

A ROCHA
INTERNATIONAL

Field notes

Updates from the A Rocha world

issue: 66



THEME

Speaking up for nature

April 2022

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Speaking up for nature

Who comes to mind when you think of the word 'powerless'? Maybe young children, or undocumented immigrants, or the socio-economically marginalised of our societies. The strong have often abused their strength, taking advantage of the weak. It is one of the human evils that most angers God: 'The Lord enters into judgment against the elders and leaders of his people: "It is you who have ruined my vineyard; the plunder from the poor is in your houses. What do you mean by crushing my people and grinding the faces of the poor?" declares the Lord, the Lord Almighty' (Isaiah 3:14,15).

There is a power dynamic at play when it comes to nature too. A person can never match the force of an Atlantic breaker, a lava flow or a cloud of swarming locusts. And yet so often we have

the upper hand and nature is 'ruined,' 'crushed' and 'ground', as were the poor in Isaiah's prophecy. Living a God-pleasing life means pleading nature's cause, advocating for its right to exist and flourish, protecting and caring for it. We hope you will be inspired by stories of A Rocha doing just that and invite you to join your voice to ours in speaking up for biodiversity conservation.

Jo Swinney

Jo Swinney,
Director of
Communications,
A Rocha International



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NEW in the A Rocha world

The John Stott Memorial Birding Day is back!

On 8 May 2021 teams around the world took part in the John Stott Memorial Birding Day, a one-day event run by A Rocha to commemorate and celebrate our great friend and supporter John Stott and his legacy as a theologian, pastor and birdwatcher.

This year we invite you to take part for 24 hours on either 14 or 15 May. You can form a team and take part in the bird race, use our resources to have a bird-themed spiritual retreat or enter our photo competition.

For more information, visit www.johnstottbirdingday.com or join the John Stott Memorial Birding Day Facebook group.



Friends of A Rocha Network growing fast

Groups of Christians who share A Rocha's concern with caring for creation are applying to join the Friends of A Rocha network from all around the world. In February, groups in Brazil, Croatia, Nepal and Spain were accepted. The network's coordinator, Júlio Reis, says, 'It is wonderful to be in touch with so many likeminded people and groups and to see God at work through them in their various contexts. Becoming part of the network is a simple and straightforward process!' To find out more, visit arocha.org/friends.

The A Rocha Leaders' Forum to go ahead

As a family of organizations dispersed around the globe, times for leaders to gather are rare and precious. The COVID-19 pandemic meant a move to an online festival last year,

which was appreciated and had advantages but wasn't the same as meeting in person. Plans are moving forward for a gathering in June 2022 at Les Courmettes, A Rocha France's centre. Please pray for renewed vision and unity, strengthened relationships and wise decision-making.



A sad day for Tatalu / Little Campbell River

On 25 February, the Metro Vancouver board voted by a slim majority to approve an application to allow for the first large-scale commercial and industrial development along the TATALU / Little Campbell River. This is a crushing blow to A Rocha Canada, which has been working to restore and enhance the 30 km river and surrounding watershed for 20 years. None of the many long-time stewards of the river believe it can weather industrialization of this scale and type without damage to its ecological health and integrity.

A local First Nation downstream from the proposed area was brought into the consultation at the eleventh hour, adding to the concerns expressed by a significant number protesting the move. In an interview with Global News, Semiahmoo First Nation Chief Harley Chappell said, "We've always been told here that this waterway is one of the last unprotected, natural-state gems in the South Fraser area. Whether it's providing salmon, whether it's flowing into Semiahmoo bay that provides wellbeing to our shellfish, it's of the utmost importance."

A Rocha will continue to care for the river, the wetlands, the forest and the species at risk, scrutinising individual development plans and advocating for the most sustainable approaches at each step. Please pray for the team as they navigate grief, righteous anger, and exhaustion and gather themselves for their ongoing work.



Photo credit: arocha.ca

A Rocha International's new Deputy Executive Director

Rev Dr Ben Lowe began his new role in February. He is working closely with our Executive Director Simon Stuart, our trustees and the rest of the Management Team to help lead A Rocha International and support the good work that our teams around the world are doing. This includes managing, fundraising, strategic planning, lots of praying and much more!

Ben grew up and has worked in various cultural, geographic and community contexts and is excited about learning from and championing the great diversity of people and work across the A Rocha worldwide family. He has also long been personally and vocationally focused on bridging faith with conservation and science,

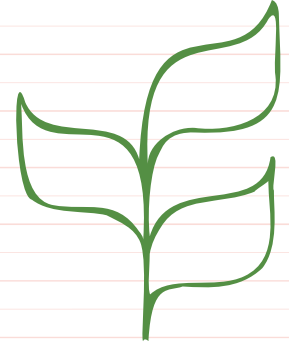
as an ordained minister in the Christian and Missionary Alliance and in his doctoral research on the human and religious dimensions of environmental change and conservation.



A beginner's guide to...

the

Convention on Biological Diversity



The 2020s have been called the 'critical decade for climate change': the window of opportunity to ensure that global average temperatures do not rise about 1.5°C is rapidly closing. Perhaps for once the old phrase 'there's nothing new under the sun' may not ring true – we are also losing biodiversity and seeing ecosystems collapse at a rate never seen before.

But with such big challenges facing us, what mechanisms, ideas and processes do we have to make the big changes we need to see? How do we even start to ensure that biodiversity decline across the world is halted, and its recovery started? Isn't that just too big a problem to deal with?

Recognizing the enormity of these challenges, the world's governments signed the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in 1992 to work together to find a way to address them.

What is the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)?



Quite simply, the CBD is the 'international legal instrument' to conserve biodiversity, supported by 196 nations globally. In practice, it is a forum through which legally enforceable acts or agreements are made and recorded – or, in other words, a method of ensuring that different countries commit to protecting nature in law and practice. The overall objective of the Convention is to encourage countries to pursue a more sustainable future through action.

What is the CBD trying to achieve?

The CBD is the over-arching global treaty to provide a legal framework for biodiversity conservation as a whole.

The Convention has three main goals:

1

The conservation of biological diversity

2

The sustainable use of its components (such as species, ecosystems, genes)

3

The fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the use of genetic resources

Goals

How does it work?

As with all UN conventions, the methods for reaching these decisions are complex. They involve multiple actors and varying levels, culminating in the meeting of those decision-makers at a 'Conference of the Parties' (COP). In reality, a lot of the negotiating, trade-offs and discussions take place before reaching a COP. Moreover, the phrase 'Conference of the Parties' is used across other conventions, so you may have seen it in reference to other UN conventions that are not the CBD (e.g. the UNFCCC COP26 held in Glasgow last year).

For the CBD, the COP usually meets every two years to review progress, set priorities and commit to work plans.

This whole process is supported by a Secretariat, based in Montreal, Canada.

The main functions of the Secretariat are:

Political:

to help governments in the implementation of the CBD and its programmes of work, and to coordinate with other international organizations.

Administrative:

to collect and disseminate information, organize meetings and draft documents.

What is the history of CBD?

The Convention opened for signature in 1992 at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. The first international treaty for the conservation of biodiversity, it entered into force in December 1993. With 196 Parties, the CBD has near universal participation among countries. The first meeting (COP1) was held in Nassau, Bahamas in 1994.

92

Sign up, sign up! Join the treaty

94

First meeting held in bahamas



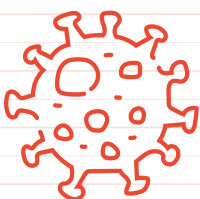
93

196 countries wanted to take part.

When is the next CBD COP?

CBD COP15 was due to be held 15–28 October 2020 in China, but it has been pushed back several times due to the pandemic. At the time of writing, the exact dates are still unclear, but COP15 is likely to go ahead at some point in 2022 in Kunming, China.

2022



Why is CBD COP15 it so important?

It is arguably one of the most important COPs of recent years. CBD COP15 will review the implementation of targets set in 2010 (also known as the Aichi Biodiversity Targets) and take decisions on new targets for post-2020. This includes both short-term targets up to 2030 to get nature back on track and longer-term targets leading up to 2050.

It is hard to overstate how important these targets will be. As the decisive decade for our planet, we must set ambitious targets to bend the curve on biodiversity loss. However, we have sadly already lost two years due to the Covid-19 pandemic. We are losing time: we now have eight years to implement these targets.



TARGETS

⇒ 2030



⇒ 2050



No.1 TOOL



Why should I care?

The conservation of biodiversity is a common concern for humankind: we are witnessing the highest extinct rates ever and ecosystems collapsing across the world. The CBD is currently the best tool we have for making global change and covers biodiversity at all levels: ecosystems, species and genetic resources. It also covers biotechnology, including through the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety.

How can I get involved?

As an individual, it can be difficult to influence any kind of change directly. But there are some things you can do:



Use your voice to join in with campaigns run by charities.



Research the negotiations and follow their progress as they are happening.



Raise awareness amongst your family and friends about what CBD COP15 is and why it is so important.

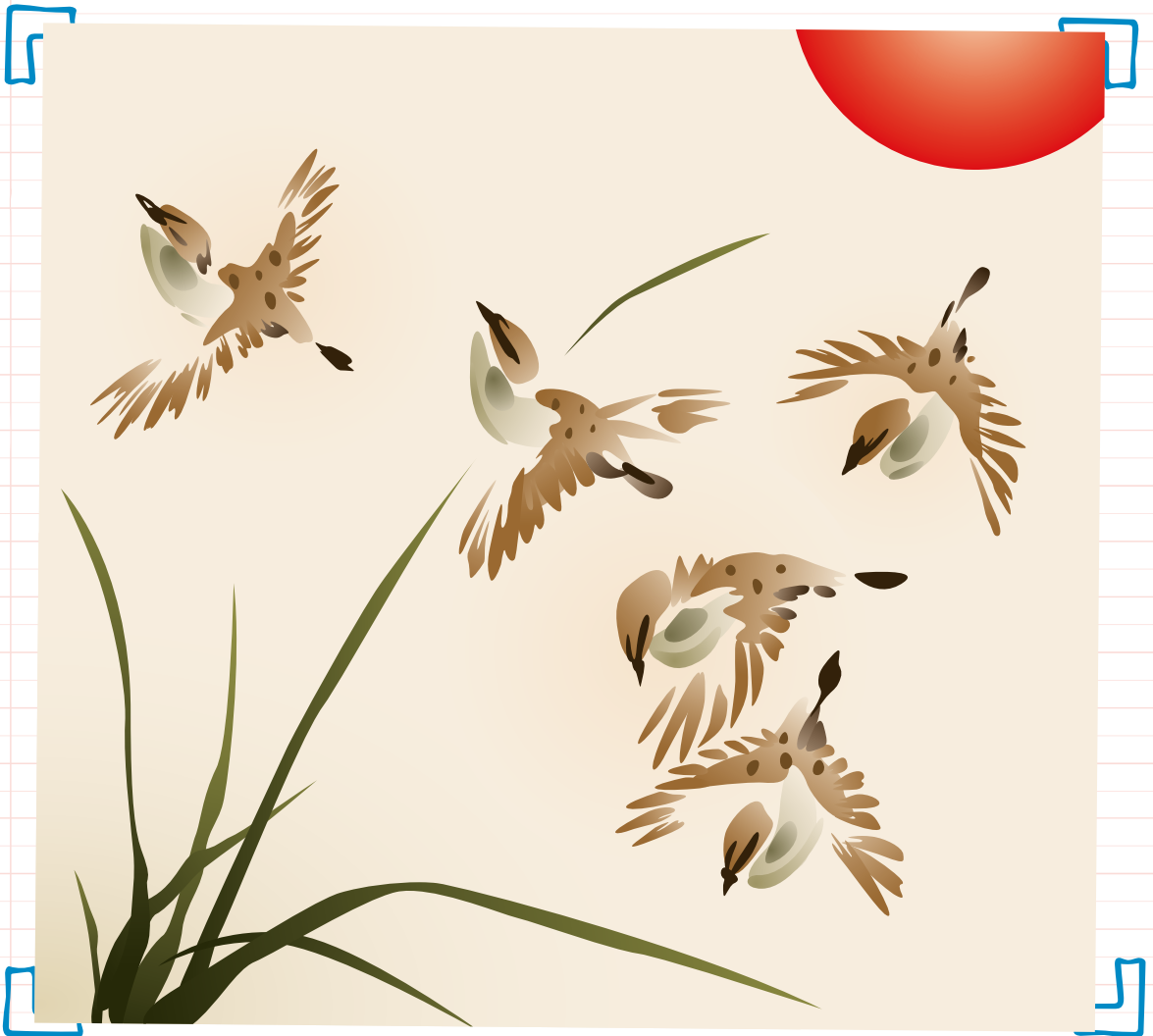
For more information, visit:

www.cbd.int

Whatever you do for the least of these...

Speaking up for wildlife

By Rachel Mander & Dave Bookless



'You are worth more than many sparrows', says Jesus as he speaks with the disciples in Matthew 10:31. Just a few memorable words seem enough to write off the possibility that our care for other creatures could be as worthwhile as our care for other people. We cannot ignore the words of Jesus, after all. ▶

And yet, Jesus also says of sparrows that 'not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father's care': translated literally, no sparrow falls to the ground 'without your Father' (anew tou Patros hymōn in Greek). Whilst it is initially easy to read this passage as affirming a hierarchy of value which places humans at the top, at the expense of every other created thing, we see here that God's very self is, in some mysterious way, associated with the loss of even one individual of the commonest of species.

When we approach the question of the worth of other creatures, we seem quick to make the same misunderstanding as the person who looks upon the second newborn child and concludes that the love available to the firstborn has been duly halved – how foolish! As people, we are not in competition with wider creation for the love of God! The value of a simple sparrow is not quantifiable as a fraction of our own worth, nor does the love of God for people diminish God's love of all other created things.

...

We live in a unique chapter of the Earth's history, a chapter that has taken us into a new geological age, the Anthropocene, so-called because it is the impact that humans have had upon the Earth that has significantly shaped its current form. With breathtaking arrogance, we find ourselves now transfiguring creation in our own image.

The magnitude of the changes we have made mean that 96% of the biomass of all land mammals are either humans or animals for human use and consumption. Only 4% are wildlife¹. The extinction rate of other species has skyrocketed, and projections are bleak. In many senses, we find ourselves tearing apart the very fabric of life itself.

Not a single one of these changes are occurring outside the care of God. We have taken the majesty, the beauty, the splendour and the glorious colours of all creation, and we are slowly homogenising the masterpieces of God into plantations of grey. We have taken away what God has provided for the creatures of Earth, and we have made them vulnerable.

...

So the time has come for a new question. If wildlife is now so vulnerable, should we read the passages of Scripture which tell us to care for vulnerable and powerless people, and consider that we have similar responsibilities to our fellow created creatures?

Well, quite possibly, yes.

Such a consideration must be made carefully, of course. God's word is powerful, and not to be misused. When we approach the Bible, we should do so both humbly and open to God's Spirit surprising us with fresh insights. While some argue for applications of Scripture which are only exact and literal, we find that Jesus and the New Testament writers themselves apply Scripture differently. For example, in the opening of John 1, 'In the beginning was ... the Word', John is



intentionally re-writing the start of the Torah for the new context of Christ's coming.

In many situations, we find ourselves asking questions of Scripture which are new and beyond the imagination of its original human authors (though not beyond God's foreknowledge). One example of this would be the questions of nuclear war which emerged in the last century. We continue to look to the Bible for principles in the text, and seek to interpret them for our context today. This is the well-trodden path of hermeneutics.

When we approach the Bible with today's tragic vulnerability of wildlife in view, we can first consider that, apart from anything else, it is powerless and vulnerable people that suffer first and worst from the depletion of the natural world. This is because many people who are poor are those most dependent on the land around them to subsist, so they are on the frontline of the climate impacts and ecosystem collapse which follow the destruction of wildlife.

In Scripture we also find evidence of God's care and compassion for wildlife in its own right. The account of Noah's ark is a powerful and obvious example. God's saving power is explicitly for all creatures, not only humanity, and the passage nowhere suggests the animals are 'saved' because of their use for humans. Rather, God has a covenant with all creatures. Psalm 145:8-9 explicitly speaks of God's compassion for all that he has made. Job 38-39 and Psalm 104 similarly give vivid illustrations of God's care for all creatures. In Psalm 84 we hear the psalmist praise God for 'Even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself where she may have her young - a place near your altar'.

Having established God's care for wildlife, knowing God's compassion for the vulnerable and confronted with the evidence that injustice and cruelty are an offence against God - whether directed at people or wider creation, we have a good foundation on which to approach passages about justice and compassion with wildlife in mind.

In the parable of the sheep and goats in Matthew 25:31-46, Jesus uses imagery of animals and their shepherd to speak of God's judgement. If we welcome those who are hungry, thirsty, marginalised ('strangers'), needing basic necessities ('naked'), or oppressed ('prisoners'), we effectively welcome Jesus himself. Clearly, this is firstly about our vulnerable human neighbours, but can we also extend it to wild creatures, who today are often left hungry, homeless and oppressed by human greed and overconsumption? After all, in becoming 'flesh' (sarx in Greek), Jesus identifies not only with humanity but with the life of all creatures. When we see images of burning forests, bleached corals and melting glaciers, can we hear the words of Jesus, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these ... you did for me'?



Stories

of how A Rocha is protecting biodiversity

One of the reasons we are facing a crisis of biodiversity loss is our failure to consider the implications of prioritising our own needs over those of the rest of the ecosystem – implications that often end up harming us in the end. We

harvest too many oysters to eat and suffer the consequences of the dirty water. We decimate a species that raids our livestock and find it was keeping down a population of rabbits that now makes it impossible to farm cabbages.

River restoration in Canada

A Rocha Canada's work near Houston, BC is a beautiful example of the benefits to everyone of caring for an entire local ecosystem and of the importance of collaboration between all the human participants. The Upper Bulkley River and its streams are regularly used for drinking water, residential use, forestry, farming, mining, oil and gas pipelines, hydro right of way, recreation, flood control, hunting and fishing. Such heavy use has resulted in pollution, habitat degradation and decreasing wildlife populations, and the solution has required enormous good will and effort from each group with a vested interest.

A Rocha Canada runs the Upper Bulkley River Project, working with local environmental organizations, churches, schools, governments and concerned citizens to ensure that the watershed is healthy and flourishing. They have established a pilot Coho Salmon *Oncorhynchus kisutch* hatchery and manage access to ensure salmon can reach their spawning grounds. The team carries out regular bio-inventory surveys, collects water temperature data and delivers environmental education programmes for schools and other groups. In May 2021, over 9,000 willow trees were planted, as healthy riparian forests are crucial for a robust watershed where shade keeps the water cool, roots prevent run-off and erosion, and branches offer the perfect habitat for local birds and insects.

Cindy Verbeek, A Rocha's Northern BC project Coordinator, writes, 'Conservation is... walking alongside the Creator of the universe and bringing healing to that which is broken, protecting what's still working well and speaking up against injustice.' The healing, protecting and advocating for the watershed and its inhabitants is ongoing and a beacon of light in an often dark world.



Photo credit: A Rocha Canada



Photo crédit: Bertrand Bender

Insect heaven

Reports of 'insect Armageddon' appear more and more frequently in newspapers and scientific journals around the globe.

a corridor several centimeters deep and makes a few small chambers at the end, making them watertight with a natural plastic. They are then filled with pollen and nectar which later serve as food for the larvae. A number of rare and endangered wild bee species have also been found in this area including the White-bellied Mining Bee *Andrena gravida* and Trimmer's Mining Bee *Andrena trimmerana*.

Gardens and balconies represent an important part of the green space in Switzerland and depending on their layout and the way they are maintained, can be useful for local biodiversity. A Rocha Switzerland's Jardin Paradis Vivant project provides training, advice and encouragement to anyone who wants to make their small corner of the earth a happy home for a multitude of species.

But in a small corner of the Czech Republic, life is getting better and better for all things creepy and crawlly. In the grounds of A Rocha Czech's field study centre, Krupárna (The Mill), a new pond has been dug, bringing the grand total of ponds to seven. Trees and bushes have been planted, creating breeding places and food sources for insects. There are bumblebee houses, two insect hotels and even a castle for beetles. Locals who come to walk and enjoy the garden say it is like paradise.

In the Netherlands, wild bees seem to prefer open spaces to insect houses or hotels. An A Rocha group in the province of Zeeland has been helping keep sand dunes open and free from vegetation for the bee species – some of which are endangered – which nest in sand. Several dozen species nest in the dunes every year. The Spring Mining Bee *Colletes cunicularius* digs

From nursery to forest

In Peru, A Rocha is working to restore degraded dry forest landscapes through reforestation with native trees and sustainable management practices. Peru's coastal dry forests are a unique and biodiverse ecosystem, but with only 2% remaining they are one of the most endangered ecosystems in the world. Deforestation is primarily due to agricultural and urban expansion as well as indiscriminate logging. These drivers exacerbate poverty amongst low-income, smallholder farming communities who depend upon dry forests for food, water, income and protection from climate events.

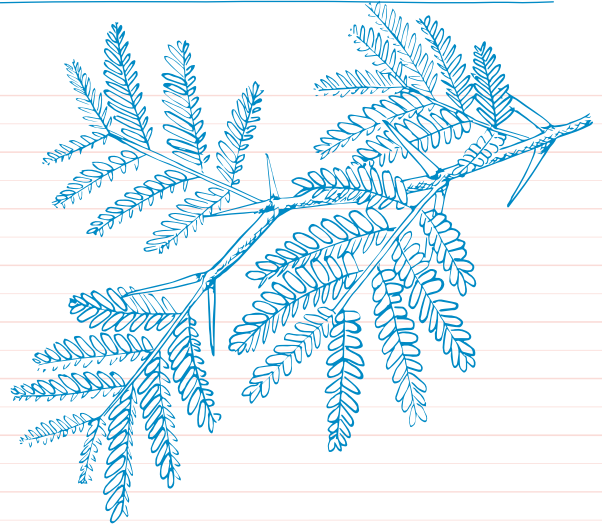


Photo credit: A Rocha Aotearoa New Zealand

An A Rocha group in Manawatu, New Zealand, gets together twice a month to collect seeds and source native seedlings which they tend in their nursery until they are ready to plant out. They also train volunteers to collect biodiverse eco-sourced seeds to distribute to other local nurseries. The provenance and genetics of a seed are crucial. 'Eco-sourcing' is the philosophy of growing native plants from the same ecological district as where they will be planted. That said, if a plant is already locally rare or extinct, going further afield to restore populations may be necessary.

A Rocha Kenya has a conservation programme that uses funds generated from ecotourism and donations to provide bursaries for local children to attend secondary school: Arabuko-Sokoke Schools and Ecotourism Scheme (ASSETS). In collaboration with the Kenya Community Development Fund they have worked with the beneficiaries to establish tree nurseries, training them how to mix soil for effective growth of the seedlings and to care for them. Parents of the children appreciate the fact that conservation is a key component of the programme, beyond simple disbursement and have become involved themselves, planting 500 indigenous trees in Arabuko-Sokoke Forest. In 2020, A Rocha Kenya began collecting seeds of threatened indigenous trees in the Dakatcha Woodland Nature Reserve, including Mkulu *Diospyros bussei* and Mkami *Newtonia hildebrandtii*.



Photo credit: A Rocha Kenya

The Atewa campaign

A Rocha Ghana is leading the campaign to save Atewa Forest in Ghana. The Government of Ghana has plans to extract bauxite – the ore of aluminium – from the Atewa Hills at Kyebi. The hill

tops would be completely removed during the mining process which would destroy all vegetation and associated fauna. There is no low impact method for removing bauxite and restoration of complex and biologically rich forests like Atewa is unrealistic.

Atewa is home to one of the highest recorded numbers of globally threatened species of any forest in West Africa: over 100 are threatened or near threatened with extinction, including five Critically Endangered species. One plant, two butterflies and one frog are found nowhere else in the world. There are strong economic and social arguments for protecting the forest. A Rocha ensures that the rich yet vulnerable biodiversity of the forest also has a voice. a



Photo credit: Jeremy Lindell

Field notes podcast

On 7 April 2022, it will have been a year since the launch of the Field Notes podcast – and what a year it has been! Peter and Bryony had the privilege of hosting a range of guests: from academics and theologians to conservationists and campaigners, activists and explorers. If you haven't discovered us yet, you can find out more at arocha.org – make sure to like and subscribe!



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Biologist



Florence Muindi
Doctor



Paul Kariya
Policy advisor



Ellen Davis
Theologian



Stuart Blanch
Campaigner



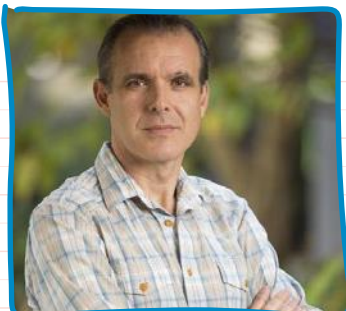
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Wine connoisseur



Bob Sluka
Marine scientist



Rachel Mander
Climate activist



Enric Sala
Explorer



Colin Jackson
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Deepa Senapathi
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A Rocha Ghana Director



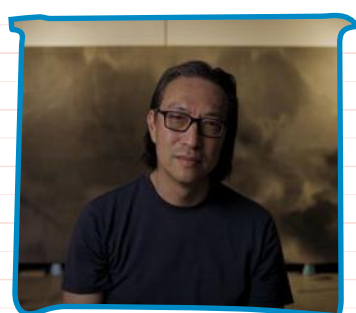
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Entrepreneur



Darren Evans
Professor



Mako Fujimura
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Cheryl Bear
Indigenous activist



Sarah-Lan Mathew-Stiefel
Ethnobotanist



Sandra McCracken
Musician



ways to speak up for nature

Zechariah 4:10 calls us not to despise small beginnings. We find this sentiment elsewhere in popular culture and literature – Vincent van Gogh was credited as saying, 'Great things are done by a series of small things bought together' and Mother Teresa, 'Be faithful in small things because it is in them that your strength lies'. In our own lives, we often see that the big actions and decisions normally have small beginnings.

So, when it comes to protecting the planet, this must be our mindset too – even if it feels like recycling the box from last night's takeaway makes no impact at all! So, what about speaking up for nature? Are there ways – however small – that we can campaign and advocate for our planet?

Here are five ideas that might help if you want to speak up for nature:



Get involved with a local conservation project

There's nothing like getting stuck practically into a conservation project to speak up for a local nature area or species.



Join a campaign

Maybe your local A Rocha group is running a campaign or there's another NGO in your country that is lobbying for a policy change. Organizations such as WWF, Greenpeace and Extinction Rebellion have been an obvious example in recent years – small actions together have gone a long way to ensuring protecting the planet is high on the agenda of policy makers and politicians.



Write to your government or local politician

In democratic societies, politicians are elected to represent the people. You are part of the people they are representing, so you should use that right to raise issues you care about with this. Want to see a local park restored or a local river protected? This is a great place to start.



Speak to your friends and family

Being a 'soft' advocate amongst your friends and family is often underrated, but small conversations change people's minds. Perhaps you might talk to those closest to you about littering, eating meat, recycling or activities that produce a lot of carbon or have another negative effect on nature. If someone has never been introduced to the idea, they will not have had a chance to consider it.



Actions speak louder than words!

It is certainly true that actions speak louder than words – one key way you can stand up for nature is by changing your behaviour. This has power as a consumer but also speaks to the people around you. If you source your meat ethically, start trying to reduce your plastic, commit to flying less (or not at all) and to buying sustainably, it can speak volumes to those around you.

Will you become a Regular Giver?

A Rocha's community of regular givers protect people and places around the world every single month. Together we have been responding to the global crisis of biodiversity loss for nearly 40 years.

We couldn't have done any of it without you, our faithful supporters, who have walked with us along the way. Our recent supporter survey revealed that more than 40% of you had been involved with A Rocha's work for more than 10 years! That's an incredible commitment, thank you.

By signing up to give on a regular basis, you will

- Save yourself admin time.
- Know you are helping us to make longer term plans with confidence
- Be a vital part of A Rocha's hands-on work caring for and protecting our most vulnerable habitats and species

Please visit

arocha.org/donate

Thank you!

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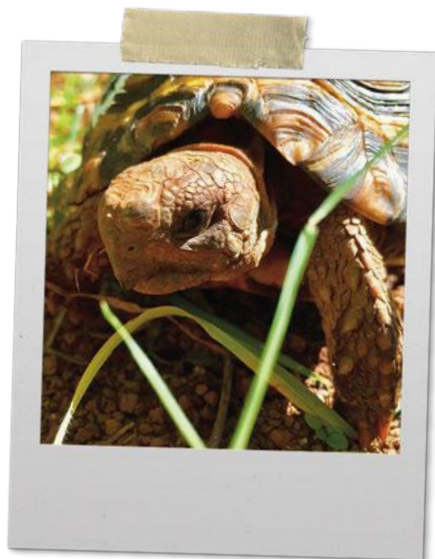
Gifts with a Difference



Tortoise rehabilitation, South Africa

A Rocha South Africa and FreeMe KZN are working in partnership to re-wild captive-held tortoises and release them into protected areas. Your gift will contribute to the costs of rehabilitating one tortoise for a year. It will also enable tortoise rehabilitation protocols to be tested and improved and will inform the practices of rehabilitation centres nationally and internationally.

£ 20 - £ 70



Tree hugger

A Rocha is helping to restore degraded forests and supporting livelihoods by working with community members in Kenya, Peru and Uganda to plant trees. Your gift of a 'tree hugger' to water and look after these trees will improve their long-term chances of survival.

£ 5 - £ 50



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