

## **Big Green Vision announced by Andy Atkins of A Rocha UK on World Environment Day, 5 June**

20 year old charity brings positive change to churches and landowners to restore biodiversity

On World Environment Day on Saturday 5th June, Britain's only Christian conservation charity A Rocha UK is celebrating its 20th anniversary with the launch of the *Big Green Vision*. In the face of accelerating climate change and species loss, Andy Atkins CEO at A Rocha UK is setting out ambitious plans for the next five years for the protection and restoration of the natural world across the UK, from forest to nature reserves, churchyards to window boxes. A Rocha UK aims to tap into the potential that churches and individuals have to help restore biodiversity at a local level in this critical year for climate ahead of COP26 climate negotiations in November.

A Rocha UK was founded 20 years ago as a local Christian conservation project in a deprived area of Southall, west London. It has grown rapidly throughout the UK. The goal of the *Big Green Vision* for A Rocha UK is to see more churches and Christians engaging in deliberate and ongoing practical action to protect nature and address climate change, and using their collective voice to speak up for change. Andy Atkins explains *"It's clear the next decade is critical for restoring nature and stabilising our climate. Governments and society need to act urgently and at scale and Christians and Churches could make a game-changing contribution"*.

The *Big Green Vision* will be delivered through A Rocha UK's key programmes: 'Eco Church', 'Partners in Action' and 'Wild Christian'. The 'Eco Church' award scheme brings together a national community of churches addressing the environmental crisis, using a common framework, an online toolkit, learning and speaking up together. Entering its sixth year, there are 3,500 Eco Churches in England and Wales - more than 5% of churches - which are already part of the Eco Church community. A Rocha UK is aiming, by 2025, to engage at least 15% of churches in on-going action to protect nature and address climate change through the free scheme. He says, *"Eco Church stories are wonderful, showing not only how churches can help restore the environment but also how caring for the environment has enhanced church lives in so many ways, including by linking up with others in their communities and communicating faith in practical ways that really make a difference."*

A Rocha UK's Partners In Action network currently supports twenty Christian land-holding charities to improve the quality and biodiversity of their land, share their learning and encourage them to work to engage their local communities. These include Churches, Christian retreat/conference centres, schools and youth adventure centres across the UK. A Rocha UK aims for 75,000 acres of land owned by churches, Christian organisations and landowners to be managed for nature by 2025 and for 250,000 members of the public to benefit annually from access to nature on land owned or managed by A Rocha partners.

'Wild Christian' is an online community scheme caring for nature through sharing ideas and learning collectively to live more sustainably in our own home to help nature along. By 2025, the charity is aiming to facilitate at least 25,000 people to routinely care for nature through their practical actions at home and in the community, and through campaigning.

Andy Atkins, CEO of A Rocha UK explains *"The next decade will be critical for the environment and the need for churches to stand up for the environment right now cannot be understated. Christians and churches have a wealth of assets to bring to bear to this challenge of our generation from vast acres of farmland to the small oasis of wildlife habitat hidden in the quiet corner of a city churchyard. Our small individual actions, joined together, can bring about powerful change. Come and get your hands dirty and join us in our bold vision of positive change with Eco Church, Wild Christian or support our Partners in Action to protect and restore the environment locally."*

- ENDS -

**For images and to arrange interviews please contact:**

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**Notes to editors:**

Available for interview - Andy Atkins, Chief Executive Officer or Helen Stephens, EcoChurch Manager;

**1) Andy Atkins** has a track record of campaigning and mobilising the public for a number of human rights, development and environment charities. Andy began as CEO of Christian conservation charity A Rocha UK in January 2016. This followed 7 years as CEO of Friends of the Earth, in which time the organisation won campaigns to establish the UK's Climate Change Act, increase government support for renewable energy, and to establish a nation Bee Action plan. Prior to that Andy was Advocacy Director at Christian relief and development charity Tearfund, where he initiated Tearfund's work on climate change and development.

**2) A Rocha UK** is a Christian charity undertaking practical nature conservation and education with local communities and equipping others to care for the environment. Their main mission is to mobilise UK Christians and Churches to care for the environment.

[www.arochoa.org.uk](http://www.arochoa.org.uk)

A Rocha is part of a worldwide family of A Rocha organisations and we work collaboratively with others who share the passion for the planet and our desire for its flourishing. The name 'A Rocha', is Portuguese for 'The Rock'. The very first A Rocha project was the establishment of a field study centre on the Alvor estuary in Portugal.

**3) Eco Church** is a free online award scheme and is an A Rocha UK project. It is an award scheme in England and Wales for churches. At a practical level the Eco Church scheme encourages churches to reduce energy use; protect open space and valuable natural habitats; reduce our churches' contributions to global warming; keep our churches safe and healthy; lessen pressure on the local water supply and reduce run-off into local waterways.

<https://ecochurch.arochoa.org.uk>

**4) World Environment Day** has been celebrated every year on 5 June since 1974, engaging governments, businesses and citizens in an effort to address pressing environmental issues. This year World Environment Day is focusing on the UN decade on Ecosystem Restoration. Ecosystem restoration means preventing, halting and reversing damage to the environment - to go from exploiting nature to healing it. Only with healthy ecosystems can we enhance people's livelihoods, counteract climate change and stop the collapse of biodiversity.