

Christian nature conservation charity launches initiative to regenerate 75,000 acres of church land for nature and cutting carbon over the next five years

- A Rocha UK has a stall in the 'Green Zone' at the COP26 climate summit today: an opportunity to find out more about their land goal and Eco Church programme to tackle climate change.
- A Rocha UK mobilises Christians and churches to care for the natural world.
- Working with and equipping others, it aims to transform 75,000 acres of Christian managed land for nature and cutting carbon over the next five years, piloting nature-based solutions to climate change.
- The charity currently works with 25 partners in the UK in its rapidly growing Partners in Action scheme, together managing 1,800 acres of land.
- It also runs the UK's largest church 'greening' scheme, Eco Church, with more than four thousand registered local churches.

Today, Britain's only Christian nature conservation charity, A Rocha UK, launches an ambitious scheme to restore 75,000 acres of land for nature and cutting carbon in Britain over the next five years. Nature-based solutions to climate change has been a key new issue on the agenda at COP26, giving some grounds for optimism when many other key issues are bogged down in disagreement and governments foot dragging. By regenerating certain types of ecosystems, such as forests, wetlands and grassland, we can absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and lock it up safely in soil and vegetation.

The charity aims to mobilise Christians and their land across the UK to help bring about the changes needed to reverse declining wildlife and simultaneously contribute to Britain's goal of reaching net zero carbon emissions by 2050.

The Christian community in the UK owns or manages over 500,000 acres of land, from churches yards and conference centre grounds, to urban community farms and agricultural estates. A Rocha UK's aim is to work with others to achieve 75,000 acres intentionally managed for nature and climate within just five years; and then, learning from this, to scale up activity in the rest of this critical decade. Already 25 land managers with more than 1,800 acres of land are committed to participating in this initiative through A Rocha's Partners in Action scheme. Of these, 10 projects are working on native woodland restoration, six on wild flowers meadows and several are working to create food forests, which are edible, climate resilient landscapes that will benefit wildlife and people. More than 40 other Christian land managers are looking at joining the Partners in Action scheme working towards the goal of 75,000 acres managed for nature and climate.

Andy Lester, Head of Conservation at A Rocha UK explains: *“From the native woodlands of Southern England to the peat bogs of Northern Ireland and Scotland, we have an opportunity to help Christians manage their land in a way that not only benefits nature but also helps to capture carbon. It is absolutely critical that the UK and other countries move much faster to end fossil fuel burning - the greatest source of greenhouse gas emissions - in the short term. But to reach net zero in the medium term, we’ll also need to deploy the power of nature. So countries had better get started now. With our new ‘land goal’ we want to show what Christians and churches can contribute to this’.*

Yesterday, 7 November, BBC 1’s ‘Songs of Praise’ featured Partner in Action, Hilfield Friary, a Franciscan Monastery in Dorset, engaged in woodland and meadow restoration. Richard Thornbury, the land manager explained *“We are learning to live in harmony with creation. We manage the land so as to maximise the biodiversity by providing suitable homes and food for as many different kinds of species as possible. If we don’t look after these particular habitats then those species won’t have anywhere to live and they will cease to exist, and that will be a loss for the world. But by creating habitats good for them we are also creating local carbon sinks”.*

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Notes to Editors:

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Spokespeople available for interview:

Andy Atkins, Chief Executive Officer of A Rocha UK, and available at COP26

Andy Lester, Head of Conservation at A Rocha UK

A Rocha UK is a member of the worldwide A Rocha family of 22 organisations and we work collaboratively with others who share our passion for nature and our desire for its flourishing. In response to the worldwide crisis of biodiversity loss, we carry out community-based conservation projects.

Exhibition at COP26: A Rocha UK has an exhibition in the Green Zone of COP26 on Monday 8th November