

## Communities mobilise to count wildlife in ‘undisturbed’ churchyards

Churches across England and Wales can now register to participate in Churches Count on Nature, an annual scheme where people visit churchyards and record the plant and animal species they encounter.

The biodiversity survey, supported by environmental charities A Rocha UK and Caring for God’s Acre, as well as the Church of England and the Church in Wales, will take place from June 3 to 11, 2023.

In the last two years, 900 counting events took place across churches in England and Wales, and over 27,000 wildlife records were submitted to Caring for God’s Acre. Churches across all denominations take part in the count each year.

The data will be used to determine where rare and endangered species are located in the country and to aid churches of all denominations to increase biodiversity on their land for the enrichment of the environment and local communities. This year, species on some of the 17,500 acres of churchyards in England alone will be mapped, with a further 1,282 acres of churchyards in Wales.

As graveyards and church land are usually undisturbed and not used for farming, they can be host to a great variety of wildlife not seen in other green spaces, particularly in urban areas. Old churchyards often have fantastic flowery and species-rich grasslands as they have been so little disturbed over the centuries.

Churches Count on Nature is part of Love Your Burial Ground Week, which is open to anyone with a love of nature and any church that has land. Churches are being encouraged to connect with local schools, wildlife groups, and those who may not have visited before to discover their churchyards.

This year’s survey is the first in three years to take place without Covid restrictions, so registered churches will hope to see an increased number of parishioners taking part in counting events.

The count can serve not only to raise awareness and encourage care of the wildlife in churchyards but to provide local communities with a shared activity that can bring people together.

The Bishop of Norwich, Graham Usher, who is the Church of England’s Lead Bishop for Environmental Affairs, said: “We are very excited about large numbers of churches across the country signing up to take part in Churches Count on Nature again this year.

“This weekend, hundreds of thousands will watch Sir David Attenborough’s new documentary on wildlife in the British Isles. Registering for this initiative is a brilliant way for churches to encourage a local response and help to restore the natural habitats on our doorstep.

“The event will help us determine the level of biodiversity in our churchyards and will be a great opportunity to bring people of all ages together to appreciate the natural world.

“As I read the Gospels, I’m struck by just how much nature is noticed by Jesus. We can join with him in seeing our lilies of the field, the thistles in crops, and the birds of the air.

“As Christians, we have a responsibility to care for God’s creation, and participating in Churches Count on Nature is just one way in which we can demonstrate that care.”

This Sunday will see the first episode of the BBC’s *Wild Isles*, a new nature documentary series with Sir David Attenborough focusing on the biodiversity of the UK – which it is hoped will help to inspire local churches to register for the count.

Speaking on the series, Sir David said: “Never has there been a more important time to invest in our own wildlife – to try and set an example for the rest of the world and restore our once wild isles for future generations.”

The Archbishop of Wales, Andrew John, said: “Our churchyards – God’s acres – are simply buzzing with life.

“They are unique as peaceful green spaces which have been undisturbed and undeveloped for centuries.

“We want to find out just how rich and diverse in plant and animal life they are today so that we can ensure they are habitats which are protected and nurtured for future generations.

“I’m appealing to those who look after churchyards – whether they are in the country or the city, at large cathedrals or small hamlets – to join in Churches Count on Nature during Love Your Burial Ground week in June.

“Invite the whole community, young and experienced, and make a day of it – it’s an easy, free and fun way to show just how much we care for God’s creation.

“Don’t forget to register, use the great resources and send in your results so we can get a clear picture of the treasures we need to protect.”

## **More info**

Register your church for this summer’s Churches Count on Nature. [link: [Register for Love Your Burial Ground Week/Churches Count on Nature 2023 – Caring For God's Acre – the conservation charity for burial grounds across the UK \(caringforgodsacre.org.uk\)](#)]

Watch the *Wild Isles* trailer on BBC iPlayer. [link: [BBC iPlayer - Wild Isles - Wild Isles Trailer](#)]

Learn more about biodiversity in churchyards. [link: [Biodiversity | The Church of England](#)]

## **Social line**

Communities across England and Wales invited to engage with the natural world in churchyard wildlife count this summer