


Holy ground?

Salisbury Cathedral exemplifies good environmental practice in its buildings and on its surrounding land.
 Ash Mills

The Christian community really does matter when it comes to looking after land, says **Andy Lester**.

According to data from the Office for National Statistics, there are over 50,000 churches in the UK, and about 3 million worshippers attend churches on a frequent basis.

It is not at all surprising to learn that the UK Church represents one of the biggest land-holding communities, but it is impossible to give an exact figure for the amount of land it manages. We do know that the Church of England owns a total of between 220,000 and 250,000 acres across the country, which includes parish, diocesan and 'glebe' land,¹ plus land owned by the Church Commissioners. When other

denominations are included, alongside Christian conference centres, hotels, retreat centres and schools, the total is likely to be about 500,000 acres.

Why does it matter? Because the planet is in a deep crisis. Because we are losing species at an alarming rate. Because climate change is already having a profound impact on nature conservation, our ability to grow food and our ability to protect our soils. And 500,000 acres is an area 1.5 times the size of Greater London. What could we as a faith community achieve if we were to creatively reimagine a future that reconnects people to nature and the land in our care?

Offering hope

Land should be looked after in a way that provides for nature itself and for all people in equal measure. A Rocha UK believes that all land belongs to God and is sustained by an active and developing partnership between people and other species.

To that end, we are working on an ambitious five-year goal to transform 75,000 acres of land owned or managed by Christians for nature and community.


A landscape that is productive but also wildlife-rich is critical if we are to become resilient to the worst impacts of climate change. It is possible to produce food in a way that benefits the soil, species and the economy. It is possible to rewild spaces that will benefit nature as well as individuals' mental and physical well-being. Seventy-five thousand acres is the equivalent of the areas of the cities of Birmingham and Portsmouth combined. Think what could be possible if that amount of land increasingly allowed creation to sing and people to rejoice in nature.

As a faith community, we are responsible for perhaps as much as 50,000 acres in our back gardens. That's an area ten times the size of Windsor Great Park! But it's about quality as well as quantity: from planting native trees to feeding birds, and from nest-boxes to creating havens for pollinating insects, what we as individuals and families do for nature in our backyards matters deeply.

Andy Lester is Head of Conservation, A Rocha UK

 **Nurturing nature**
 We've planted this bed with flowers that will attract bees and other pollinating insects.

St John's Church  Caring for God's creation

Even a small patch in church grounds can be used to benefit nature and spread the message.
 Jean Morgan

A tale of three churches

Each of these featured churches is demonstrating creation care in multiple ways, but our specific focus here is their use of land and nurture of nature.

Salisbury Cathedral

Among several impressive initiatives that enabled Salisbury to be the first cathedral to earn an Eco Church Gold Award was the provision of a habitat to support endangered peregrine falcons on its tower, and an ecological survey mapping the Close and Cathedral School grounds – both havens for birds and wildlife. The survey led to the discovery of a patch of the rare fiddle dock plant, possibly dating back to the presence of cattle in the Close in the 19th century.

The cathedral has been proactive in restoring biodiversity at a local level, encouraging native wildlife on its land through the provision of bird, bat and hedgehog boxes. Following the clergy's decision to stop mowing annually in May to boost local flora and fauna, the pristine lawn surrounding it has become a flower meadow. There are wetland areas and a pond, where plants favoured by birds, bees and butterflies are specifically grown.

Protection and successful maintenance of the nearby Harnham Water Meadows is crucial to regulate flooding from the River Avon. The cathedral is sensitive to changes in the climate, as it sits on a flood plain which has flooded twice in the last 100 years, most recently in 2014.



Adult peregrine on cathedral tower.  James Fisher

Beulah United Reformed Church



Beulah's small garden has been carefully planned.  Eileen Newington

Care for creation has long been at the heart of Beulah United Reformed Church's worship, recognised first in their Eco Congregation status and most recently with a Silver Eco Church Award. Located in Cardiff, it was the first local church in Wales to divest from fossil fuels (see page 17).

Church land is managed sustainably, with planting aiming to encourage wildlife. The Church Garden, next to their community centre and open to anyone to visit, has a lawn which is mowed but not closely, allowing plants such as clover to thrive. Flowers, shrubs and climbers have all been chosen for their benefit and attraction to pollinators throughout the growing season. Children from Junior Church grow vegetables and herbs, and the garden also has a bird feeder, bird bath and bee house. The nearby manse garden has a small pond, and is large enough for a no-mow wildlife area to be maintained.


St Richard's Ham

St Richard's Church in Richmond, south-west London, has only a small patch of land in front of it, but is making the most of it for the benefit of nature with a wildflower garden and bug hotel (pictured).

During June 2021's Churches Count on Nature week, 91 species of plant, animal and insect were discovered there, and a rare bee orchid was identified by a botanist from Kew Gardens who lives locally. Each church group, plus the adjacent church school and local walking group, share responsibility for the upkeep of the bug hotel and the monitoring of its occupants.

Near the church is Ham Lands, a nature reserve of 70 acres, and connections are being made between the church and reserve volunteers, with church members learning more about the management of the land and helping initially with litter-picking.



Our Church Relations Manager Helen Stephens and two church members with St Richard's bug hotel and plants for their wildflower garden.  John Cairns

¹ An area of land within an ecclesiastical parish used to support a parish priest.