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A Rocha Australia *ALERT*

A Rocha is an environmental NGO with an interdenominational Christian ethos.

By the grace of God, A Rocha Australia has progressed in several strategic areas.

With great joy the directors approved the Tahlee Centre for Creation Care, NSW, as the first A Rocha Australia Associated Project at their June board meeting. As a ground-breaking cooperative venture for A Rocha Australia and Tahlee Ministries, this was the culmination of considerable effort and all thanks go to those who laboured for this outcome. It has given an on-ground dimension to the work of A Rocha Australia and should encourage additional collaborations around the country. Meanwhile, accreditation of the biodiversity program of Capernwray Australia in the Southern Highlands of NSW continues.

A Rocha Australia is pleased to announce that it will hold a national conference at Capernwray on 11–13 November this year. This should coincide with a visit to Australia by A Rocha co-founders Peter and Miranda Harris, who we anticipate will inspire us with stories from A Rocha projects around the world. An outline of the program is included in this issue of the *Alert* and the registration procedure will be advised soon.

This issue of the *Alert* also provides details of the Tahlee project and other recent or upcoming meetings, conferences and seminars involving A Rocha Australia. One of our directors, Sally Shaw, shares her article on theological thinking in relation to creation care, an important subject deserving future efforts by A Rocha Australia.



Roger Jaensch
President/Chairperson
australia@arocha.org

Save The Date!





Tahlee project taking place!

Congratulations Tahlee!

The Tahlee Associated Project was officially approved as the first for A Rocha Australia at our June directors' meeting. We warmly congratulate John and his team for their enthusiasm and efforts in seeing this collaboration become a reality.

Sitting on 70 hectares property on the NW shores of Port Stephens Marine Park and surrounded by State Forest, Tahlee is an ideal location for a biodiversity conservation project.

Tahlee has environments that are close to their natural state. It offers a wide variety of distinctive bird habitats in a relatively small area. The kilometre of foreshore and tidal flats attract shorebirds and raptors; it is a suitable place for studying migratory species. Behind Tahlee village is a large area of eucalypt forest and small pockets of gully rainforest. A large range of native plants flower at various times throughout the year.

The Tahlee Associated Project will have two main activities:

1. Ecological monitoring and biodiversity research

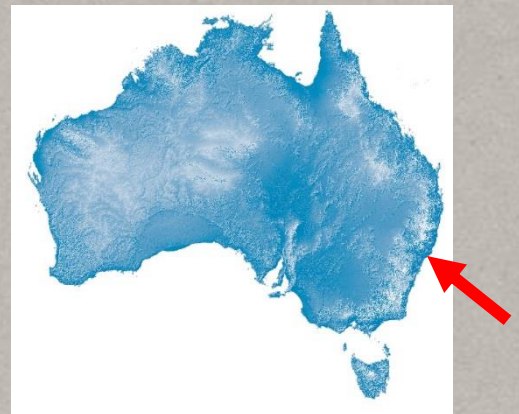
We have surveyed vegetation on the Tahlee property to identify weeds for removal, endangered species that need to be protected, and areas to be revegetated. We have identified 200 species of flora with at least one being endangered.

We are also compiling records of bird observations and surveys over the past ten years and have commenced regular surveys. Assisted by experts from A Rocha Australia and Hunter Bird Observers Club, we have now identified around 140 bird species that live in or visit our Tahlee site, some of which are listed as threatened. These include: Eastern Osprey, Bush Stone-curlew and Eastern Curlew.

Myrtle-leaf Milkwort (*Polygala myrtifolia*) is a weed that has spread extensively in bushland at Tahlee.



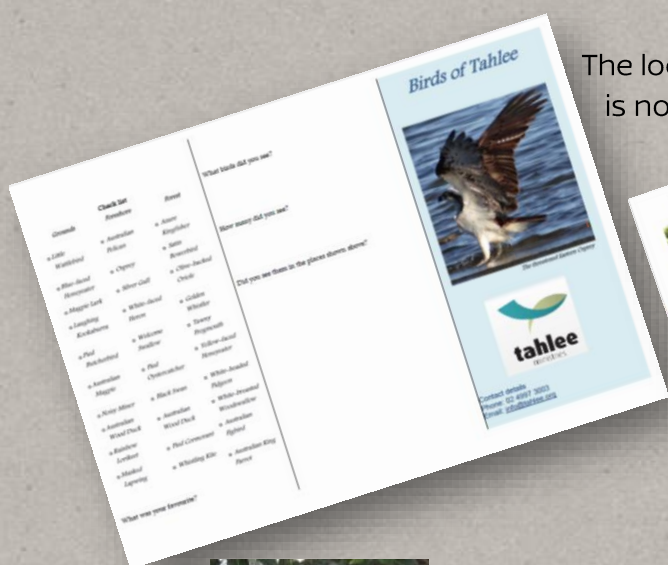
Photo credit: Richardson, R.G. & F.J.



2. Environmental education

We have converted a section of Tahlee's Training Room into a study centre. We are engaging with school groups to provide programs that fit within the National Curriculum relating to sustainability and the environment. A number of our staff have experience and skills in education and are helping with the development of these programs.

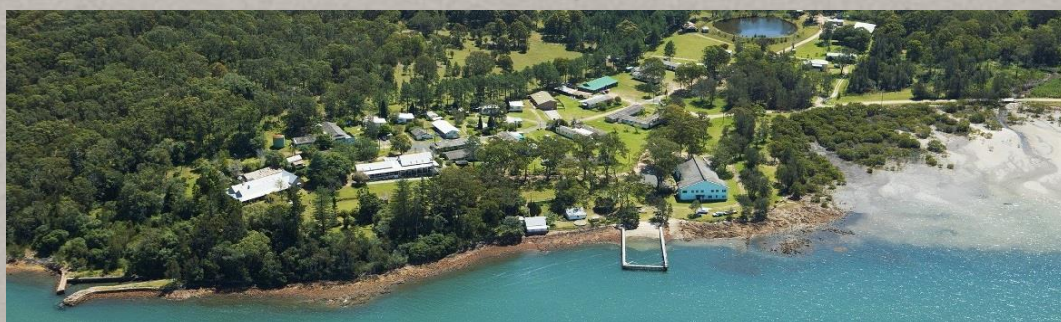
We have developed a leaflet guide to local birds so that groups coming to Tahlee for camps and recreation can also engage in bird observation and surveys to assist us in collecting data. With the assistance of a volunteer we are developing a smart phone app that will assist in making observations and recording data.



The local bird guide is now available



"We are at an early stage but there is a lot of enthusiasm and lots of potential. Please contact us for more information about the Tahlee Centre for Creation Care or to find out ways to get involved" – John Anderson, Director at Tahlee Ministries.



Tahlee Ministries Inc. is an interdenominational missions organisation based at Tahlee on the north shore of Port Stephens in New South Wales, Australia. Our ministry centres around the concept of a multicultural Christian community living and working closely together to advance the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.

<http://www.tahlee.org/>

<http://www.creationcaretahlee.com/>

Theological Thinking: Now is the time for Evangelical Christians to get more involved in creation care.



A Rocha director (South Australia) Sally Shaw urges evangelicals to recognise the importance of creation care in her article included in the latest EFAC Australia ESSENTIALS publication – see www.efac.org.au/

Now, I believe, is the time we need to reflect on the implications of our theological interpretations when it comes to caring for God's creation. The Paris Climate Change Agreement in December 2015 have shown us that significant action to curb climate change needs to happen not just with Governments but with each of us.¹ Evangelical Christians in Australia are starting to recognise the importance of creation care, but there is still much to be done. In July 2015 the *Gospel, Society and Culture: Creation Care* was published by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Australia in NSW.² It is an important report that leaves no room for complacency. It quotes Beisner *et al* who argue "To reject environmental stewardship is to embrace, by default, no stewardship. The only proper alternative to selfish anthropocentrism is not biocentrism but theocentrism: a vision of earth care with God and his perfect moral law at the centre and human beings acting as his accountable stewards."³ This paper complements the 2012 Lausanne Global Consultation on Creation Care and the Gospel, which built on the 2010 Lausanne Cape Town commitment, and is a significant voice from which we can learn.⁴

I had the privilege of being invited to join this Consultation. It was a gathering of theologians, church leaders, scientists, and creation care practitioners from 26 countries, who met to develop a more deeply biblical understanding of creation care. Our aim was to create a document, 'a call', that the evangelical church around the world would be able to hear and respond *urgently at the personal, community, national and international levels*.

The final Statement made a number of specific calls for action, including the need for:

- an integrated theology of creation care that can engage seminaries, Bible colleges and others to equip pastors to disciple their congregations
- a theology that examines humanity's identity as both embedded in creation and yet possessing a special role towards creation
- a theology that challenges current prevailing economic ideologies in relation to our biblical stewardship of creation and
- a theology of hope in Christ and his Second Coming that properly informs and inspires creation care.⁵

Hearing these calls requires us to put aside our presuppositions and re-read God's word through a new lens, recognising that it is the Christian worldview that gives the only viable basis for care of the natural environment. On this basis we should not withdraw from environmental concerns simply because we feel that other approaches to environmental

care are flawed. Rather, we should be all more concerned about the issue, just as other worldviews give people reasons to be concerned about the environment. Like all genuine moral responses, these are signs of God's common grace.⁶

We, as Beisner *et al* say:

"should be ready to enter the debate, to...



Continued....



"...present and to act on the clear Christian reasons for creation care, since they can provide the metaphysical basis that ecologists are yearning for."⁷

Organisations such as A Rocha Australia and Hope for Creation⁸ are examples of evangelical Christians taking holistic action to help curb the environmental injustices of this earth. In addition, the Seminary–Stewardship–Alliance, a consortium of evangelical seminaries and theological colleges in the USA and Australia, is seeking to take on this challenge, both in the curriculum, on campus and in other ways.⁹

These calls and examples should compel us in our passion for justice and our love for God, our neighbours and the wider creation to *urgent and prophetic ecological responsibility*, seeing the biblical doctrine of creation as an essential part of the gospel story.¹⁰



References

1. Paris Agreement December 2015
http://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/international/negotiations/paris/index_en.htm
2. Creation Care: A Report to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Australia in NSW, July 2015, from <http://pcnsw.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Creation-Care-Report.pdf>
3. E.C. Beisner, M. Cromartie, T.S. Derr, D. Knippers, P.J. Hill, T. Terrell, "A Biblical Perspective on Environmental Stewardship", *Action Institute* see <http://www.acton.org/public-policy/environmental-stewardship/theology-e/biblical-perspective-environmental-stewardship>
4. Creation care is indeed a 'gospel issue within the Lordship of Christ'. Informed and inspired by our study of scripture we reaffirm that creation care is an issue that must be included in our response to the gospel.
We are faced with a crisis that is pressing, urgent, and that must be resolved in our generation ... Love for God, our neighbours and the wider creation, as well as our passion for justice, compel us to *urgent and prophetic ecological responsibility*, <http://www.lausanne.org/content/ctc/ctcommitment>
5. 2012 Lausanne Global Consultation on Creation Care
<http://www.lausanne.org/content/statement/creation-care-call-to-action>
6. Creation Care: A Report to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Australia in NSW, July 2015, from <http://pcnsw.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Creation-Care-Report.pdf>, 7
7. Beisner et al, *A Biblical Perspective on Environmental Stewardship*, No page
8. Hope for Creation <http://hopeforcreation.com.au/>
9. Blessed Earth <http://www.blessedearth.org/featured-one/seminary-stewardship-alliance/>
10. Cape Town Commitment 1.7.from <http://www.lausanne.org/content/ctc/ctcommitment> in the 2012 *Lausanne Global Consultation on Creation Care and the Gospel: Call to Action* <https://www.lausanne.org/content/statement/creation-care-call-to-action>

Happenings around Australia

Brisbane creation care network – 30th July

We had a great tour of the new educational facilities at Council's Karawatha Forest Discovery Centre, with a talk by Dr. Chris Dalton ("Towards an Australian Ecotheology"), a testimony from a Malaysian student studying Environmental Management at UQ, and we also video-skipped Jesse Wildeman from A Rocha Canada, outdoors at the Brooksdale property.



Our next gathering will be in October. Email Ross for more details: rossvanvuuren@gmail.com

Ross Jansen-van Vuuren, – QLD

New South Wales ReachOut Missions Conference– August



John and David from Tahlee proudly showcasing new A Rocha promotional material with a wildlife slideshow of photos taken by the very talented David.

This was a great opportunity to get A Rocha Australia known around Missions Interlink and conference participants, and a number of important contacts were made over the weekend.

Jen Schabel – NSW

Upcoming Event

A Rocha is co-hosting this seminar with Capernwray

EXTINCT? Threatened Species SEMINAR

Presentations, reports and updates on research and management of threatened species in the Southern Highlands region

Saturday 10th September 2016
9am to 3:45pm
Capernwray Australia
596 Moss Vale Road, Burradoo
(Opposite The Briars)

Seminar attendance is FREE including morning tea and lunch.
Registration prior to 7th September is essential -
Go to: www.stickytickets.com.au/41067
For further information email: tallopenforest@gmail.com or call 0422 279 946

The seminar is facilitated by A Rocha Australia and Capernwray Australia

A Rocha Promotional Gear

We've developed promotional gear to raise awareness of A Rocha in Australia, including a banner and flyers. If you would like to help us by distributing some flyers to your networks please send us a message using the online contact form and we'll mail some out to you: <http://australia.arocha.org/contact/>

Also use the contact form to connect with A Rocha directors...



Roger Jaensch
QLD



David Williams
SA



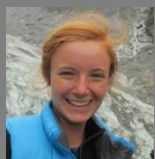
Sally Shaw
SA



John Anderson
NSW



Stuart Blanch
NSW



Anna Radkovic
VIC



Philip Hughes
VIC



Wendy Hoare
SA



Jen Schabel
NSW





Working Together for Creation Care in Australia

A Rocha Australia National Conference, 11–13th November 2016 – Capernwray NSW

DRAFT NATIONAL CONFERENCE PROGRAM

Friday 11 November – evening

First Session: Peter and Miranda Harris (A Rocha co-founders, from UK)

- International Update
 - A Rocha values: Christian, Conservation
-

Saturday 12 November – all day

Bird watching next door in Cecil Hoskins Nature Reserve

Second Session: A Rocha Australia

- Registered projects
- Networks
- State reports

Third Session: Greg Stone/Jen Schabel

- Challenges and opportunities in biodiversity conservation in Australia: Southern Highlands

Optional excursions including a tour of local waterfalls

Fourth Session:

- Jesus, Conservation and Mission
-

Sunday 13 November – morning

Nature/History walk

Worship

- Bible Teaching: Peter Harris: Stewarding God's creation

Final Session: Wrap up and Where to from here?

For more details about the venue visit: <http://www.capernwrayaustralia.org>

Keep an eye out for an email from us with more information and registration details soon!