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COMING SOON! Bringing A Rocha to Australia

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

Portuguese for 'The Rock' A Rocha was founded in 1983 and based initially in the Portuguese Algarve, where the first field study centre opened in 1986. A Rocha is now active in 20 countries.

A Rocha projects are frequently cross-cultural in character, and share a community emphasis, with a focus on science and research, practical conservation and environmental education.

To date there are no A Rocha-linked projects or bases in Australia, although this is changing. There has been interest over many years, and there is a national database for Australians to receive three times a year the regular A Rocha International publications.



After many discussions and a lot of prayer it seems that God is enabling the establishment of A Rocha Australia as a National Organization. While we are going through the approval process and while many aspects of how this will function are still being discussed, it is expected that the National Organization will help to coordinate and promote Christian conservation projects across the country.

This Alert reports on some of the progress to date.



What does A Rocha do?
www.arocha.org



Photo courtesy of A Rocha International

A Rocha responds to the global crisis of biodiversity loss through community-based conservation projects. Via residential field study centres, site-based projects and wider advocacy, A Rocha:

- carries out ecological monitoring and research in areas of high value for wildlife
- spearheads practical measures for conserving and restoring habitats and their fauna and flora
- encourages appreciation of nature and participation in its conservation, through environmental education and community outreach
- provides a forum for understanding the relevance of the Christian faith to environmental issues.

A Rocha Australia Alert, Summer 2015

Bringing A Rocha to Australia - National Conference

Tahlee Ministry Centre - 16-18 OCTOBER 2015

Conservation-minded Christians came from around the country recently to a conference on creation care promoting the work of A Rocha and seeking to establish A Rocha and linked projects in Australia. We had a great time sharing about what we are up to in our local areas and enjoying the serenity and biodiversity values of the Tahlee property in Port Stephens on the NSW Central Coast.

Chris Naylor, the International Director of A Rocha attended as keynote speaker, highlighting the Biblical mandate for creation care and updating us on the work of A Rocha around the world. We were also given a tour of Hunter Wetlands Centre by its CEO Stuart Blanch.

Here are some photos from the conference:



Right: some of the attendees at the recent conference in Tahlee



Left: Interim A Rocha Australia directors. From left: Jen Schabel (NSW), Ruth Colman (NSW), David Williams (SA), John Anderson (NSW), Roger Jaensch (QLD), Stuart Blanch (NSW) (kneeling is Chris Naylor - International Director of A Rocha)
Directors missing from photo: Sally Shaw (SA), Anna Radkovic (VIC) and Philip Hughes (VIC).

See page 5 for directors elected at the AGM in December 2015.

A Rocha Australia Alert, Summer 2015



The Tahlee Project

www.tahlee.org & www.creationcaretahlee.com

Tahlee Ministries Inc. is an interdenominational missions organisation based at Tahlee on the north shore of Port Stephens in NSW. Tahlee provides facilities for Churches and other Christian groups to run camps, retreats and seminars. Team members are involved in support of local churches and schools, prayer ministry, evangelistic outreaches as well as kids and youth ministries. Tahlee also offers training in a variety of fields.

The Creation Care project at Tahlee will involve baseline biodiversity studies, bush regeneration and other conservation activities, environmental education activities and tending of the organic garden on-site.



The Capernwray Project

www.capernwrayaustralia.org

Capernwray operates as a Bible school and conference centre in the Southern Highlands of NSW beside the Wingecarribee River and adjoining Cecil Hoskins Nature Reserve. Over 90 species of birds have been recorded including twelve threatened species.

Caring for the Garden in a Fallen World: A Christian Perspective on Nature Conservation conferences were held for students and the general public in 2014 & 2015, with content available at www.caringforthegarden.wordpress.com



A conservation and restoration project funded from NSW Local Land Services will include:

- Undertaking a research project to look at assisted natural recruitment of the threatened species Paddy's River Box *Eucalyptus macarthurii*, and undertaking activities to conserve and rehabilitate it.
- Rehabilitating the critically endangered ecological community Southern Highland Shale Forest/Woodland
- Restoring habitats for fauna
- Rehabilitating degraded land and removing weeds





Other potential projects around the country

A range of other Christian conservation activities in other parts of Australia have been suggested as projects that could be aligned with A Rocha Australia.

These include revegetation activities on a grazing property near Kyneton (VIC), bush regeneration on hanging peat swamps on Christian conference properties in the Blue Mountains (NSW) and wetland work with an Aboriginal community in the lower Murray (SA). We're also aware that there are likely to be other Christian conservation initiatives around the country that could be aligned with the National Organization – we're keen to find out about them!



Where to from here? Key steps:

- Register A Rocha Australia as a legal entity in Australia (this has been completed!)
- Formalise its relationship with A Rocha International (in progress)
- Establish communication mechanisms and raising awareness of what A Rocha Australia stands for and aspires to achieve
- Develop a membership base and business operational systems
- Initiate a program of activities, notably the bringing of appropriate projects (around Australia) under the A Rocha banner.



A Rocha Australia Board and Membership

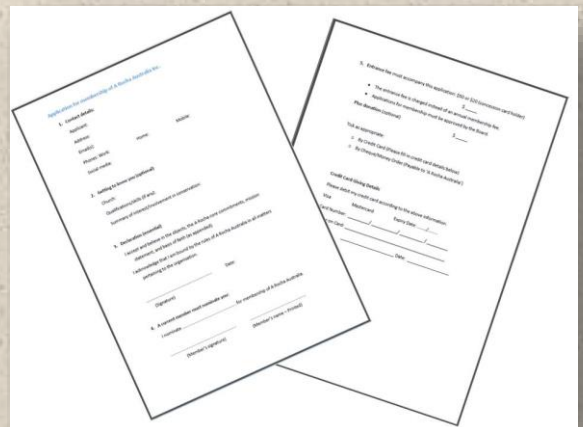
The inaugural A Rocha Australia Incorporated Annual General Meeting was held on 3rd Dec 2015 via skype with 14 members present from 5 states. The following directors and officers were appointed:

Roger Jaensch – President (QLD)
Anna Radkovic – Vice President (VIC)
David Williams – Secretary (SA)
John Anderson – Treasurer & Public Officer (NSW)

Stuart Blanch (NSW)
Philip Hughes (VIC)
Jen Schabel (NSW)
Sally Shaw (SA)
Wendy Hoare (SA)

Joining A Rocha Australia requires filling out the “Application for membership of A Rocha Australia Inc” and a \$50 entrance fee (\$20 for concession card holders).

Non-members on the national database of contacts will continue to receive the international newsletter.



A Rocha Australia Commitments

- **Christian** - Underlying all we do is our biblical faith in the living God, who made the world, loves it and entrusts it to the care of human society.
- **Conservation** - We carry out research for the conservation and restoration of the natural world and run environmental education programmes for people of all ages.
- **Community** - Through our commitment to God, each other and the wider creation, we aim to develop good relationships both within the A Rocha family and in our local communities.
- **Cross-cultural** - We draw on the insights and skills of people from diverse cultures, both locally and around the world.
- **Cooperation** - We work in partnership with a wide variety of organizations and individuals who share our concerns for a sustainable world.

Interim contacts as we make A Rocha Australia a reality:

Ruth Colman rcolm@bigpond.com for membership & contacts
Jen Schabel jenny.schabel@gmail.com for publications
Roger Jaensch roger.jaensch.bne@gmail.com for other inquiries



'Gossip the gospel': the power of nature conservation in promoting Jesus

The message of the gospel is central to the work of A Rocha. This is an excerpt from an Eternity Magazine interview with Chris Naylor, executive director of A Rocha, on his recent Australian visit



As a missionary in the Beqaa Valley in Eastern Lebanon, Chris Naylor got involved with efforts to protect the Aammiq marsh on the floor of the valley in the years following the civil war. It wasn't what he'd envisaged when he came a missionary, but Chris said being part of A Rocha provided endless missional opportunities.

Chris' understanding of the importance of conservation was deepened when he realised that as a missionary, the environment is a fantastic platform to "gossip the gospel" because everybody is affected by it.

Protecting the marsh meant Chris worked in different villages, affording him the opportunity to help communities who had been at war against each other only a few years ago cooperate and reconcile. "It was a very powerful platform for working out gospel truths in people's lives." Chris said that he had many chances to talk about why he was involved in the project at the Aammiq marsh.



Aammiq Marsh. Credit: A Rocha Lebanon - courtesy of A Rocha International

"As Christians we have a huge amount to say about why we have this aching desire in our hearts to see and protect and conserve beauty. Outside the Christian tradition, many people don't have answers to that, whereas of course we do. "We love nature, because God loves nature and nature points us to God."

As a missionary, Chris believed that he had been tasked with taking the whole gospel to the world, not just bits of the gospel. "Too often we've been selective in what we think are the bits of the gospel that people need to hear. Clearly the broken relationship between mankind and God is hugely important and our individual salvation is a fundamental part of the gospel, but it is a *part* of the gospel and the *whole* gospel is much broader than that. It has implications for how we treat our fellow human beings, and how we also treat the earth.

A Rocha Australia Alert, Summer 2015

www.biblesociety.org.au/news/gossip-the-gospel-the-power-of-nature-conservation-in-promoting-jesus