



© Fiona Pfennigwerth



# A Rocha Australia ENEWS

Spring 2019

We are a Christian organisation engaging communities in nature conservation



Sacred kingfisher, Wingecarribee River

## Chair's report

Welcome to the spring 2019 issue of A Rocha Australia's ENews. Thank you for supporting A Rocha Australia.

As a teenager and then a keen ecology student at university in the 1980s and 90s, I felt my twin passions of following Jesus and learning about nature occurred in areas of my life separated by calendar, relationships and belief. I studied and talked science with

biologists on weekdays, and faith with Christians on Sundays and Wednesday nights. My ecology friends thought Christianity was quaint or irrelevant, or bore much blame for environmental degradation, and saw rigorous science as providing the answers. My inquiries to Ministers and mission agencies about the environment and environment-focused missionary jobs were met with polite puzzlement, or gentle rebuke.

When I started work as a river campaigner in the Murray-Darling Basin, that separation spread to politics. It got harder to bring together Jesus, science and conservation into a cohesive world view. I felt my life riven in three, unreconcilable. Christian farmers thought me a city greenie and unfaithful, scientists thought me emotive and religiously unscientific, environmentalists thought me soft and socially conservative.

My worlds rarely overlapped, and trying to make them do so was fraught. I well remember the day my worlds started to come together...

## In this Issue:

- [Chair's report](#)
- [Searching for Australasian Bitterns](#)
- [Coastal cleanups](#)
- [Fairs Fair stall](#)
- [Bush regen, Katoomba](#)
- [Capernwray Focus Day](#)
- [SA wetlands walk and project planning](#)
- [A Rocha International Resources](#)
- [Biblical theology of Creation Care book review](#)
- [Gifts with a difference](#)
- [Science and Christianity book launch](#)
- [COSAC 2020 Save the Date](#)
- [Women's group event](#)



## Chair's report continued...

It was a two-line advert for a job as a freshwater ecologist working for some Christian mission organisation with a name I couldn't pronounce. The advert was in the newsletter of my not-particularly-interested-in-the-environment church, sandwiched between notices about evangelistic events and prayer points. And the job was in Lebanon.

*What?!* I thought. Who was this group A Rocha? And what were they doing studying frogs and waterbirds in a country that I associated with civil war and religious hatred, and definitely not wetlands? And how did Jesus fit into it all? So I shot off a quick email to ask about the job, and the organisation.

That was two decades ago. The email came to mind when I heard the tragic news about the car crash in South Africa that claimed the lives of A Rocha leaders Miranda Harris and Chris and Susanna Naylor on 28 October.

I thought of Chris when I heard the news. He had started the A Rocha Lebanon project in the Aamiq Wetlands in the Beqaa Valley, living and working on the edge of a war zone to restore a beleaguered wetland and help show Jesus' love to a beleaguered community. It was he who replied to my email. And his considered response helped me understand why ecology, conservation and sharing God's love could come together in a cross-cultural context in a land maligned by hate. And he helped me start down the path towards bringing my three worlds together, and helping set up A Rocha Australia.



Chris was there when A Rocha Australia formally began in October 2015. He guided us through the many decisions we had to make in a hurry, and was encouraging and enthusiastic (whilst we were more worried and overwhelmed). He marvelled at a kookaburra feeding from his hand, avidly watched our amazing birdlife, and welcomed people into the A Rocha family. I did not know Susanna, but remember Chris talking so fondly about her and their kids. He smiled the most when he talked about his family. Here are some photos from our conference in Tahlee, NSW:



On his visit to Australia, Chris spoke with *Eternity News* – here is the [link](#) to his article.



## Chair's report continued...

Miranda Harris had time for people. She would email or jump on a Skype call, despite all the time pressures on her, and enquire about my family and my journey in Creation care. It was a very special trait of hers. The few times we met, she treated me as so important and special. It always amazed me, and made me feel very valued. During their visit to A Rocha Australia in late 2016 for our annual conference, we took Peter and Miranda for a bushwalk in a National Park. She and I sat near a cliff talking about our faith and hope, and marvelled at the sight, watching a waterfall, and sitting quietly watching as a lyrebird fed its chick. She loved the wildlife and forest, and it gave me great joy to show it to her. Here are some photos from that conference:



Peter and Miranda Harris recorded this [interview](#) for us, which beautifully demonstrates their faith, dedication to A Rocha and their support of us in Australia. We pray for Peter. He is recovering, and doctors say he should be able to travel back to the UK within weeks.

The A Rocha Australia directors have felt the tragedy very deeply. It has hurt so much. I thought of [Isaiah 57](#) when I recoiled at the tragedy of the accident and the deaths:

*1 The righteous perish,  
and no one takes it to heart;  
the devout are taken away,  
and no one understands  
that the righteous are taken away  
to be spared from evil.  
2 Those who walk uprightly  
enter into peace;  
they find rest as they lie in death. (NIV)*



This gave me great comfort, amongst the grief.  
The Lord has his plans, and loves his servants.

**Dr Stuart Blanch**  
*President (Chair, board of directors)*

On 28 October, Peter and Miranda Harris, Co-founders of A Rocha, and Chris Naylor, A Rocha International CEO, together with his wife Susanna, were involved in a horrific car accident near Port Elizabeth, South Africa. Miranda, Chris and Susanna did not survive. Peter is being treated in a local hospital and is in a stable condition. For more details and tributes visit the [A Rocha International webpage](#)



## Chair's report continued...

On other news, a new covenant is being developed between organisations in the worldwide A Rocha family. The covenant will be finalised and come into effect in 2020.

We are hoping to develop local A Rocha Networks across the regions where we have been steadily growing our work, particularly in Melbourne/around Kyneton, Sydney, SE Queensland, Newcastle/Hunter Valley and Adelaide. Please [contact us](#) to be involved.

We seek to grow a prayer network to seek God's guidance for our work. If you pray, please consider whether you can be involved, and [let us know](#). We are also praying for Australia as it is ravaged by drought and bushfire, and for those of you being impacted.

## Searching for Australasian Bitterns in Victoria



A Rocha Australia Executive Officer Roger Jaensch and Director Philip Hughes recently spent two days searching for Australasian Bitterns in South-West Victoria on land covenanted by key partner organisation Cassinia Environmental. The Australasian Bittern, *Botaurus poiciloptilus*, which is listed federally as endangered, is a secretive waterbird that inhabits mainly freshwater vegetated swamps.

South-West Victoria is a relative hot-spot for bitterns, and Roger and Philip conducted their search as part of a BirdLife Australia – Glenelg Hopkins Catchment Management

Authority project aimed at assessing the distribution and population size of bitterns and to instigate habitat protection and restoration. Unfortunately no bitterns were recorded during the survey, but the time spent in the wetlands allowed Roger and Philip to assess the habitat as structurally suitable for bitterns and to identify a number of rushes and sedges. They

also recorded Lewin's Rail, *Lewinia pectoralis*, a rarely sighted waterbird that is listed in Victoria's *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988* Threatened List, as well as the migratory Latham's Snipe, *Gallinago hardwickii* and diminutive Southern Emu-wren, *Stipiturus malachurus*.



an old rail nest



Roger (above) and Philip (below)



**Roger Jaensch – Executive Officer, QLD**

Do you know your trees, insects, plants, reptiles, fish or birds? The Victorian network of A Rocha Australia has the opportunity to engage in biodiversity surveys across the state and is seeking people who know the fauna and flora of Victoria to help in surveys. You don't need to be a taxonomic expert in *Eucalyptus*, but if you do have some specialist knowledge that would be welcome. Please contact Victorian Director Dr Philip Hughes at [Philip.hughes@arocha.org](mailto:Philip.hughes@arocha.org)

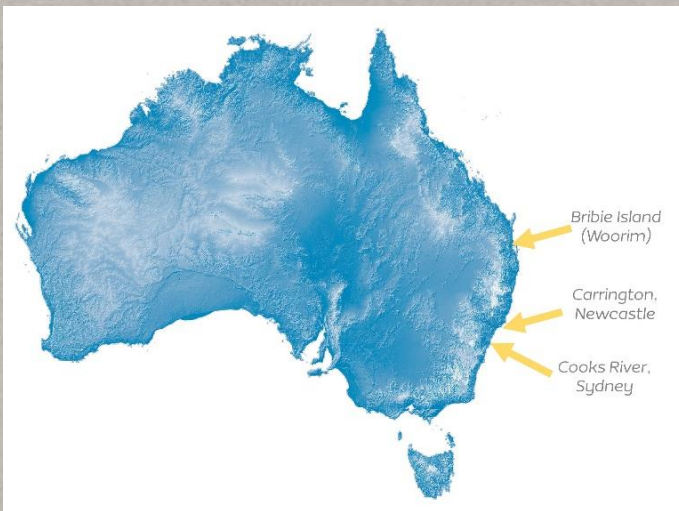


# Coastal Cleanups in September

The global A Rocha family is committed to seeing our oceans be a place of hope, not plastic. We not only study and provide education about plastic pollution, but are contributing to habitat restoration of coastal and riverine systems. A Rocha works throughout the year on this issue, but focusses efforts on [International Coastal Cleanup](#) events held each September. Here are details from the 2019 Australian sites:

## From South East Queensland:

We had a good turnout of 12 A Rocha members and friends, up on last year and with many return participants, for the beach cleanup at Woorim Beach, Bribie Island. The weather was sunny and definitely beachy. Our beachside rallying point was in a beautiful shady park with carbeen and Melaleuca trees and we collected many buckets of plastic from a dry creek there. Moving on to the ocean beach, we ended up with quite a few buckets of plastic as well as recyclable bottles and cans. In our discussion over scrumptious morning tea, we agreed that next year we should target Brisbane River or another waterway because these are known to have plastic litter whereas our beaches are relatively clean. – Roger Jaensch



**From Sydney, NSW:** We had a group of five for our cleanup, but when we first arrived we bumped into a group of men who have been court ordered to clean up the river! They were targeting big items, so we focused on cigarette butts and other small bits of waste. We had Juliana and Jad who were over from the United States and were very keen on cleaning waste from the environment on their holiday! On Sunday we had a group visit a beach south of Bondi and spent most of the time picking up Styrofoam and nurdles – Issy Lyons



**From Newcastle, NSW:** A wide array of rubbish was collected along the Carrington mangrove boardwalk. Check out this [video](#) to see more! – Stuart Blanch



## A Rocha at Fairs Fair, Melbourne

A Rocha Australia had a sustainability demonstration stall at Truth and Liberation Concern (TLC) church's annual [Fairs Fair](#) on 26 October. Begun in 2012, Fairs Fair promotes living and buying ethically. The organisers desire *"to be good stewards of this great planet of ours and support projects both globally and locally that assist in creating jobs, skills and dignity"*. Over 30 stalls featured crafts and handmade items from around the world and locally-made artisan products. For the first time a Tiny House was displayed. For refreshment a Karen team served up delicious Burmese food, Persian kebabs, an Aussie BBQ, and an array of cakes and good coffee. The A Rocha stall featured a range of ideas for reducing waste and cutting down plastic consumption in the home, and useful resources. Many good conversations were had and there was genuine interest in and concern for our environment. Origami demonstrations were popular, showing how newspaper can be re-purposed as bin-liners. Thank you TLC for inviting us once again! **Julia Jardine– Director, VIC**



Ruth Chapman helping on the A Rocha stall

## Bush regeneration, Katoomba

It was delightful to hold a bush regeneration weekend for the A Rocha Sydney Network at [Katoomba Christian Convention Centre](#) in September. We helped to control weeds and restore native bush and swamps on the edge of the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area. We targeted scotch broom, agapanthus, blackberry, tutsan, montbretia, Japanese and Himalayan honeysuckle, holly, ivy and cotoneaster. We also planted some tubestock along the creek line to improve the resilience and functionality of the site, and we did some maintenance on some previous planting sites including mulching.



We had a great time of fellowship and a group on Sunday visited The Gully Aboriginal Place nearby to learn about the local history, impacts of stolen generations and land redevelopment, and the environmental restoration of the swamp onsite.



It was a very encouraging weekend and we thank Shelley and the team at KCCC for looking after us so well – to repeat soon! **Issy Lyons & Jen Schabel– Directors, NSW**



# Christians, Conservation & Creation Care

## Capernwray Focus Day, 2 Nov

On 2 November A Rocha Australia combined with project partner [Capernwray Australia](#) to present a one-day seminar 'Christians, Conservation & Creation Care'. Conducted at the Burradoo (NSW) campus, the event was attended by over 60 people, including Capernwray's current bible school students and members of the local community.



Greg Stone



Issy Lyons



Zoe Creelman

The day commenced with an exposition of Romans 8:18–23 (Greg Stone) and was followed by several short presentations from fellow A Rocha Australia members. Issy Lyons (biodiversity conservation), Zoe Creelman (regenerative agriculture),



Anna Radkovic ([Cassinia](#) / landscape conservation) and Stuart Blanch (environmental advocacy) each spoke from the perspective of their personal experience and professional expertise. Guest speakers Matt and Ashlee Anslow from [Milk and Honey Farm](#) shared about their journey towards sustainable living.



Anna Radkovic



Stuart Blanch



Matt and Ashlee Anslow

Lunch was followed by A Rocha Australia Executive Officer Roger Jaensch's 'Overview of A Rocha International and A Rocha Australia', after which everyone present was able to attend one of the five elective workshops run by Stuart, Zoe, Greg, Margaret Stone, and Matt and Ashlee. Thanks to Peter Thomas (National Director of Capernwray Torchbearers Australia) and Capernwray staff for hosting the event.

**Greg Stone– Director, NSW**



# Capernwray Focus Day continued...

Here is a recent before and after comparison of the main tree planting area on the Capernwray property, adjacent to the Cecil Hoskins Nature Reserve on the Wingecarribee River. Prior to the project this area was dominated by hawthorn, an environmental weed. The photo on the right shows the impressive survival rates and growth of mostly Paddy's River Box (a threatened species of *Eucalyptus*), and wattles.



October 2016



April 2019

Following the Focus Day morning sessions, the A Rocha executive officer led 17 participants and children on bird-watching walks past the revegetation areas and beside the Wingecarribee River. Walkers were intrigued by the different fishing methods of waterbirds and use of tree hollows by nesting kingfishers and cockatoos.

Overseas-based students learnt about Australian parrots and fairy-wrens. Over the weekend Roger also conducted standardised surveys of the 0.25 ha plantation and recorded nine bird species using the sapling river box trees, out of 51 species documented at Capernwray and the adjacent river and nature reserve at the time. Diversity is likely to increase further as the trees mature.



Great content was taught at the Focus Day, e.g.

*A sacred kingfisher seen near the Wingecarribee River*

## **We care for creation:**

1. To obey the command God gave us
2. To fulfil the purpose for which God created us
3. To co-operate with God's common grace
4. As a demonstration of love for others
5. In recognition of creation's God-given value
6. In acknowledgement of Christ's work as creator, sustainer and redeemer
7. As a sign of our hope in Jesus Christ
8. As an expression of the gospel of Jesus Christ

*–Greg Stone*

## **How Christians can best advocate:**

1. Start on your knees and reading Scripture: Creation care is mission
2. Be godly and full of hope, not secular and despairing
3. Challenge believers who ignore Creation with Bible, science and reality
4. Help others know the Lord more deeply by experiencing Creation
5. You can't un-say it. Pray and think carefully before speaking and writing
6. Love and pray for those who ignore or hate you and your message
7. Speak up for those who can't: the poor, wildlife and future generations
8. Be prophet, encourager, solution provider.

*–Stuart Blanch*



## South Australian wetlands walk and project planning

On 17 November 16 people connected with A Rocha in South Australia met at the Hart Road wetland in Aldinga Beach, about 50km south of Adelaide.

The group was guided by Ben Moulton, Senior Natural Areas Conservation Officer from Onkaparinga Council who shared about its history, potential and challenges.

This site is near suburbs, both old and new, with a new one planned for next door. It is not pristine nor remote, but it is very popular and much visited by people. With a number of schools and churches nearby, there are great opportunities for the wetland to help people learn about nature, and perhaps get involved in conservation activities.

We appear to have enough A Rocha-connected people living nearby, or from not far away, that could form a core group for an A Rocha South Australia project at the wetlands. We used this recent visit to discuss the opportunities and challenges.

We discussed revegetation approaches, weed removal, interpretation signage, nest boxes, amenities including a bird hide and shelter, and funding support.

While the planning is in its infancy, we are excited about the opportunity that this site presents, to share God's love for his creation with Christians and non-Christians.

If you live in South Australia and are interested in joining a working group for this wetland, please email Sally Shaw: [sally.shaw@arocha.org](mailto:sally.shaw@arocha.org)

*Sally Shaw – Director, SA*





# Some resources from the A Rocha International website



At this hard time of loss and environmental concerns close to home with drought, catastrophic bushfires and coral bleaching (etc.), it is good to engage with solid Christian thinking for encouragement.

A great place to check out biblical reflections on topical issues such as climate change, sustainability, future, poverty, community and hope is the [A Rocha Blog](#). It has a large collection of blogs from a range of authors dating back to 2012: the 150 milestone was [celebrated](#) on 1 October. You can [sign up](#) to get new blogs sent directly to your email address. Here is a small selection that might spark your interest – in anticipation of perhaps having more time for reading and reflection over the summer lull!

18 April 2019 | [Panu Pihkala](#) | [Extinction Rebellion, eco-anxiety and Christian faith](#)

31 August 2019 | [Hannah Malcolm](#) | [Finding words for the end of the world](#)

30 September 2019 | [Dave Bookless](#) | [The Bible, biodiversity and God's priorities](#)

There are also excellent articles on the [A Rocha International website](#). Here is an excerpt from an [article](#) published on 25 Sept by Rev Dr Dave Bookless, Director of Theology:



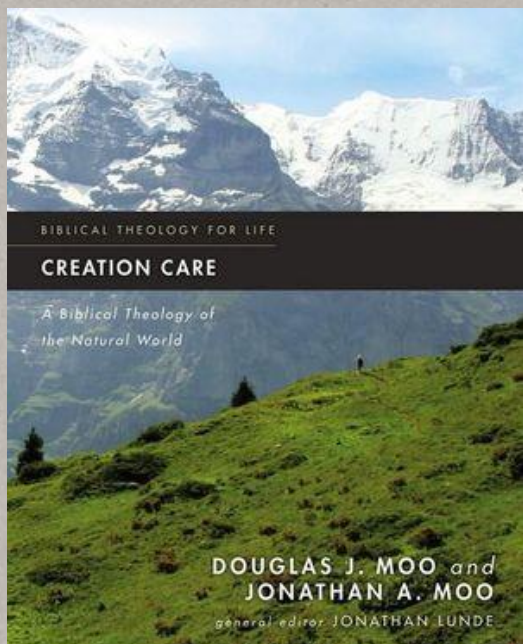
When Greta Thunberg speaks, the world listens. How is it that a 16-year old Swedish schoolgirl, unknown just over a year ago, has become one of the best-known faces and voices on the planet? And what about her message? The controlled anger with which she calmly addressed the United Nations this week was extraordinary, as she rebuked world leaders...

...So, how do we assess Greta Thunberg from a biblical perspective? She does not publicly claim any Christian faith, and it's fairly easy to find things to disagree with in what she says. She speaks of never forgiving today's generation of leaders for refusing to take the necessary drastic action, whereas we believe there is always room for repentance and forgiveness. She supports the illegal (albeit nonviolent) protests of [Extinction Rebellion](#), which causes unease amongst many. Her language is sometimes apocalyptic, encouraging climate anxiety and even despair, and could feed a deep anger against the rich and powerful. Yet, in her despair and rage, her outspoken passion and clarity, she sounds remarkably like [Amos](#) or [Ezekiel](#) railing against the injustice, corruption and vested interests of their day, or even like Jesus' 'Woe to you's' in [Matthew 23](#)....



# Book Review: Biblical theology of Creation Care

Douglas J. Moo (Author) and Jonathan A Moo (Author), Jonathan Lunde (Editor), *Creation Care: A Biblical Theology of the Natural World* (Michigan, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018)



Douglas Moo and his son, Jonathan, have provided for the Christian community a scholarly study on the biblical reasons why care for creation is essential for all Christians.

Rather than merely offering a response to environmental concerns, *Creation Care* invites readers to read the Bible afresh to explore the place of the natural world within God's purposes and to celebrate God's love as displayed in creation and new creation.

In addition to providing a comprehensive biblical theology of creation care, they probe behind the headlines and politicized rhetoric about an 'environmental crisis' and climate change to provide a careful and judicious analysis of the most up-to-date scientific data about the state of our world.

They conclude by setting forth a bold framework and practical suggestions for an effective and faithful Christian response to the scriptural teaching about the created world.

Following the contours of the biblical storyline, they uncover answers to questions such as:

- What difference does Jesus make for our understanding of the natural world?
- How does our call to care for creation fit within the hope for a new heaven and a new earth?
- What is unique about Christian creation care compared with other approaches to 'environmental' issues?, and
- How does creation care fit within the charge to proclaim the gospel and care for the poor?

I'd highly recommend this excellent book.

*Sally Shaw – Director, SA*



## Gift with a Difference Gift Catalogue

Show someone you care by giving a [Gift with a Difference](#). Something that brings hope for them and the planet. By supporting Gift with a Difference you get to help a needy local community overseas *as well as* support nature conservation. They'd also make great conversation starters to promote in church. Here are some of many options as you consider ethical purchases for loved ones this Christmas.



Bio-sand filters,  
Uganda



Nature-based  
livelihood for a Syrian  
refugee, Lebanon

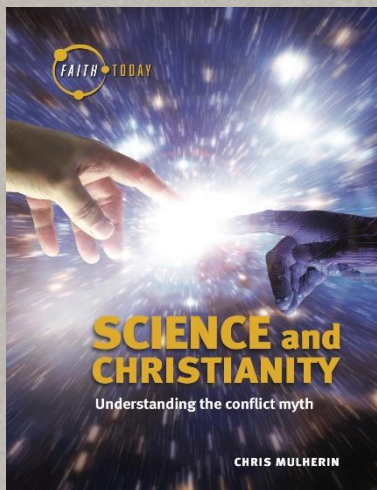


Purchase land to protect  
endangered owls, Kenya



Forests in the desert,  
Peru





## Launch of 'Science and Christianity'

We congratulate A Rocha Australia member Chris Mulherin on the recent launch of his book in Melbourne. Chris is the Executive Director of ISCAST, 'Christians in Science and Technology'. This book is an easy-to-read introduction to science and Christianity. It is written for students, teachers, clergy, parish groups and interested lay people. It has been warmly commended by a range of church leaders and scientists. Visit the [ISCAST website](http://www.iscast.org) for more details.

## Upcoming conference in Melbourne



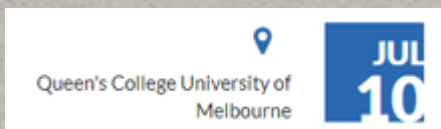
Initial Save the Date and call for presentations at <http://www.iscast.org/cosac2020call>

"Planet Earth and its inhabitants face a paradoxical future. Increasing threats to the creation sit alongside the extraordinary possibilities that science and technology offer: species extinction and climate change alongside gene editing and dreams of humanity 2.0. In the face of anxiety and bewilderment, Jesus Christ offers hope.

What does it mean to be a Christian in the 21st century? What does it mean to be faithful to Christ in a time of "eco-anxiety" when patterns of consumption seem unsustainable and damaging to the creation? What does it mean to be a Christian in a time when many people look forward optimistically to "the singularity" and the transhuman possibilities of overcoming the limitations of the human body? What does it mean to live in a time of climate change and CRISPR, of animal extinction and AI?

Under the overall theme of "A Hopeful Future?" this important Australian conference will take up these urgent global challenges. How do we think and live faithfully in such a world, and what sort of hope does Christian theology offer?

We hope you will join us at COSAC 2020 and we invite proposals for presentations that will help all people engage with these themes in a spirit of Christian hope."



The first public call for papers is now open and will close on January 31, 2020. A Rocha Australia is looking to be involved in COSAC 2020.

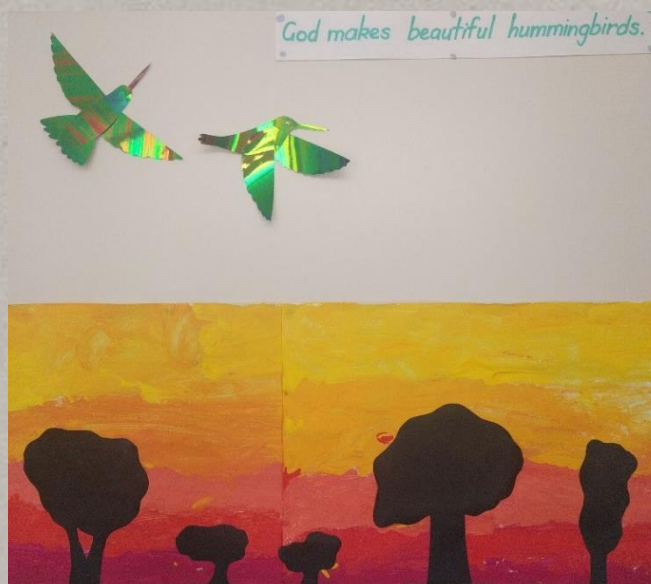
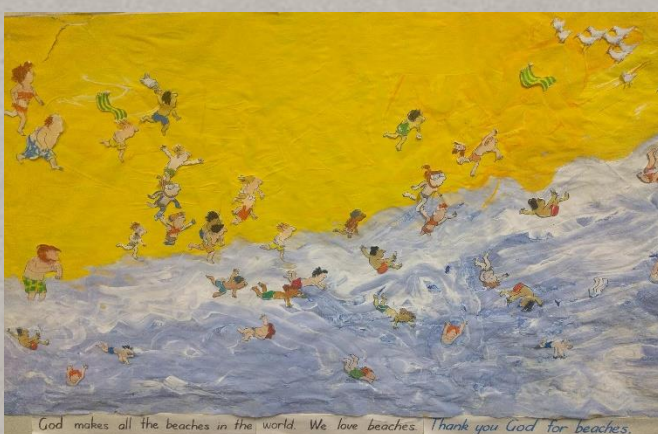
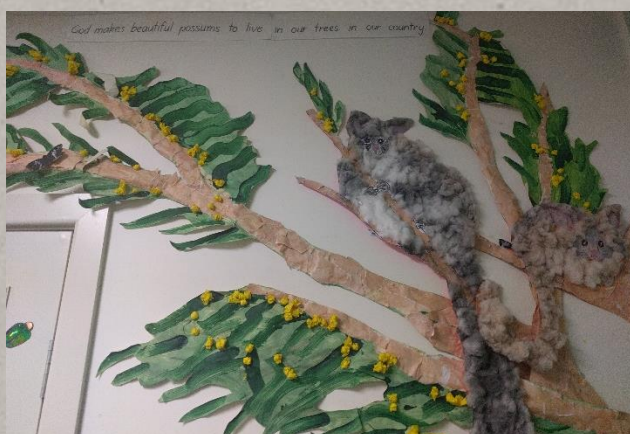


# Women's group environmental event, Sydney

The Oasis women's group at [St Clements](#), Lalor Park in western Sydney, recently gave an invite to speak about the biblical basis for environmental care and the work of A Rocha. They made beeswax wraps, newspaper planter pots and learned about waste-saving initiatives in the home:



The Sunday School room in St Clements is wonderful, inspiring the next generation:



Jen Schabel– Director, NSW

Images by A Rocha Australia directors and used with permission, unless where otherwise stated

Send feedback and suggested events/articles for the Summer ENews by 6 Feb to [australia.comms@arocha.org](mailto:australia.comms@arocha.org)

