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A Rocha Australia ENEWS

Winter, 2020

We are a Christian organisation engaging communities in nature conservation

In this Issue:

- Chair's report
- Peter Harris: retirement and a new chapter
- Call for volunteer ecologists to help with field studies
- A new Executive Director for A Rocha International
- Conference on Science and Christianity held in July
- A Rocha Australia directors speak at COSAC
- Capernwray update, NSW
- Spring event: International Coastal Cleanups
- Upcoming: A Rocha Australia is turning five!
- Queensland projects update
- Connecting Creation Care with faith
- Recommended short reads during COVID-19

Chair's report

Welcome to the winter 2020 issue of A Rocha Australia's ENews.

We continue to be involved in a range of Creation care projects and initiatives during the Covid-19 pandemic. While some activities have had to cease in some states, the activities covered in this issue show we have not been idle.

On behalf of directors I extend my very deep gratitude for your ongoing support of A Rocha Australia during the Covid-19 pandemic. Thanks to the leadership of Jo Swinney at A Rocha International, A Rocha organisations from around the world joined together to help produce a [video](#) to say thanks to our supporters for walking with us during the pandemic. As you can see from the image, we are all saying 'thank you' in our own language.

We are hoping to host seminars on a range of Creation care topics via Zoom. Just because many of us can't travel to conferences or workshops during the...



20 A Rocha organisations from around the world say thanks for walking with us all during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Chair's report continued...

...pandemic does not mean we need to stop meeting together, learning and encouraging each other. Would you be interested in listening in, or potentially presenting a seminar? Please let us know via our Facebook site or email.

The worldwide A Rocha family will mark a major step in September when a new covenant is signed by representatives of all organisations. The A Rocha Australia board has provided significant input to the covenant, thanks to the detailed reviews provided by our executive officer Roger Jaensch. One of the outcomes of the covenant will be greater engagement with other A Rocha organisations in the Asia-Pacific region.

One of the responsibilities we now have is to jointly nominate a representative from our region to the board of Trustees of A Rocha International. Over the past few months the chairs of the boards of A Rocha organisations in Aotearoa, India, the Philippines and Australia met (by Zoom, of course) to consider and pray about who to nominate .



Chairs of the Boards of A Rocha organisations in Asia-Pacific (clockwise from top left) Dr Nicola Hoggard Creegan (Aotearoa / New Zealand), Dr Zenet Maramara (Christians in Conservation, the Philippines), Rev Prem Mitra (India), Dr Stuart Blanch (Australia), and Sarah French (A Rocha International).

You can listen to his sermons [here](#).

Rodel assisted in helping establish Christians in Conservation in the Philippines.

I hope this issue brings you hope and inspiration in otherwise difficult times.

Thank you for your prayer and support.

Thanks, and enjoy.

Dr Stuart Blanch
President (Chair, board of directors)

We are very thankful that our agreed nominee Rodel Lasco from the Philippines has been appointed to the A Rocha International board.

Rev Dr Lasco has a wide background and experience in environmental science and as a Christian pastor that will serve A Rocha well.

His [scientific expertise](#) includes forests and forestry, natural resource management, land degradation and climate change adaptation. He has been a lead author on several assessments of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

He is also an ordained pastor at [Trinity Bible Church](#), a Reformed Baptist church in San Pablo in the Philippines.



Peter Harris: retirement and a new chapter

A Rocha co-founder and President Peter Harris retired at the end of May 2020.

Along with the global A Rocha family, A Rocha Australia extends our grateful thanks to Peter, and praise God for the ways that Peter and wife Miranda shaped A Rocha across the globe since they first moved to Portugal in 1983 to establish and run A Rocha's first field study centre and bird observatory.

Following the accident last October that took Miranda's life – as well as A Rocha International's Executive Director, Chris Naylor, and his wife Susanna – Peter's retirement has taken on a different character. He continues to recover from the injuries sustained in the accident and is grateful to be able to drive again, particularly as he recently began living on his own. And he is looking forward to a new incarnation of his role with A Rocha, now in a voluntary capacity. At the moment, this is particularly focused on raising support for some of the national organizations most affected by COVID-19, but has also involved online and filmed speaking and teaching.

The A Rocha Australia board sent a thank you package of Australian children's books to Peter to enjoy reading to his grandchildren:



You can read more about Peter on the [A Rocha website](#) and watch this [short film](#), in which Peter shares his reflections on life since the accident:

Please join us in praying for God's healing presence as Peter continues to recover, and for guidance in his new role.



Call for volunteer ecologists to help with field studies



A Rocha Australia has flora and fauna study locations in Vic, SA and NSW. We are looking for volunteer field ecologists (preferably with some experience) who may be interested in travelling to these field locations to help us conduct scientific studies.

Please consider contacting us to indicate your interest, and we will place details on our website and in upcoming ENews.

A new Executive Director for A Rocha International

Announced on 12 August 2020

A Rocha International is delighted to announce the appointment of Dr Simon Stuart as Executive Director, following the tragic loss of Chris Naylor in a road accident in South Africa in October 2019.



We are grateful to God for providing such an outstanding person to lead A Rocha into a new chapter and to help us rebuild after a difficult and traumatic time.

Simon's career includes his work on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species and his chairing of the IUCN Species Survival Commission. He was recently announced as one of two winners of this year's prestigious Blue Planet Prize. He will leave his current position as Director of Strategic Conservation at Synchronicity Earth to join A Rocha in December 2020.

Simon has a long history with A Rocha, having served as an A Rocha International trustee between 2000 and 2009, and from 2017 to June 2020. He has been instrumental in developing an organizational covenant, to be signed by all 21 A Rocha organizations later this year. He says, 'I am both excited and humbled to be taking this new position with A Rocha International – an organization I have grown to love over many years. The A Rocha family is in many ways groundbreaking as it brings together practical conservation action with Christian faith. We are facing an unprecedented ecological crisis, and it is imperative that Christians are at the forefront of the fight to save and recover nature. It is also a critical moment for A Rocha as we start to live out our new covenant in the worldwide family of A Rocha organizations.'

Rebecca Irvin, Chair of A Rocha International, says 'We feel blessed and grateful to have someone of Simon's caliber, credentials and experience to lead us at this critical juncture. Simon's unique combination of his strong Christian faith, extensive global conservation leadership and passion for the work of A Rocha make him the ideal candidate for this role.'

Simon will retain some critical roles in the conservation community, notably as Chair of the Amphibian Survival Alliance and the Asian Species Action Partnership, and as a member of the board of Fondation Segré. He will remain active with Synchronicity Earth, transitioning to the role of Chief Scientific Advisor.

With the global A Rocha family, A Rocha Australia welcomes Simon to this important role and looks forward to his leadership in the months and years ahead.



ADDITIONAL NOTES:

- [Synchronicity Earth](#) acts to address overlooked and underfunded conservation challenges for globally threatened species and ecosystems.
- Now in its 29th year, the [Blue Planet prize](#) was created by the Asahi Glass Foundation to recognize significant contributions to the resolution of global environmental problems.

Dr Simon Stuart, the new Executive Director (photo – [A Rocha](#))

Conference on Science and Christianity held in July

The 12th ISCAST conference was successfully held online from 10–12 July with 215 participants, 60 speakers and five concurrent streams.

We would like to congratulate Chris Mulherin and the other organisers for hosting this excellent event.

If you did not attend COSAC, you can [register here](#) at post-COSAC prices to have access to almost 60 presentations.



Some of the speakers are part of the A Rocha Australia family, or known to us. [Click here](#) to find out more about the conference and to learn more about the speakers and topics covered.



COSAC 2020 speakers

If you would like to view a free public session, view this [interview and Q&A session](#) with Prof. Ian Harper about economics, climate change and Christian faith. Ian Harper is Dean and Director of the Melbourne Business School and a member of the Board of the Reserve Bank of Australia. The title of this session is 'Does Economics Have Anything Hopeful to Say About Climate Change?'

A Rocha Australia director Sally Shaw's interview with Q&A session is also available to [view here](#). More details of her interview as well as director Philip Hughes are outlined on the next page of this ENews.

A Rocha Australia directors speak at COSAC

A Rocha Australia directors Sally Shaw and Philip Hughes both spoke at COSAC this year. Here are some more details about their talks in this conference:

Philip Hughes



Caring for Our Diminishing Biodiversity: Combining Science and Faith and the Hope that Each Offer

Audience: People who have thought about these issues before

Description: Australia has a rich, varied, and in some cases unique range of biodiversity: the fauna and flora that have evolved to occupy our continent. Our wildlife and vegetation, both known and unknown, are part of God's creation and, although we have been entrusted to care for it, our record of caring has been mostly dismal and ineffective. Scientific knowledge tells us what biodiversity is, where it exists, and how much exists. Christian faith informs us why biodiversity is worthy and important. Although there is much pessimism about the plight of our biodiversity, both science and faith offer different forms of hope for a brighter and liberated

future. The worldwide Christian biodiversity conservation organisation A Rocha combines a focus on science with an underlying biblical faith in the living creator God. A Rocha engages in practical conservation as well as education and advocacy, and is a forum for understanding the relevance of environmental issues to our Christian faith.

Keywords: biodiversity, conservation, A Rocha, creation care, science, faith, hope

About me: I have a lifelong interest in Australia's natural environment. I volunteer with BirdLife Australia and am a director of the Christian conservation organisation A Rocha Australia. I have tertiary qualifications in optometry and ornithology and a PhD researching visual conspicuity. I am a former research scientist at the Defence Science and Technology Organisation.

Sally Shaw



Caring for Creation with My Right Brain: Creative Ways to Give Hope to 21st Century Christians

Live stream with Q&A: July 8 at 7:30 pm (AEST). [Watch it here.](#)

Description: Are you puzzled as to why your church is not involved in care for God's creation? Perhaps you're not sure of the biblical reasons or necessity of this. Maybe you feel overwhelmed by the doom and gloom stories about the future of this planet and wonder what positive action you can take. I will briefly discuss how to use interactive arts-based activities to explore these issues.

Studies show that all learning should involve the brain and the body as we naturally construct knowledge through our thinking, emotions, perceptions and attitudes, usually in interaction with others. This type of social learning has the capacity to encourage curiosity, to allow critical reflection that can challenge stuck beliefs, and lead to transformative discoveries.

About me: I am a Doctor of Ministry student at Adelaide College of Divinity, implementing arts-based workshops on caring for creation. My background includes ecotheology, creative arts, ecology and community health and development. I am a director of A Rocha, a Christian conservation organisation.



Capernwray update, NSW

In 2016 A Rocha Australia commenced a biodiversity rehabilitation project in partnership with Capernwray Torchbearers Australia, a bible college located approximately 100km south-west of Sydney, NSW.

The project is located alongside the Wingecarribee River at a site significantly impacted by European settlement in the 1820s. Clearing and grazing over two centuries resulted in a few, scattered remnant trees amongst introduced hawthorns and a groundcover of exotic pasture grasses and weeds.

What remains of the original native vegetation is now classified as a critically endangered ecological community (Southern Highlands Shale Forest and Woodlands) and includes the threatened species *Eucalyptus macarthurii* (Paddy's River Box).

The overall aim of the project is to restore the threatened riparian vegetation and habitat. The initial phase commenced in 2016, as Capernwray students assisted with planting a range of indigenous *Eucalyptus* species to re-establish the original canopy cover. In June 2020, the first plantation was extended as college students and staff planted a further fifty trees.

A gradual extension of these plantations is planned to create a wildlife corridor within the Wingecarribee River riparian zone, linking the project site to the adjoining Cecil Hoskins Nature Reserve wetland.



June 2020 planting, next to trees planted in 2016.

A Rocha Australia has commenced regular surveys to monitor birds utilizing the project site as the trees establish.

At the invitation of Capernwray director, Peter Thomas, A Rocha Australia returned in August to contribute to the Winter School program by conducting bible teaching, a workshop and discussions around the themes of creation care and environmental issues.

These sessions, which have become a regular part of Capernwray's bible college program, were well-received by the students, with several indicating an interest in taking part in future A Rocha Australia activities. As is often the case, this was the first time most of the students had ever considered a Christian and biblical perspective on the natural environment.

Greg Stone
Board director – NSW

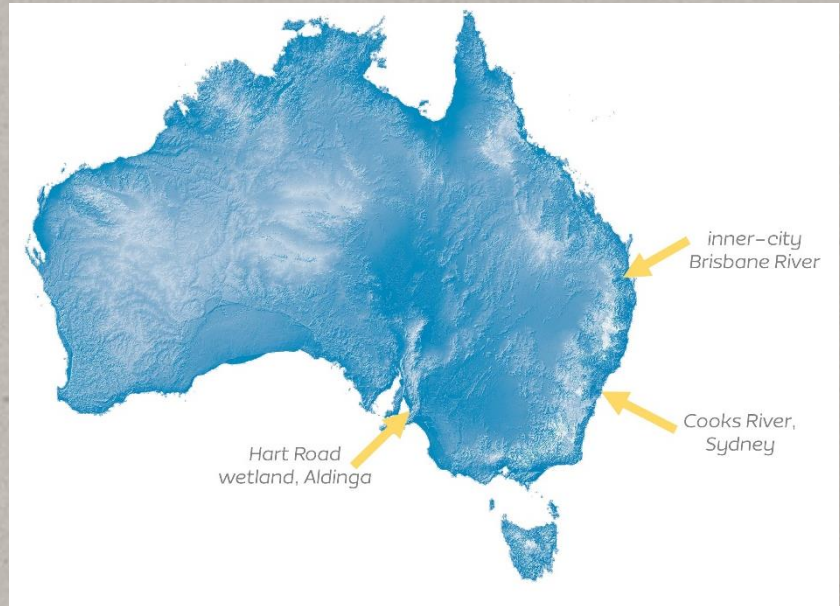
Spring event: International Coastal Cleanups



For the last few years we have joined other groups around the world in [The International Coastal Cleanup](#) during September. We are hoping to hold three official events this September if COVID-19 restrictions allow.

Head to our [website](#) to find out more and to register for one of our events.

Official A Rocha Australia events have insurance coverage.



Upcoming: A Rocha Australia is turning five!



A Rocha Australia turns 5 in December 2020 – time to celebrate!

We are turning five! We're not sure it feels like it has been that long since we became an incorporated body and an Australian charity, but we would certainly like to celebrate. We would like to *give thanks* to God for graciously guiding the formation and development of A Rocha Australia over the past five years and *celebrate* what has been achieved. Stay tuned – details will be posted on our [website](#) and in our next ENews edition in Spring.

Queensland projects update

Members of A Rocha Australia in the Toowoomba area started a second project this winter, another weeding activity. The site is Redwood Park on the eastern escarpment of the Great Dividing Range, at the edge of Toowoomba city. Once again we are working in support of and under supervision of Friends of the Escarpment Parks (FEP). A Rocha volunteers are removing cat's claw creeper *Dolichandra unguis-cati* from trees and shrubs in mixed ironbark woodland and softwood scrub (semi-evergreen vine-thicket, also known as 'dry rainforest'). This creeper grows from large tubers, climbs, smothers and eventually kills trees, opening the shaded ground layers to direct sun and drying heat.

The softwood scrub here harbours ground-feeding birds such as Black-breasted Button-quail *Turnix melanogaster* (a threatened species), and Noisy Pitta *Pitta versicolor*, which are restricted from feeding in the leaf litter when cat's claw vines have spread across the surface. Work by FEP over about ten years has freed up many hectares of scrub and woodland that had become overrun with woody weeds, but there is much still to be done, including follow-up treatment where re-infestation has occurred. A Rocha volunteers are using hand tools to cut creeper from the base and trunk of trees, a slow and tiring activity but the release of each tree from the creeper's grip is cause for rejoicing! It is a small but important act of creation care.

Meanwhile, weeding at Nielsen Park has continued through winter in the absence of social restrictions, with regular rain showers keeping the weeds lively. A locally-residing A Rocha member has added noteworthy species to the park's bird list: a pair of Barking Owls *Ninox connivens* and a Square-tailed Kite *Lophoictinia isura*, both seen also at other Toowoomba parks this winter. Lately, some small birds such as thornbills have been a little more prevalent in the park despite harassment from larger aggressive bird species that thrive in these urban parks and gardens

Roger Jaensch – Executive Officer



The three-pronged tendrils look like cat's claws, it has yellow flowers and long thin seed pods.

Photos: John Hosking NSW DPI

A eucalypt smothered by cat's claw creeper; after treatment

Cat's claw creeper is a Weed of National Significance, native in Central and South America and the West Indies but now widely naturalised around the world. Cat's claw creeper was introduced to Australia as a garden plant, and has escaped to become a major weed of native forests and riparian areas in eastern Australia.

<https://weeds.dpi.nsw.gov.au/Weeds/CatsClawCreeper>



Connecting Creation Care with Faith

During COVID-19 social isolation Merri Creek Anglican Church in Fitzroy, Melbourne, like many across Australia, has livestreamed services via Facebook. They held a "Creation Care and Faith" online service in April, and Christine Parrott was one of the parishioners interviewed. We liked her interview so much that we have modified it into this article, with her permission.

Christine works as a community nurse with homeless young people during the week and she reflects that she has had an interest in the environment most of her life, if that is what it is when you just get on with composting, recycling and trying to reuse things.

Her interest in birds flourished on a trip to Darwin, where she was able to go birdwatching with a group of women with a keen interest in birds. That formative experience has since combined with a love of painting and drawing, where Christine can also explore creation. She particularly loves parrots! This passion for art brings a lot of joy.



Some of Christine Parrotts' [cheerful creations!](#)

However, it has been much more recently, only in the last couple of years really, that she has been able to connect her environmental interests with her Christian faith in a more integrated way.

"Up until the last couple of years it had been quite separate. My environmental interests were more on a secular side of myself, if I was to divide it. My faith side was linked more with injustice towards humans, and less so the environment. I didn't really make the connection between faith and creation care or the world around me the same way. It has only been in the last couple of years I've started being made aware of that. Finding out about the organisation A Rocha which explores the integration between creation care with faith has helped this journey."

Christine also volunteers for a local not for profit environmental group called Abbotsford Riverbankers. They work on a floodplain of the Yarra River, which has suffered from erosion due to factories on-site in the past.

The group has been removing invasive plants and planting locally native groundstorey species to control some of that erosion. Christine is happy to report that a lot more birdlife is returning as the work progresses and local wildlife habitats are being restored.



Photo: supplied for church interview

Connecting Creation Care with Faith continued...

Christine recommends that members of other churches consider getting involved with a practical community group who is passionate about the local area (when we are all allowed to again!). If it is not a Christian group then that is all the more reason why it is great to be involved. Christine has found that if you have a connection between creation care and Christian faith, being involved in a local care group can offer great opportunities to share about a faith-based motivation, and can really open doors to deeper conversations. She sees it as a small part we can play that is very practical.



Christine at the Abbotsford Riverbankers' site
Photo: supplied for church interview

As a new venture Christine has just opened an [online store](#) to showcase and sell some of her artwork.

Recommended short reads during COVID-19

Here are some short but great reads we recommend and hope will inspire you during this challenging time:

[Ten steps to start Kingdom Gardening:](#)



So you want to combine your passion for faith, the environment and mission? We've got some ideas to get you started!



[INTERSERVE.ORG.AU](https://www.interserve.org.au)

Ten steps to start Kingdom Gardening - Interserve Australia

[Learn More](#)



20th March 2020 | [Dave Bookless](#) | [What virus are you spreading?](#)

7th April 2020 | [Jo Swinney](#) | [Coronavirus, creation and an opportunity for change](#)

2nd June 2020 | [Dave Bookless](#) | [Please Build Back Better!](#)

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Send feedback and suggested events or articles for the Spring ENews by 6 Nov to australia.comms@arocha.org

