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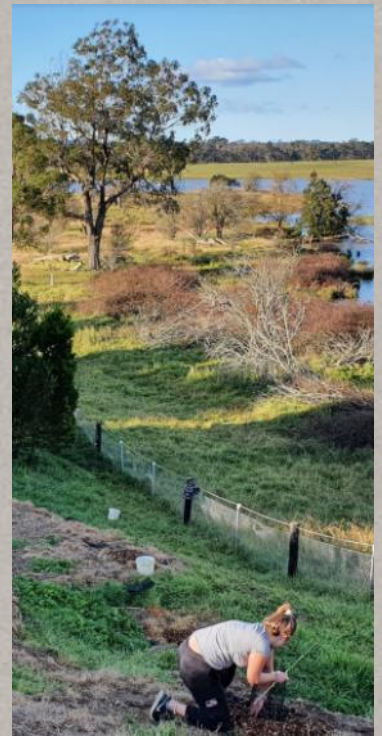
A Rocha Australia ENEWS

Spring, 2021

We are a Christian organisation engaging communities in nature conservation

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Planting at Capernwray

Chair's report

Welcome to the spring 2021 issue of A Rocha Australia's ENews. As you can see from this issue, A Rocha Australia has been busy! In this, our biggest issue ever, you can read about The Big Chat webinar, return of the Whipbird, our great appreciation of our donors, a beautiful new book, a church community garden and more.

On behalf of the board I express my deep and sincere thanks for your support, donations and prayers during this very challenging year. Covid continues to require A Rocha Australia to do things differently – such as by starting The Big Chat – as travel continues to be disrupted. As the weather in the southeast of the continent flips to a strong La Nina pattern with above average rainfall, we are also reminded what a difference two years makes since the terrible droughts and bushfires.

It is with sadness that we say goodbye to Roger Jaensch who has informed the board that he is stepping down from the role of Executive Officer in late December. Roger has served very diligently and capably in the role for two-and-a-half years. Prior to that, he was inaugural President of A Rocha Australia from its establishment in...

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...October 2015 through till June 2019. Roger led the organisation in establishing partnerships with Tahlee Ministries, Capernwray Torchbearers Australia, Cassinia Environmental and the City of Onkaparinga. He also led A Rocha Australia's work to be a member of the Friends of the Escarpment Parks in Toowoomba, with a focus upon removing smothering weeds that helps restore dry rainforest and is allowing threatened birds and other wildlife to return. He has provided superior administration and compliance support to the board, and in our engagement with and reporting to A Rocha International. He has led implementation of a range of our strategic actions, and ensured we have well established processes and systems in place.

Roger advises he will still be involved in bush regeneration work through Friends of the Escarpment Parks in Toowoomba. On behalf of the board and members Roger, thank you and God bless for the next stage.

Looking ahead into 2022, the board will also soon progress to recruit a new executive officer, so do keep an eye out on our website and in your email in-tray for the advertisement and job description.

Have you considered serving on the board of A Rocha? We will soon seek expressions of interest from members who are interested in becoming a director of A Rocha Australia. We are looking for passionate people who want to support the organisation's mission in Creation care. To ensure good governance and a diverse skills base, we are hoping to attract people with experience and networks in financial management, fundraising, governance, the law, administration, theology or conservation. Please do reach out if you would like to know more, or have a chat about this.

Keep an eye out for our Annual General Meeting, which will be held in March. It's a good time to hear what A Rocha Australia has been doing, and to submit nominations for becoming a director.



Looking abroad, we contributed to production of a global A Rocha position statement on nature-based solutions to climate change for politicians and negotiators to – hopefully – guide their thinking at the COP26 Climate Summit in Glasgow. It was heartening to see the Glasgow Leader's Declaration on Forests and Land Use released during the summit. And it was very heartening to see the role of nature in mitigating global heating was explicitly included in the text of the Glasgow

Climate Pact: "Emphasizes the importance of protecting, conserving and restoring nature and ecosystems to achieve the Paris Agreement temperature goal, including through forests and other terrestrial and marine ecosystems acting as sinks and reservoirs of greenhouse gases and by protecting biodiversity, while ensuring social and environmental safeguards" (see para 38).

Finally, the board will soon receive a brief on how to consider purchasing or leasing land for conservation and restoration, perhaps including establishing a field studies centre and A Rocha community. Thanks to Andrew Bennett, Rob Scriven and Roger for working so diligently on the brief. We have some seed funding thanks to a wonderful donor, and have had had encouraging discussions with a one of our...

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...partner organisations regarding a collaboration on their land, and are considering other opportunities as well. It is an exciting space! If you would like to discuss donating funds or land, or entering into a leasing arrangement, please do get in contact.

I hope you find time to celebrate the birth of Jesus this Christmas, marvel at what the Lord has given us to steward, give thanks for the past year, and find yourself in Creation over the next few months.

I hope you enjoy this issue of ENews.

Dr Stuart Blanch
President (Chair, board of directors)



A Rocha Australia inaugural member webinar



A Rocha Australia has reached 100 members, and we are now looking to host webinars for members around Australia on Zoom every three months. We intend these to be a great space to share and be encouraged, hear A Rocha project updates and plan future activities.

The very first member webinar was held on 18 November (see photo above), and the next one is being planned for mid February 2022. Would you like to join us? Please consider becoming a member. There is a one-off joining fee and the application form is available [here](#).

A Rocha Australia benefits in gaining more members, for example demonstrating that our organisation has a widespread and growing member base when applying for grants, building a deeper pool of expertise and experience; and involving more participants in the growing range of activities that A Rocha Australia supports.

Whipbird and friends return to Nielsen Park, QLD

As described previously, Toowoomba members of A Rocha have been conducting vegetation management at Nielsen Park in Toowoomba, Queensland. By volunteering alongside Friends of the Escarpment Parks, over nearly two years A Rocha Australia has contributed to removal of weeds, which has encouraged regrowth of indigenous shrub species. Concurrently, the assemblage of bird species in the park's blackbutt eucalypt forest has been documented in the hope of revealing any improvement in bird biodiversity.



Photo: Rob Brodribb

The Eastern Whipbird *Psophodes olivaceus* is a generally secretive inhabitant of dense vegetation in the ground and lowest shrub layers of forest in Australia's south-east. After a prolonged absence from Nielsen Park, a whipbird was seen there by the A Rocha Australia survey team in January this year. Not many weeks later, a male whipbird began calling and eventually a second bird was confirmed present. The pair frequented thickets of coffee bush, sweet pittosporum and prickly beard-heath as well as a patch of weedy lantana that had been temporarily retained to provide cover for small bush birds until other shrubs regenerated.

The whipbird pair was seen carrying nest material in August 2021. Great excitement gripped the bird survey team in mid-September when an adult whipbird was spied sitting on a nest in a head-high shrub that was mostly concealed by old man's beard, an indigenous creeper. Taking care not to disturb the nesting, no further visit was made until October by which time the nest was empty—the fate of the breeding effort is unknown but success nevertheless is a possibility.

Regardless of the nesting attempt's outcome, these observations caused the A Rocha Australia team to ponder whether re-occurrence of whipbirds and their nesting activity are useful indicators that the shrubland habitat in Nielsen Park has improved.



nesting site of whipbird in Nielsen Park: a shrub, 2m high, covered in *Clematis* and vines

Probably, the complicating factors—such as return of higher rainfall—rule out any firm conclusions, as so often is the challenge for understanding our mobile wildlife. Nevertheless, it is highly encouraging that a small bush-bird of the low strata presently inhabits Nielsen Park despite it being surrounded by housing and walked daily by local people.

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Old man's beard (a native *Clematis*)



The whipbird nest is about the size of a cupped adult person's hand

There is also some evidence that White-browed Scrubwrens and Brown Thornbills, two smaller denizens of shrub cover, also were absent from the park for some time. Both have been back in the bushes of Nielsen Park this year. **STOP PRESS:** further excitement only a few days ago, as the first Rufous Fantail in A Rocha Australia's two-year bird survey was discovered in Nielsen Park's shrub thickets.

Encouraging news like this from A Rocha Australia projects points to the hope we have in God the Creator and His ongoing care for Creation, to which we strive to contribute.

Roger Jaensch, Executive Officer

Sharing about A Rocha, S.A.

We've been prevented this year from going to many large events, but we look for opportunities where we can! Here is a write-up from a recent South Australian forum:

Season of Creation forum

Earth as God's Home for All – Hospitality and Habitat was the theme of a forum held during the Season of Creation at St Mary's Hall at Glenelg parish on September 7.

Fr Michael Trainor spoke about the "problems" including the credibility of religion in a non-religious/secular world, the disposition of some Christians to believe they have the fullness of truth and the belief of some that global warming and climate change is God's judgement on the world.

He also referred to the literal interpretation of Scripture and the focus on 'human salvation' as impediments to addressing ecological issues.

Henrietta Wighton from the Vinnies Refugee and Migrant Service spoke about the 150 Days of Action Campaign for refugees and asylum seekers. She said there was an increasing number of people fleeing their homes because of climate change.

Sally Shaw, national director (SA) of A Rocha Christian Conservation, gave a presentation on Restoring Habitat which featured the group's conservation projects around the world including the Aldinga Hart Road Wetland in southern Adelaide.



SPEAKING OUT: Sally Shaw, A Rocha Christian Conservation, Henrietta Wighton, Vinnies' 150 Days of Action Campaign, and Fr Michael Trainor, at the forum.

A Rocha is a Christian nature conservation organisation, the name coming from the Portuguese for 'the Rock', as the first initiative was a field study centre in Portugal. 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.

The final speaker at the forum was Glenelg parishioner Ron Knolder who talked about developing an active parish social justice group.

Caring for Creation workshop, S.A.

Exploring God's invitation to care for His Creation



This workshop is for you if you're keen to explore what the Scriptures say about caring for God's world.

When: Saturday, October 30th, 2021

Time: 9.30-5pm

Who: Christians, aged between 20-50 years

What: A mixture of experiential and creative activities (indoor and outdoor) with biblical reflection. Lunch, refreshments & a travel allowance (\$35) provided.

Where: Scots Uniting Church Hall, North Terrace, Adelaide

If you're interested, please email Sally Shaw sallyshaw@gmail.com or phone 0418154195
This project is part of my Doctor of Ministry research

On Saturday 30 October 2021 I ran a very successful workshop which aimed to assist evangelical Christians connect their faith with care for Creation.

The workshop involved 12 participants from a variety of denominations, with ages ranging from 24 years to 65 years, two men and ten women (with one woman from Peru, another from Iran, and South Africa). Prior to the workshop each person completed an online survey questionnaire.

The key workshop activities included:

- A reflective walk from Rundle Mall to the Adelaide Botanical Gardens. The aim was to encourage the participants to reflect on how care for Creation differs in the two environments. There was then a time of reflection for drawing, writing poetry and sharing in the gardens.

- We listened to and then discussed an Indigenous Christian talking about their understanding of the land.
- While eating delicious organic food we watched a video from Regent College, Canada on *Food, Community and Communion*.
- We watched and then discussed a series of videos from theologians in the global south and north talking about the biblical reasons for care for Creation.
- We watched and reflected on climate change and its impact on the developing world and Australia. This included reflecting on some 16th and 18th century paintings and a poem by Mary Oliver.
- At the end of the workshop each participant was asked to draw a picture of the features/activities of the workshop that had most influenced them. They could include activities they plan to do in the following months. Since the workshop I have conducted a rich-picture interview with each participant so they could tell me about their picture as well as share any personal stories that related to the workshop. These interviews have given me some exciting results. They will then be coded to enable me to discover which features of the workshop were most transformative.
- Each person also completed a post-survey questionnaire which included questions on positive and negative aspects of the workshop. These results will assist me as I consider any revision required for the next workshop in March 2022.
- I have already received requests via word and mouth from a variety of people to attend one of the 2022 workshops.

Sally Shaw, Director – S.A.

Weeding out the invasives in Glenaroua, VIC

During November and December, Victorian members of A Rocha Australia participated in some weed removal at Cassinia Environmental's Glenaroua property near Broadford about an hour and a half north of Melbourne.



Our task was to dig out the South African Weed Orchid (*Disa bracteata*), a highly invasive species that produces a huge number of seeds and compromises the growth of native plants such as lillies and other orchids.

Cool but sunny weather made for ideal conditions so we spread out across a sloping field and soon were meeting our 'quotas'!

It was hard work but an enjoyable day knowing that we were contributing to the rejuvenation of this piece of land.

Greg Gorfine (Victorian member of A Rocha Australia)



Purchased by Cassinia Environmental "as the largest remnant forest patch in the region, Glenaroua is a mixture of Box-Ironbark forest and a derived native grassland. Still maintaining a good mix of native species, but degraded by significant erosion, the projects we are implementing on the site are bringing together a range of strategies for revegetation, habitat protection, and land rehabilitation. The vision for the project is to entirely rehabilitate the site to include substantial habitat for the critically endangered Golden Sun Moth while protecting the native forest, and restoring the eroded waterways."

Listening for Bitterns, VIC



Australasian Bittern
(credit Helen Cunningham)

The Australasian Bittern *Botaurus poiciloptilus* is an elusive, partially nocturnal, and cryptic waterbird that is more often heard than seen. For this reason, acoustic monitors are often used to determine whether bitterns inhabit a particular region. Male bitterns call with a deep booming call at dusk and early morning during the breeding season between September and January. Because much of its natural wetland habitat has been drained or degraded and its population is decreasing, its national conservation status is listed as Endangered.

A Rocha Australia recently facilitated the deployment of an acoustic recorder in a wetland located in a conservation property operated by Cassinia Environmental. Cassinia works in landscape restoration and biodiversity protection and is a

major supporter of A Rocha Australia under a formal MoU agreement. The property, near Portland in South-West Victoria is in an area that remains an important refuge for bitterns. The local Glenelg Hopkins Catchment Management Authority, National Landcare Program, and Birdlife Australia manage a program committed to working with landholders to preserve remaining habitat suitable for bitterns.



View across the wetland from the acoustic logger

In early November an Audio Moth acoustic logger was placed in the wetland to help determine whether bitterns are present. The wetland is classified as Ecological Vegetation Class 681: Deep Freshwater Marsh and is isolated within a remnant messmate forest and comprises many native wetland plants including *Baumea*, *Eleocharis*, *Juncus*, *Myriophyllum*, and *Triglochin* species and therefore appears an ideal habitat.

Several other acoustic recorders have been deployed in Victoria, and many hours of audio is available from the recorders. But with so much audio data and so many potential species of other birds and even frogs to identify, the task ahead is monumental, and BirdLife Australia is calling for more volunteers to help decode the wetland recordings. And no trudging through the swamps is required—this is monitoring in the comfort of your own home using your own computer. If you are interested in helping with this task please contact Bradley at bradley.clarke-wood@birdlife.org.au

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The Glenelg–Hopkins soundscape project is supported by Glenelg Hopkins CMA through funding from the Australian Government's National Landcare Program.

Philip Hughes, director – VIC



A Rocha director Philip Hughes and Bradley Clarke-Wood (Wetland Bird Program Coordinator at BirdLife Australia) installing an Audio Moth acoustic recorder



Thank you to our donors

Over the last six years A Rocha Australia has grown in many ways: the number of financial members has reached 100, formal MoUs have been signed with like-minded organisations, larger numbers of people have joined state-based networks to encourage each other in creation care, plant trees, and remove weeds.

But, as treasurer, I am also thankful to God and to all our financial donors for growth in A Rocha Australia finances that enable many of these activities to occur. From our first bank statement that showed we had a \$0.00 balance, our financial balance is now at a level where we need accounting software to manage all the ins and outs.

Our donors come from many different parts of Australia. There are also donors from overseas and this reflects the international aspect to the worldwide family of A Rocha organisations. A Rocha Australia directors don't necessarily know everyone who provides financial support because of privacy laws and unless the donors specifically identify themselves. Some donors use the web-based form on the A Rocha International website and others give directly to A Rocha Australia's bank...

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...account. Some donors give regularly while others prefer to give one-off amounts. Some donors have given substantial amounts and continue to do so! Other donors come and go as their circumstances change. We also have a small income from the one-off membership fee charged to become a member of A Rocha Australia. We have also received government grants. Regardless of whether you are known to us or not, the directors would like to sincerely thank you for every financial gift and the blessing it comes with.

What do we do with the money? Most significantly, a substantial donation from the John Rymer Bequest permitted A Rocha Australia to employ a part-time executive officer in 2019. Another substantial donation has resulted in the board investigating whether A Rocha Australia should be responsible in some way for managing land for conservation. As the directors have quickly learnt, just keeping an organization alive requires money. For example, volunteer insurance, accountancy fees, software for managing our financial accounts and document archives, and the payroll implications that come with being an employer are some of the recurrent costs to our organisation. We have also distributed some of our income to enable other organisations to undertake conservation work or provide interpretive signs, and our state-based networks have acquired a wide range of conservation materials including camera traps, herbicides, and tube stock.

What are the directors' plans for managing A Rocha Australia's finances in the future? Our strategic plan is replete with options for engaging the Australian church in Creation care, for increasing the activities and projects we undertake for biodiversity conservation, and overall responding to God's call in being stewards of the wonderful biodiversity in God's creation here in Australia. Although money is a helpful component of the work of A Rocha, the directors are most thankful for the prayerful commitment, skills, and enthusiasm of the people associated with A Rocha Australia.

Recently, acting on a query raised by an A Rocha Australia member, the board has considered the options of different banks and changed its banker. So let me end with a rather prosaic piece of information: our new bank account for those who donate this way is:

A Rocha Australia Inc. BSB 313140 Account 12356990.



*Philip Hughes,
Treasurer*

Community garden a part of church's Creation care, NSW

During Covid shutdowns A Rocha Australia has been encouraging churches to implement Creation care projects on their church grounds and in their buildings. We would love to hear from you about what projects or activities you have tried.



At Charlestown Presbyterian Church, on Awabakal lands near Newcastle in New South Wales, we have started installing a community garden as part of expanding our Creation care initiatives and discussing establishing a Creation care group as part of our gospel ministry.

The project is being undertaken thanks to a water conservation grant of \$4351 from Hunter Water Corporation, a lot of hard work from around 20 members of the congregation, strong encouragement from the Senior Pastor Stephen Taylor and our committee of management, plus a growing interest in having Creation care across our church.

So how did we get to installing a community garden, a fairly unorthodox activity for a Presbyterian church?!

The first step was just talking amongst the congregation over several years what it means to live out the biblical commands to show God's love to all Creation, and how it relates to our discipleship in Jesus Christ. Blank stares and some hard discussions became, over time, recognition that the bible clearly teaches that God cares about how we treat His world, including when we are at church.

I was very encouraged at people's willingness to try new approaches and question the accepted ways of doing – or not doing – things.

Step 1 was establishing a recycling scheme. Easy and practical. Compliance with the "bin rules" is slowly growing, and contamination is reducing. And when I came to be distinguished from another guy at my church, with whom I shared the same first name, by being called "bin Stu" I figured people were listening.

We then started buying 100% FSC-certified recycled copy paper for the printer, which was pretty simple if a little more costly.

Then came switching our energy provider which sold us coal and gas-fired power to instead buying electricity from an energy utility that only sells carbon-free electricity. This was a challenging idea for some as we live near one of the world's largest coal export ports, and coal ships dot the horizon every day. We eventually did it, it didn't increase our power bills, the lights stayed on, and our greenhouse gas emissions have reduced a lot.

We then rewired our old electrical board, which was necessary to install air conditioning and allow for future export of surplus solar power to the grid, on our old thermally inefficient church buildings which are increasingly unbearably hot in spring and summer as global heating impacts worsen. We have twice unsuccessfully sought government grants to install a 13 kW solar array. So we are now also including solar in plans being considered.

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Our church's focus this November was Creation care, thanks to the Senior Pastor. This has been fantastic. It has involved showing a video by Lausanne on the biblical foundations for Creation care during church services, praying for God's creation, many informal discussions, and a couple short Q&A sessions during worship services about why the church is installing the community garden.

On two Saturdays in November – the first being extremely windy and quite hot, the second being very windy with a lot of rain! – we dug up grass on unused lawn, removed hibiscus shrubs and excavated soil to pour concrete to form a foundation for a 2000 litre water tank.

We covered the 60 square metre site of the wildflower garden with old newspapers and then spread bark chips to conserve soil moisture and deter weeds. On a very rainy morning we planted 113 native Australian plants, plus five citrus trees and a couple of passionfruit vines nearby.



Many people walking along the busy footpath stopped to ask what we were doing, and this allowed us to talk about why God cares for His Creation.

Over the next few months we will also build a raised vegetable garden bed (also right next to the footpath), install the water tank and build a couple bench seats for people to sit next to the community garden. Our goal is for a small group of church members to tend the community garden, and invite people from our neighbourhood to also be involved, share in harvesting the food and hearing why our church is involved in Creation care.

Also, there have been some discussions about undertaking the A Rocha Eco-church audit, as it is trialed in Australia.

After 5 years, I admit that I found it a bit daunting at times raising Creation care in our church, and proposing initiatives. So, I am very thankful to know the community garden is taking shape thanks to the support and engagement offered by our church. We'd love to hear from you about Creation care in your church.

Stuart Blanch, President

New book and exhibition by artist Fiona Pfenningwerth

What does the natural beauty of Australia have to do with Christian hope?



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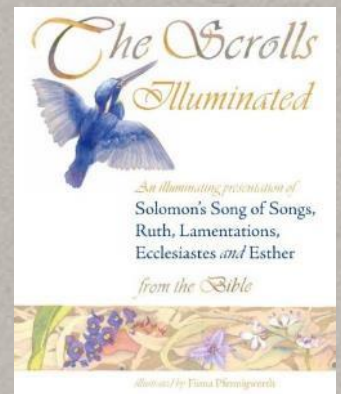
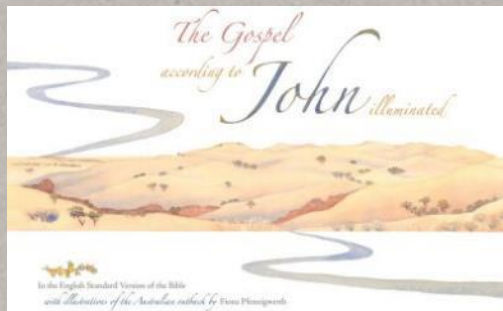
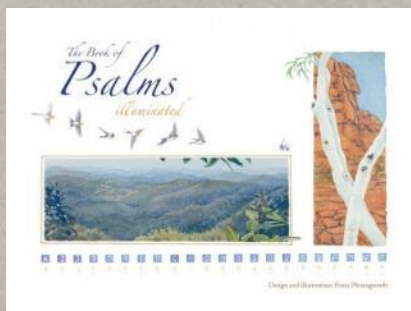
Fiona is an A Rocha Australia member and kindly supplied the watercolour header for our ENews editions. Here is a bit about her from her website <https://fionapfennigwerth.info/>

"I am an Australian artist, based in Newcastle, whose work expresses my love for the natural world and my Christian faith. I love exploring the Australian bush and national parks; and I love depicting them naturalistically in watercolour. I love studying the Scriptures and responding to them visually.

Combining these loves with skills in layout and theological exploration has filled a large part of the last two decades, and flowed out into the production of my three illuminated books, which I self-published on the advice of Eugene Peterson.

Books

These works aim to present Bible books invitingly and clearly for meditative study. In these, the text of the English Standard Version of the Bible is set out in a readable way that is sympathetic to the original authors' voices; and accompanied by naturalistic illustrations of the Australian bush, which suggest their individual timbre and themes. Now available are all three of my volumes combining Bible books and my illustrations, produced in the last ten years: "



Fiona's work is being exhibited at the Australian National Botanic Gardens in early 2022:

EXHIBITION

Illustrating five Australian regions and their flora and fauna: illuminating the Book of Psalms

26 Jan – 20 Feb

An exhibition of naturalistic watercolour works depicting the regions of Tasmania, The Kimberley WA, Gariwerd (The Grampians) Vic, The Red Centre NT and The Hunter, NSW, and their flora and fauna.

These works are a selection of illustrations reproduced in the artist's recently self-published book, *The Book of Psalms Illuminated*.

Visitor Centre open daily from 9.30am – 4.30pm

Australian National Botanic Gardens

Fiona Pfenningwerth Artist is also on [Facebook](#).

Hope and Conservation reflection

NSW director Greg Stone gave this reflection at the recent member webinar, and Board retreat:



Introduction

You are no doubt familiar with A Rocha International's motto 'conservation and hope'. We invest considerable time in discussing, planning and acting in the 'conservation' realm. However, it is worthwhile to consider how 'hope' underlies and directs why and how we work in conservation – why we do it, what we do, how we do it and what outcome we might expect.

The meaning of hope

We begin by defining our terms. What is 'hope'? The meaning of the word as it is most commonly used in the bible is 'a confident expectation of an unseen future based on an assurance given by God'. Hope overlaps with faith¹ and may be described as 'future-oriented faith'². It is not wishful thinking about what may or may not happen in the future, but rather a considered view derived from the promises of God revealed in the bible². On the subject hope, we will briefly look at the basis of our hope, the focus of our hope, some implications of hope, and finally our rest in hope.

The basis of our hope

What is the basis of our hope? Paul wrote of the 'hope held out in the gospel'³ and explained that we heard about our hope 'in the true message of the gospel'⁴. As Christians, the basis of our hope is the gospel. The foundation of our confident expectation is the 'good news'.

Why is the gospel the basis of our hope? What is it about the 'good news' that provides us with a confident expectation? We will consider the *nature*, the *content* and the *context* of the gospel because these are crucial to understanding our hope.

Firstly, the *nature* of the gospel. Jesus, his apostles and the inspired writers of the New Testament all referred to the gospel as a propositional message or a word *from* God to be preached, proclaimed, taught and heard⁵.

Secondly, the *content* of the gospel. The bible reveals that 'the gospel is the revelation of what God the Father has done, is now doing, and will do for his people and his creation through Jesus Christ and by the Holy Spirit'⁶.

Thirdly, the *context* into which the gospel is given by God. It is 'good news' because it is a message of what God – acting in accordance with his love, grace and mercy – has done, is now doing, and will do for rebellious and corrupted people living in a fallen world and cursed creation⁷.

What is the significance of the *nature*, the *content* and the *context* of the gospel for our hope?

Firstly, because the gospel is a propositional message or a word *from* God, it comes with the full authority of God. As a revelation from God himself, the good news is reliable, trustworthy and dependable and therefore is the reason for our confident expectation and is the basis for our hope.

Secondly, because the gospel is God's revelation of what *he* has done, is now doing, and will do for his people and his creation, it comes with the assurance that he can and will fulfil all his plans and purposes. We can have hope in the good news because it has been given to us by the God 'who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will'⁸. We can...

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...confidently expect that God has and will exercise his sovereign will and omnipotent power to fulfill all that he has promised for his people and his creation.

The focus of our hope

The primary subject of the gospel, and therefore the focus of our hope, is Jesus Christ. Paul commonly refers to the good news as 'the gospel of Christ' ⁹ and he writes of the 'gospel, the message I proclaim about Jesus Christ.' ¹⁰

Why is Jesus the focus of our hope? The gospel reveals that God the Father determined that his eternal plans and purposes for his people and his creation would all be fulfilled in, by and through Jesus Christ, the Son. ¹¹

The good news is that Jesus, the eternal Son of God, came into this fallen world to 'save his people from their sins' ¹². By way of his perfect life, sacrificial death and glorious resurrection, Jesus secured the justification and adoption of all who would repent and believe. Jesus' atoning death on the cross revealed both God's holiness, righteousness and justice, and his love, mercy and grace to rebellious, sinful, condemned, weak and helpless people – such as we are. ¹³

Jesus is also the focus of our hope for the earth. Not only was he the agent of creation ¹⁴, but Jesus also continues to uphold and sustain it ¹⁵. Although it is now frustrated and in bondage to decay ¹⁶ through Jesus the creation will in future be liberated from the effects of the curse ¹⁷, reconciled to God ¹⁸ and renewed ¹⁹.

This is why the apostles referred to 'Christ Jesus our hope' ²⁰ and often spoke of 'hope in Christ' ²¹. Paul clearly stated without Christ, people are 'without hope and without God in the world.' ²². For those without hope of salvation in Christ, there can be no hope of enjoying a renewed creation.

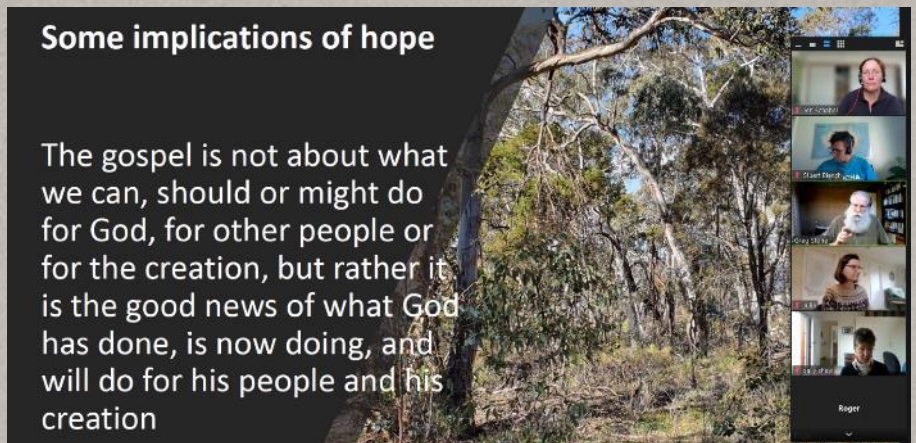
Some implications of hope

Now, you may well ask, what does our understanding of the gospel have to do with hope and our caring for the earth? As crucial as it is to know what the gospel is, so it is important to understand what it is *not*. The gospel is not about what we can, should or might do for God, for other people or for the creation, but rather it is the good news of what God has done, is now doing, and will do for his people and his creation. Conservation work we undertake is not integral to the gospel, rather it is our response to the gospel. ²³ The good news provides us with an assurance that in Christ God will fulfill all his plans and purposes for the earth – for its final liberation and renewal. Our work towards conservation is the appropriate response to this. We care for the earth with thanksgiving, in obedience, in faith, and with dependence upon God's common grace. We work in the knowledge that whatever we do in conservation – no matter how minor – has significance because it is a reflection of God's divine plans and purposes. Most importantly, we work with hope in Christ.

If the future of the earth was in some way dependent upon what we could achieve in creation care, then what hope would we have? Although saved by grace, we are presently fallen people living in a fallen world. Our plans and projects so often fail because...

Some implications of hope

The gospel is not about what we can, should or might do for God, for other people or for the creation, but rather it is the good news of what God has done, is now doing, and will do for his people and his creation



Hope and Conservation reflection continued...

...of lack of knowledge and wisdom, because we do not have the power or ability to implement them, or because of the continuing impacts of the curse. Thankfully, our hope is in Christ and not in ourselves.

Our rest in hope

The present rate of biodiversity decline may be slowed, or we may enter a period of mass extinction. The current rate of climate change may be slowed or even reversed, or the upward trajectory may continue. International governments and people may take action to restore and rehabilitate the earth, or environmental degradation may go from bad to worse. It may be that the work of A Rocha Australia grows and flourishes, or it is possible that we contract or even cease to exist. In any case our hope, our confident expectation for our future and the future of creation remains unchanged. The gospel is the word *from* God in which he reveals what he has done, is now doing, and will do for his people and his creation through Jesus Christ.

The current environmental crisis can lead us to despair, anger, frustration, depression, or disillusionment. On the other hand, it can also stir up within us a desire to act; to plant more trees, collect more nudrles, advocate more passionately, educate more churches, conserve more habitats and so on. In either case, Jesus alone is our hope. Through him, by him and for him, God will fulfill all his plans and purposes for his people and his creation. In Christ, we can simultaneously work *and* rest in hope.²⁴

Greg Stone, director – NSW

Rainbow over
the Toowoomba
escarpment



References

1. Hebrews 11:1, Romans 4:18, Romans 8:24–25
 2. Romans 10:17
 3. Colossians 1:23
 4. Colossians 1:5
 5. Mark 13:10, Acts 8:25, Romans 10:13–15, Romans 16:25, 1 Corinthians 9:16, Ephesians 1:13, Colossians 1:5, 2 Timothy 1:11
 6. Examples may be found in the preaching of the apostles and others e.g. Acts 2:14–40, Acts 3:12–26, Acts 7:2–56, Acts 13:16–47, 17:22–31 etc.
 7. Romans 5:8, Ephesians 2:3–5
 8. Ephesians 1:11
 9. Romans 15:19, 1 Corinthians 9:12, 2 Corinthians 2:12, 9:13, 10:14, Galatians 1:7, Philippians 1:27
 10. Romans 16:25
 11. Colossians 1:15–20
 12. Matthew 1:21
 13. Romans 3:23–25, John 1:29
 14. Hebrews 1:2, Colossians 1:16, John 1:3
 15. Colossians 1:17, Hebrews 1:3
 16. Romans 8:20–21
 17. Romans 8:21
 18. Colossians 1:19–20
 19. Revelation 21:5
 20. 1 Timothy 1:1
 21. 1 Corinthians 15:9, Ephesians 1:12, 1 Thessalonians 1:3
 22. Ephesians 2:12
 23. Ephesians 4:1, 5:2, Philippians 1:27, 1 Thessalonians 2:12
 24. Matthew 11:28
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