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AUSTRALIA  
**A ROCHA**  
Conservation and Hope

**ENews**

Summer, 2023

We are a Christian organisation engaging communities in nature conservation

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### Chair's report...

Welcome to the Summer 2022/23 issue of A Rocha Australia's ENews.

I do love reading and hearing about Creation care initiatives in local churches. If you do too, then you will love this issue. There are examples of different churches trying different things, including community gardens, preaching and teaching from the Bible, nature walks, planting trees, going bush, learning about EVs and installing solar panels.

You will also read about the systematic bird surveys that have now been undertaken over the past three years in Council-managed

parks in South Australia and Queensland. A big thanks goes to the committed group of A Rocha volunteers and supporters who have been collaborating respectively with Onkaparinga City Council and the Friends of Escarpment Parks, Toowoomba.

The bird surveys reveal just how important those areas are, and a reminder to 'look at the birds of the air' as Jesus said to his disciples in Matthew 6:26. In doing so we can also be reminded just how much God values us.



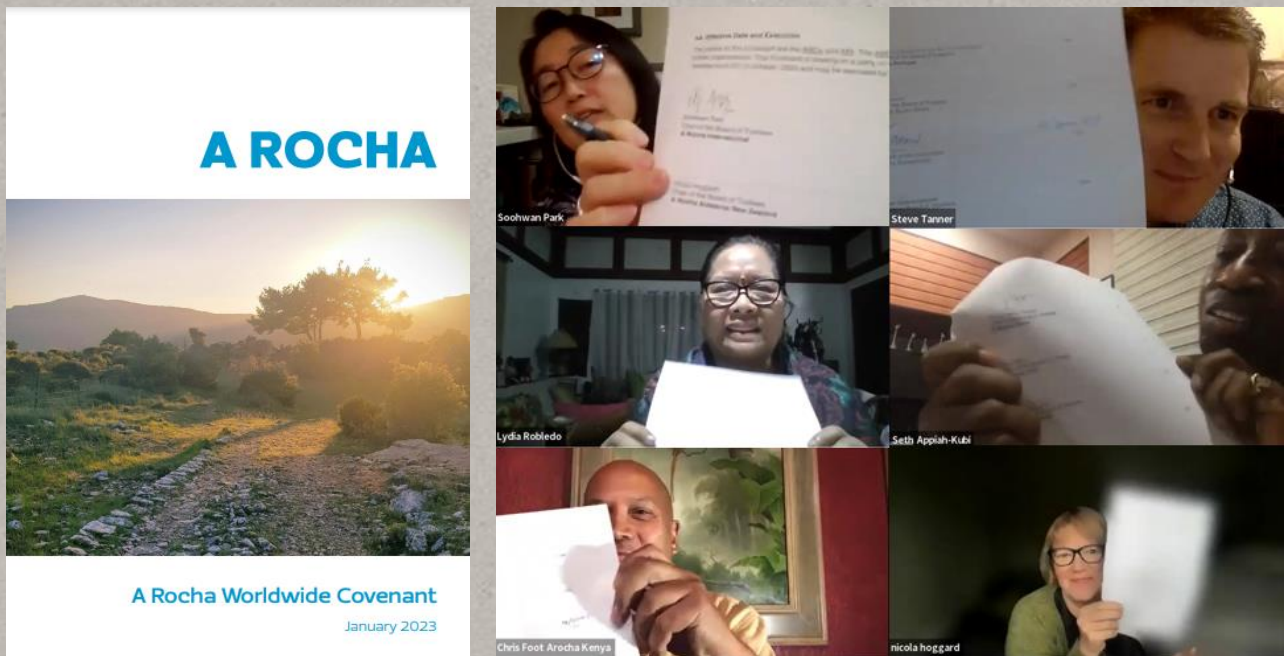
NSW Christmas Bush (*Ceratopetalum gummiiferum*)  
flowering in Sydney's northern suburbs over Summer



# Chair's report continued...

You are invited to join us on the evening of Thursday 30 March, from 7:30 pm AEDT, for our Annual General Meeting. You can learn about what we did in 2022, hear about plans for 2023, and learn about opportunities for new directors to join the Board. Come along and ask questions, and meet others interested in Creation care. Whether you are a member, or a supporter just wishing to join as an observer, I hope to see you on the Zoom call.

I'm thankful to report that all A Rocha Organisations in the global family have agreed to the A Rocha Worldwide Covenant, which was signed in January, following an agreement last June at the A Rocha Forum in France. It will guide our work in Australia for, likely, the rest of this decade and perhaps beyond. As a result, I'm now involved in discussing and drafting a new Strategic Direction, as well as a global A Rocha Climate Programme, in response to the Covenant.



Some of the A Rocha Worldwide Covenant signatories via Zoom in January

Another key outcome from the Forum was to agree a new A Rocha commitment on Creation Care, which can be read and downloaded [here](#). This rigorously consulted and negotiated document, alongside the amended 5 Commitments and Nicene Creed, provides the key statements that will guide and maintain A Rocha's identity globally. The Statement of Faith is recognised as a foundational document.

I hope you enjoy this issue of the ENews.

*"Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?". (Matthew 6:26)*

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



Stuart with Julia Jardine and Philip Hughes



# Three years of bird surveys at Hart Road Wetlands – Aldinga Beach, SA

Hart Road Wetlands is a system of artificial wetlands to treat urban stormwater, managed by the City of Onkaparinga (in the traditional lands of the Kaurna people). Habitats include open water and beds of cumbungi *Typha sp.*, reed *Phragmites australis*, sedges (e.g. *Juncus sp.*), swards of nardoo *Marsilea sp.*, tussocks of cutting grass *Gahnia filum* and clumps of lignum *Duma florulenta*. There are also a few old gum trees and dead trunks. Mixed woodland including mallee species and mowed grassland are on the dry land.

A Rocha Australia is building an interesting cumulative picture of birds here over three years of surveys since 2020, with seasonal surveys of six plots, of irregular shape but designed to include distinct wetland and/or woodland units. The '2.0 ha, 20 minute' method of BirdLife Australia has been used.

In 2022, 327 bird records were made, with a cumulative total of 1420 records over three years.

In 2022, 50 bird species were recorded, with a cumulative total of 79 species over three years.

29 waterbirds species have been recorded, although high water levels and little exposed mud from 2020-22 is likely impacting some species including Latham's Snipe and Red-kneed Dotterel.



Species of ornithological interest due to being unusual in this habitat, or secretive behaviour (not commonly detected) include Peregrine Falcon, Lewin's Rai, Baillon's Crake, Spotless Crake and Crescent Honeyeater.

While further surveys are required to conduct robust analysis, some indications of preference are beginning to emerge:

- 35 species were recorded across survey sites, being common in the landscape, including Elegant Parrot, Mistletoebird and Common Bronzewing.
- 29 species have narrower habitat preferences, for example the small rails and crakes (four species recorded to date), have been found only in one or two sites with larger and broader reed/bulrush beds.
- Some species are only found close to the extensive woodland of the Aldinga Scrub, namely Brush Bronzewing, Dusky Woodswallow, Peaceful Dove, Red-browed Finch, Sacred Kingfisher, Spotted Pardalote and White-browed Scrubwren.



Elegant Parrot, *Neophema elegans*

A Rocha Australia hopes this emerging picture of bird usage of Hart Road Wetlands may help to inform good management decisions, habitat restoration techniques and the development of visitor facilities such as bird hides and signage.

We thank Phil Barron, Taylor Headland, Sally Shaw, Jean Tucker, Malcolm Worthing and Roger Jaensch for their contributions to this project.



# Three years of bird surveys at Nielsen Park–Toowoomba, QLD

Nielsen Park lies on a plateau in the south-eastern part of the Toowoomba urban area (land of the *Giabal* people) and protects 6 hectares of eucalypt open-forest that is mapped as an endangered regional ecosystem. A Rocha Australia has been helping Friends of the Escarpment Parks with weed management.

A Rocha Australia is building a baseline knowledge of birds here to inform management, using the '2.0 ha, 20 minute' method of BirdLife Australia to survey two plots. In Year 1 (Feb 2020 - Jan 2021) and Year 2 this occurred monthly, in Year 3 this took place in the middle of each season. Each time both plots were surveyed four times: soon after sunrise, mid-morning, late afternoon and soon after sunset. Systematic nocturnal surveys commenced in Year 3. A remote camera was also used to detect ground-dwelling birds.

A wealth of information has been collected, and some patterns are emerging:

In Year 3, 288 birds were recorded from 32 surveys, with 36 bird species in total.

The cumulative list over three years and 116 surveys is 51 bird species.

Species added in Year 3 included Painted Button-quail, Pacific Baza and Grey Fantail.

Year 3 nocturnal surveys found breeding Southern Boobook.

The most frequently recorded species in Year 3 were Noisy Miner, Rainbow Lorikeet, Scaly-breasted Lorikeet, Galah and Pied Currawong.



a female Satin Bowerbird (*Ptilonorhynchus violaceus*), by remote camera

Small bush bird numbers and diversity remains low compared to nearby areas of similar habitat and considering the available shrub habitat of the Park. It is probably due both to the Park's isolation (surrounded by houses) and the high abundance of aggressive Noisy Miners.

Although not yet clear, recent above-average rainfall surely has had some impact on bird usage of Nielsen Park. Ground cover has become more diverse, extensive, tall and dense, and some birds may have left the local area to exploit temporarily revitalised habitat elsewhere.

Painted Button-quail were discovered, apparently for the first time, in a small area of the Park; perhaps also due to highly successful breeding in the Toowoomba region, leading to local expansion of range. They were not seen in Spring 2022 and Summer 2022 surveys, however a domestic cat was recorded by remote camera in July 2022. With houses surrounding, survival of birds such as button-quail must be in doubt although the whipbirds seem to have held on.



The Year 3 results support the conclusion that the program of quarterly surveys was successful and should be continued.

We thank Roger Jaensch, Rob Brodribb, John Wall, Mick Atzeni and Sue-Ellen Jaensch for their contributions to this project.



# Creation Care in Churches across Australia

Being spread out around Australia as we are, the proposition of meeting up in a central location is much trickier than in many of the other countries A Rocha operates in! We are greatly encouraged to hear about *local* expressions of Creation Care, especially when church families get involved together.

In this ENews we have compiled some stories from churches that we know have been taking a range of approaches to care for creation as an active expression of faith and Christian service. We hope these four stories will inspire you where you are placed and worship, and spur you on to consider what might be achievable in your church and local community.

We hope to make stories like these a regular feature of upcoming ENews as well as our next Big Chat for A Rocha Australia members. If you have a story you would like to have featured, or you are not a member but would like to join the next Big Chat, please email [julia.jardine@arocha.org](mailto:julia.jardine@arocha.org)



A beautiful mural in the Sunday School room of St Clement's Anglican church, Lalor Park, NSW

## Some church eco–programs

There are programs being run with resources available for churches to use.

Overseas, [Eco Church](#) projects are run by A Rocha organisations in a number of countries including [New Zealand](#) (42 churches since 2020) and the [UK](#) (3000 churches since 2016).

In Australia we congratulate the [Five-leaf Eco Awards](#) program on turning 10 years old [recently](#). On their website they have a [list](#) of churches around the country that have community gardens.



# Reuben Robinson: Wagga Wagga Baptist Church, NSW

Tell us something about your church?

We have had a Creation Care Committee at [Wagga Wagga Baptist Church](#) since 2015. Wagga Wagga (Wiradjuri Country) is the largest inland city in NSW, with a population of about 68,000 people. Despite being a city, Wagga Wagga is heavily influenced by its setting in regional NSW and its agricultural origins. It is often referred to as “a big country town”. Our church is located very close to the Murrumbidgee River and its riparian River Red Gum forest. A number of our creation care activities have occurred at sites adjacent to the river and its wetlands.



How is your church raising awareness of and caring for creation, and how do you hope to see this grow?

We have held three creation care services in our church on Sundays for the whole congregation. For two of these, we had guest preachers (Mick Pope and Tony Rinaudo). During these services, we highlighted the glory of God in creation, his provision for us and the biblical principles for caring for the environment.

Our Creation Care Committee has engaged in various activities and organised events for the church, such as:

- Information sessions on topics such as recycling, climate change and native birds.
- Taking part in tree planting days with the local Landcare group and Charles Sturt University.
- Guided bushwalks and a bike ride at locations in the local environment, with prayer.
- Installing solar panels on the church roof and setting up recycling.
- Annual Aussie Bird Counts – we state our organisation as Wagga Wagga Baptist Church in the online form.
- Clean-up Australia days.





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- Ken Duncan landscape photography workshop for the Wagga Wagga community. Tickets sold out.
- A fruit and veggie bag-making workshop.
- Writing to politicians about environmental issues.
- Auditing our energy, water and material use and taking steps to improve our efficiency.
- Sharing information about environmental issues in the church newsletter and with our Creation Care email list.
- Climate change march.



Our Creation Care Committee is now giving greater attention to:

- Opening more of our events to the community, such as an upcoming electric vehicle information session.
- Collaborating with other churches in Wagga (such as Rob Scriven's church!)
- Providing more opportunities that our younger church members are keen to be involved in.

### Do you have any encouragement or learnings you can share with us?

We are very encouraged by the acceptance our ministry has in our church, the feedback we receive about our activities, and the discussions we have with people whose opinions on environmental issues are changing.

We try to talk to people about the environmental issues they want to discuss, in language that is meaningful to them. It's important to listen to people respectfully even when they express opinions different to ours.

Although we have had some great attendances at our events, we would always like to have more people involved.

### What motivates you to be involved with this?

Our motivation in creation care is recognising that God has gifted us his beautiful creation, and he expects us to care for it. Caring for creation is an important part of loving God and loving one another. It is an opportunity to contribute to change in societal perspectives on the environment, and to demonstrate to non-Christians that Christians care about the environment.



Photos from  
Reuben Robinson



# Rob Scriven: St Aidan's Presbyterian Church, NSW

Tell us something about yourself and your church?

I began my career in the mid 1980s as a soil conservationist in the western rangelands of NSW (Broken Hill, Hay), and then in catchment management in Wagga Wagga (indeed the semi-arid rosewood/spinifex/mallee vegetation community is still my favourite).



<https://staidanswagga.org.au/>

I attend St Aidan's Presbyterian Church - about 200 adults and children in Wagga Wagga (Wiradjuri Country). The creation group functions not only to create awareness, but also to *affirm* biblical creation care. I regard the latter as equally important, as I perceive many in the church regard the issue as important, but are 'unsure what it looks like'.

How are you helping to raise awareness of and caring for creation, and how do you hope to see this grow?

With the support of the church's elders, I have used three vehicles:

A *newsletter* where I focus on articles that describe the functional beauty of God's creation; and also good news stories relating to conservation. This tact is deliberate as it's easy to be swamped and overwhelmed by bad news conservation stories.

*Field trips* Generally 1 or 2 a year. We are fortunate to have ample nature reserves relatively close by of pristine and modified landscapes. A bonus has been Christian farmers in the church with a conservation bent (indeed one bought a property based mainly on its conservation values). These field trips comprise mainly families, and I think they are attracted by 'a tech-free day in nature'. We normally have a walk, make observations, which is concluded with a





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short creation care devotion (and food of a different sort!). A WorkSafe plan is prepared for each field trip, with consideration to child protection issues. I am working on hands-on field trips (e.g. tree planting), though the family nature perhaps limits these.



Nangus creation care trip (photo from Rob Scriven)

*Presentations on creation care.* Generally been at the inter-church scale with an apologetic focus. It's great that others can do 'creation-care type sermons/talks' in their churches; but it's not something I have wanted to do.

**Do you have any encouragement or learnings you can share with us?**

Creation care activities *can build the community* of the church in special ways. I find the general busyness of people - yes, even in Wagga - is the greatest challenge.

Perhaps it's my extension background, but I find one has to 'be a spruiker' (without the sandwich board - now that's an interesting thought!?!); and answer the question '*why bother?*'

In this I am greatly encouraged that God as Trinity (Genesis 1:26), *bothered* to speak a physical creation into existence, of innate beauty and functionality (Genesis 1); and that this will be redeemed by the Son (Revelation 21) from its current degradation (Romans 8:20).



# Jude Waldron: Armadale Baptist Church, VIC



Tell us something about your church?

Armadale Baptist Church is over 120 years old, inhabiting a heritage-overlay building in one of the poshest bits of Melbourne's inner East (*Boonwurrung* land). Just like the shops and restaurants of our area, the congregation is boutique – small and beautiful. It's tough for a church in the area to survive in this context of individualism, self-sufficiency, status-seeking and devotion to consumerism. As the pastor I have two roles – one is to equip the saints for mission, and the other is to incarnate Christ's love in Armadale, which is similar to planting a whole new church.

How is your church raising awareness of and caring for creation, and how do you hope to see this grow?

The local council tends to many beautiful parks (of the lawn-and-roses style), and the Environment department is also keen to help the neighbourhood value sustainability, native flora, and a sharing economy. There's a long road to this, with the major block being finding available land.

Eight years ago the Environment department entered into a project with us to establish the first community garden in the municipality, bringing \$20,000 and a staff worker one day a week for a year.

The garden has a membership who gather monthly to make decisions about the garden, have a working bee together and then people tend the garden during the month according to the time they can offer.

The people are mainly from the community, with some church members. We harvest together and share out the produce, with any leftover distributed to people with low food security. The garden has solar-powered water tanks and we moved our compost bins outside the gate so anyone from the community can contribute their vegetable scraps. The garden is also a venue for the local council to run workshops on sustainable living. The congregation inhabit it occasionally in our worship.

Do you have any encouragement or learnings you can share with us?

Christians have largely been trained to think that serving means doing something *for* someone, but this garden has been a great opportunity to learn that we are called to do life *with* people.





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When the congregation believed that mission was to just come from our own expertise and resources we were limited, but once we could see something of the kingdom of God happening in the community, we partnered with that movement and God has been able to do abundantly more than we could imagine.

Conservation and care of God's creation is not possible without the mentality of a sharing economy.

Elements of nature are not designed to be alone and the earth, humanity and our neighbourhoods are connected in a system. Even the simple task of watering the garden takes into consideration the weather, the resource, the soil, the buildings nearby, the daily/weekly patterns of humans, the species of plants and what they are planted near.



Photos from Jude Waldron




The greatest lesson this community has to learn is that none of us are islands. If you're going to make a change toward creation care, anticipate ongoing effects in areas you may not have realised.

What motivates you to be involved with this?

My motivation comes from a desire to follow whatever the Holy Spirit is doing and join in.

I'm a terrible gardener, but if you tell me where to dig a hole or to shovel some compost, I'll enthusiastically do what I'm told! You don't have to be naturally gifted in horticulture or environmental knowledge to engage with creation and contribute positively to the environment.





ABC Community Garden

March 6, 2022 · 🌐

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This weekend, we made good progress on clearing the beds and adding compost to enrich the soil. Among the weeds were some rogue pumpkin and tomato plants!  
Our next meeting we will be choosing veggie seeds and planting them.

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# Karen Moseley: Hills Baptist Church, SA

Tell us something about your church?

Our church, [Hills Baptist Aldgate](#), is located in the Adelaide Hills (traditional land of the *Peramangk* and *Kaurna* peoples). The church is situated on a large steeply sloping block, with native vegetation (large eucalypts) in some areas, and small flower beds and grassy slopes in others. It is a predominately a white middle-class congregation, which is reflective of the area it is in.



How is your church raising awareness of and caring for creation, and how do you hope to see this grow?

Many years ago, one of the small groups within the church, took it upon itself to raise the churches awareness of basic elements of Creation Care and Fair Trade. A split bin system was introduced and new tea and coffee suppliers sourced.

More recently, at the beginning of 2022, a more formal Creation Care group was formed. It consisted of half a dozen congregational members who had a passion for the environment and in their own way, in other spheres, were caring for creation. The group began by meeting fortnightly and watched a series of videos put out by A Rocha International (the Lausanne Global Classroom). The videos and accompanying study guide provided much food for thought and discussion. It was decided that the purpose of the group would be to raise awareness within our church of the importance of Creation Care, to celebrate the things that were already going on in that space, and to get involved with local groups that had environmental projects underway.

Some group members have been involved in a local project, joining a group called C4C, in their attempt to control weeds and revegetate after a devastating local bushfire. C4C has been very pleased to have us come onboard and help out. It is so important for them to see Christians in this space. Others in the group have participated in some of the A Rocha revegetation projects in South Australia, including working with Indigenous elders to restore their traditional lands.



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One of our members and his family is involved in seed propagation and tree planting in the Fleurieu Peninsula and is caring for bushland on North West Kangaroo Island where many rare animals including Southern Brown Bandicoots, Kangaroo Island Dunnarts and Western Whipbirds are thriving after the 2019-20 bushfire.



The church grounds in the Adelaide Hills

We have run one Creation Care service at church, in the evening service, and hope that more will follow. We have also tried to introduce worship songs, like those put out by Resound Music, with a creation focus.

**Do you have any encouragement or learnings you can share with us?**

Our group is relatively new and therefore does not have a great deal to share in terms of learning and encouragement. One of the challenges is, and will continue to be, finding the time in our busy lives to come together regularly to join in with environmental projects.

**What motivates you to be involved with this?**

My motivation is long seeded. I come from a family of passionate lovers of the Earth. My father is an agricultural economist and has worked to liberate Pacific Island communities from their dependence on the West. He began a social enterprise that enables small holders to produce virgin coconut oil at the village level. My mother and my brother are avid gardeners. My brother, who worked for Landcare for some time after completing his Agricultural Science degree, was one of the early adopters of permaculture techniques and he has an impressive vegetable garden (that spreads into the backyards of his suburban neighbours – spreading the passion!).



It is therefore natural that I, too, have a love of creation and a desire to see it nurtured and protected. I love spending hours on my own 1.5 acre Adelaide Hills property, tending the orchard and vegetable gardens, and keeping the weeds down in our native vegetation areas! I have taken school students on tours of our property and teach Creation Care to my class at a local Lutheran primary school.

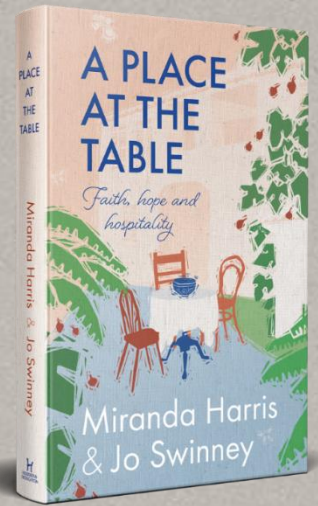
Photos supplied by Karen Moseley



# Summer read: Reflections on *A Place at the Table: Faith, Hope and Hospitality*

Miranda Harris & Jo Swinney, Hodder and Stoughton, 2022

I was excited when my copy of *A Place at the Table* arrived on the front porch. A large part of this, I admit, was due to being one of the many students through the doors of Cruzinha in the early 1990s. Digging out my photo album from September 1992 happy memories came flooding back – of night-time bird banding and the thrill of gently holding and releasing the weightless birds, squelching across the Alvor estuary surveying vegetation, harvesting almonds, helping with meals, and perhaps the most unexpected, learning how to use a sewing machine to make bird bags! It was quite an experience for two college girls more used to studying and writing essays than doing anything practical. The welcome and community experienced as a nineteen year old left a deep impression and undoubtedly shaped the rest of my life.



Setting aside this personal lens, *A Place at the Table* draws you into the A Rocha story with an engaging mix of biblical reflection, lived experience, story-telling, prayers and journal entries. Chapter-by-chapter the reader is led through the process of sharing a meal from hunger and preparation to welcome, the meal itself, cleaning-up and then casting our eyes forward to the 'forever feast' we await. The joy and fulfilment found in building deep relationships and sharing our messy lives is woven through each chapter - accompanied by a simple honesty about the personal cost to the Harris family that came with modelling extravagant Christ-like hospitality. Times of loneliness, anxiety, relational tension, and rootlessness and are all part of the story, and what it took to realise the vision of a nature conservation organisation founded upon Christ and rooted in community. In that respect I found the book encouraging, comforting and challenging in equal measure. Encouraging in that perfection isn't required; comforting to be reminded of God's faithfulness to his people and plans through our tough as well as fun times; and challenging to be reminded that extending the welcome of God to everyone is the way of discipleship, not an optional extra.

The legacy of these times now is a global family committed to conservation, extravagant generosity and welcome – of Christians providing a place for people to belong and be cared for, whilst extending the same care to all creation. May Jesus continue to be modelled and honoured everywhere A Rocha has a presence; and thank you Jo for the gift of this book to the A Rocha family.

*A Place at the Table: faith, hope and hospitality* is available [here](#) (all royalties go towards the work of A Rocha around the world).

There is also [this video](#) about Miranda, Jo and this book.



Photo: Cruzinha, [A Rocha Portugal](#)

Julia Jardine – executive officer, VIC



## Upcoming events and other news

# Annual General Meeting

Our AGM is on Thursday 30 March via Zoom at 7:30pm (AEDT). Members will be notified by email. Financial members of A Rocha Australia may participate and vote. Non-members are welcome as observers. If you would like to join in on the meeting, please email [julia.jardine@arocha.org](mailto:julia.jardine@arocha.org)

### A Rocha International News: A Rocha turns 40 this year!

In 1983 a small seed was planted in the dry, sandy soil of southern Portugal: an innovative mission to protect and restore an ecologically significant area of wetland in God's name. A Rocha, meaning 'the rock' in Portuguese, this year celebrates forty years of roots in the soil: first in Portugal, now in landscapes on six continents.

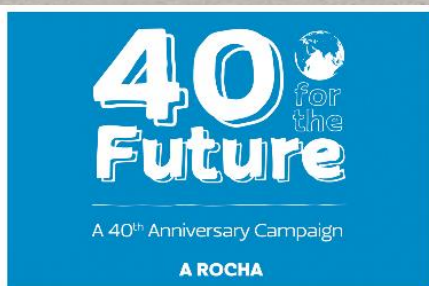
Over forty years, A Rocha has been peacekeepers in elephant/human conflict in India, planted indigenous trees from Nigeria to Peru, fed undernourished children with the produce of our sustainable agriculture programme in Canada and become a credible voice of hope in the increasingly fraught environmental conservation.

Here are three news links from A Rocha International about anniversary happenings:



**I am a conservationist**

17 January 2023



**40 for the future campaign**

17 January 2023



**A Rocha turns 40! What to look forward to this year:**

16 January 2023

### A milestone also for one of our partners:

We congratulate Capernwray Australia as they celebrate 50 years. Read more [here](#).



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Send feedback and suggested content for the Autumn ENews by 15 May to [australia.comms@arocha.org](mailto:australia.comms@arocha.org)