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AUSTRALIA
A ROCHA
Conservation and Hope

A Rocha Australia *ENEWS*

Autumn, 2023

We are a Christian organisation engaging communities in nature conservation

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Executive Officer's report...

I have the pleasure of welcoming you to this Autumn 2023 issue of A Rocha Australia's ENews.

In this issue we report back on the John Stott Memorial Birding Day in May, where 105 participants from 32 countries recorded almost 1,000 species! The A Rocha Australia team at Werribee Water Treatment Plant contributed 44 species to this list. Special days like this remind us that we're part of a global family with like-minded brothers and sisters around the world enjoying God and his good creation.

On page 5 we provide an overview of the bird surveys conducted in Council-managed parks in Toowoomba, Queensland which point very clearly

to the benefit of habitat connectivity in maintaining species diversity.

We also hear from director Sally Shaw about her Creation care journey including her recently awarded Doctor of Ministry - congratulations Sally! We introduce you to two of a growing number of Christians who have connected with us: Jodie McGill, working with NSW Parks and Wildlife Service (page 4) and Donna Toulmin, who would love to speak to you and hear your thoughts as she prepares a book on Jesus and creation care (page 9). We hope their stories encourage and inspire you on your own Creation care journeys.

On 30 March we held our Annual General Meeting for A Rocha Australia, with members and supporters joining us via Zoom. It's always encouraging to meet together. At this meeting we shared our new-look Annual Report for 2022, which we encourage you to



Hairpin Banksia – *Banksia spinulosa*

Executive Officer's report continued...

read, available [here](#). Please do consider becoming a member of A Rocha Australia to take a more active role in what we do. You can apply for membership on our [website](#).

During the last quarter we have had opportunities to speak of the good news of Jesus Christ for the whole of creation in a range of contexts, including to

students at Eastern College Australia in Sydney as they studied an intensive unit on Climate Change, Justice and Sustainability; to students at Tatchilla Lutheran College in South Australia; and through attending Lausanne Gatherings in Melbourne and Adelaide, and the Surrender conference in Victoria. We thank God that there are more conversations taking place and a growing awareness of the relevance of the gospel to all of life, including our relationship with the natural world.

Lastly, we are pleased to recommend the Centre of Public Christianity Simon Smart's [recent interview](#) with Jo Swinney from A Rocha International. What a great introduction for many people to Creation care and the work of A Rocha! It's a 32-minute audio recording and we strongly recommend you listen in.



I leave you with this verse from Psalm 115, which reminds us that God has entrusted the world he created to our care – so let's spur each other on to work with God in extending his Kingdom here on earth.

*"The highest heavens belong to the Lord,
but the earth he has given to mankind."
Psalm 115, v16.*

Julia Jardine
Executive Officer, A Rocha Australia



John Stott Memorial Birding Day 2023



On 13 May, bird watchers from around the world participated in a concerted [birding event](#) in memory of avid birdwatcher, theologian, minister, and valued friend of A Rocha, John Stott.

This event was the third annual event organised by A Rocha International. There were observers from 32 countries who together recorded 966 species with the *Snipe Hunters* team from Canada recording 134 species.

A small team of A Rocha Australia members spent the day at Melbourne's Western Treatment Plant, a RAMSAR listed site. The area is a non-breeding destination of many

thousands of shorebirds, but at this time of year most have departed for their northern hemisphere breeding grounds. However, we did see a range of wetland species including White-winged Black Tern and Australian Spotted Crake. As I read the list of species recorded from around the world I was struck by just how varied and interesting is the world's avian biodiversity.



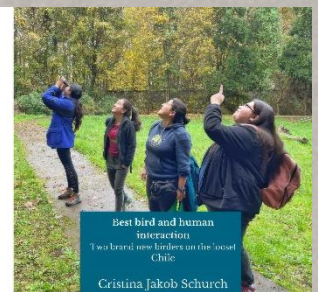
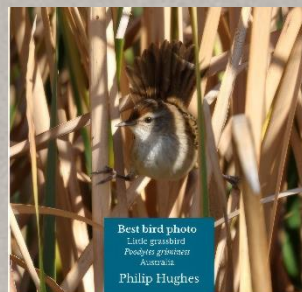
Australian Spotted Crake

Amongst his many theological books John also wrote *The Birds Our Teachers*. In it he describes how a lifetime of observing birds around the world taught about faith, repentance, gratitude and other aspects of the Christian life and instilled a desire to appreciate, protect, and preserve God's creation. During his lifetime, John Stott observed about 2500 bird species and photographed many of them.

In the words of John Stott: "So let's resolve to do all we can to protect and preserve our unique God-given environment, and so continue to enjoy its God-given 'biodiversity', not least its fascinating birds."

Philip Hughes– director, VIC

and congratulations to Philip for winning Best bird photo this year!



Results of 18 months of bird surveys – Duggan Park, QLD

Duggan Park is a bushland reserve of about 8 ha at the top of Toowoomba's eastern escarpment, in the land of the Jagera, Giabal and Jarowair people. At 680m above sea level, the Park is mostly covered in a mix of remnant and regrowth native vegetation.

The A Rocha Australia team started monthly surveys of birds in August 2021, the first systematic approach in the Park using the '2 hectare, 20 minute' BirdLife Australia method, as well as remote cameras occasionally to detect secretive species.

28 surveys have now been conducted, with 284 Birddata records, and 57 species recorded, 23 being small bush birds.

This high relative abundance of so many small bush birds in Duggan Park is very encouraging, and strongly contrasts with nearby Nielsen Park where only six species of small bush bird have been recorded in similar surveys.

With Nielsen Park now surrounded by housing, there is a clear case to be made for keeping Duggan Park well connected to large areas of forest on the escarpment, so this biodiversity may be maintained.



Rose Robin and Rufous Fantail (photo credit: Roger Jaensch)

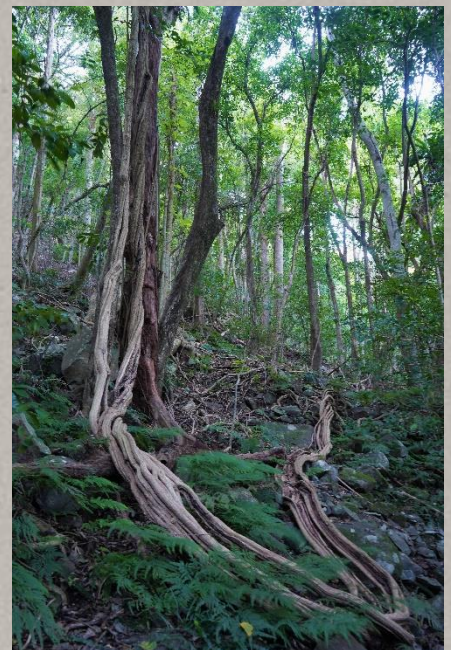
Faith at Work: Seeing the creator's fingerprints everywhere

Kara Martin, writer for Eternity recently interviewed Jodie McGill, a Christian working with NSW Parks and Wildlife Service.

Jodie is someone who sees God's Word lived out before her in her work, both in Scripture—which she knows well and can apply—but also in the tell-tale signs of the creator all around her in nature.

"I see the Creator's fingerprints on everything in the parks. I see the intricate fingerprints on the hands of our unique koalas. I see a tiny orchid flower with intricate detailed patterns. I see the ring marks on a cut tree stump. Each one of these plants and animals is unique, and we are each created uniquely. This speaks volumes to me."

To read the rest of this interview with Jodie McGill visit [Eternity News](#).



Director Sally Shaw shares her Creation care journey

My early evangelical faith, which stressed the importance of saving souls and social action, led me to train as a nurse/midwife. In 1985 I joined a Christian medical team assisting Cambodians in a refugee camp on the Thai-Cambodian border. In 1988 I moved to Cambodia to work with World Vision in a Mother and Child Health program.

Later I established a local NGO, Chrysalis, which used improvisational drama to assist disadvantaged people to find value in their life. It was through this work that I discovered the Arts to be an effective tool for assisting people to discover a transformative way of being and doing.

In 2007 I left Cambodia with my husband and three young children and moved to live in the Adelaide Hills in South Australia. I soon became aware that this area was experiencing the dire effects of the 2001- 2009 millennium drought. I was deeply saddened to see the natural environment around our home slowly dying. Despite the fact my evangelical faith did not advocate Creation care, I felt a responsibility to care for it. On reflection, I maintain that some of this desire came from my father, who was both a farmer and passionate conservationist in the United Kingdom; and some came from a God-given, but dormant, desire to care for his creation.

Our home was adjacent to some bushland, an environment that was heavily infested with weeds. I started trying to remove some. It was hard work as the invasive grasses have a habit of rapidly multiplying. One day while I was removing one particularly large clump, I discovered hiding underneath it was a small indigenous bush. It had a mass of dainty yellow flowers (being a Prickly Guinea-flower, *Hibbertia exutiacies*). At that moment, the following thoughts came to my mind:



mind:

These invasive grasses represent the destructive practices that have occurred in Australia since Europeans arrived. As a result, God's creation has been oppressed, invaded and destroyed. It is struggling to survive but God hasn't given up on it because he loves it and will continue to sustain it, just like this little Prickly Guinea-flower.

I felt at that moment God was asking me to speak out and act against this injustice, but also that he had entrusted me with a responsibility to pass on this vital message to evangelical Christians. This, I realized, would not be an easy task, as I considered my inadequate understanding of the biblical reasons for Creation care. I needed to examine the pillars on which my evangelical faith was based, as well as think through the biblical, moral and ethical reasons as to why Christians are to care for God's creation.

Amongst the many things I studied, I came to realize, as Paul explains in Romans 8: 18-26, that we are not saved *from* the world of creation but saved *for* the world of creation, and in Genesis 2:15 we are called to be God's "pro-creators, his stewards, his vice-regents for his creation."

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Secondly, I was keen to find others who shared my newfound conviction. I was disappointed to be unable to find any in the local evangelical churches, nor could I find an Australian Christian organisation involved in Creation care.

After an extensive internet search, I discovered *A Rocha*, an international Christian organisation with amazing conservation projects in over 20 countries around the world. I loved their diversity and their values: Christian, Conservation, Community, Cross-cultural and Co-operation. But it was not until 2016 that A Rocha Australia came into existence and I became one of their directors.

I also discovered evangelicals involved in the Global Lausanne Movement who were actively promoting Creation care. I was invited to be part of their 2012 Consultation on Creation Care and Gospel, that led to two primary conclusions:

- *Creation care is indeed a 'gospel issue within the lordship of Christ', and*
- *We are faced with a crisis that is pressing, urgent, and that must be resolved in our generation.*

From this they produced a [Call to Action](#), and invited Christians and Christian organizations everywhere to signify their agreement with and commitment to its call.

I was eager to encourage my evangelical friends to become involved in *A Rocha*, but soon discovered some of them did not want to spend time looking after the environment and were not ready to adopt the call to a simpler lifestyle, that requires us to live lightly on this earth.

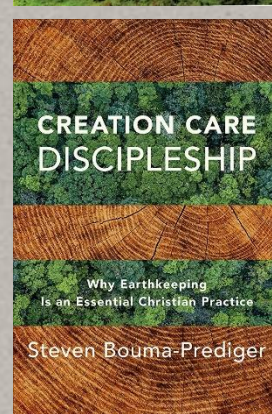
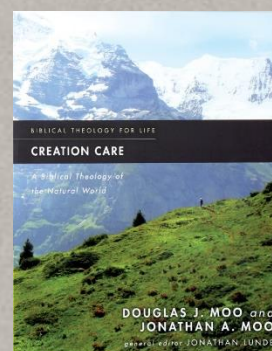
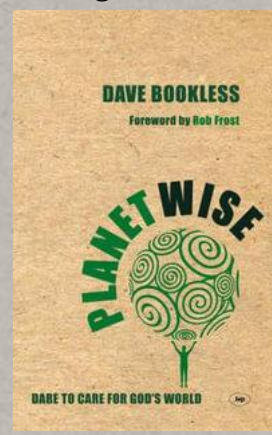
I later realized that this was not because they did not want to get their hands dirty, but more because of their underlying beliefs.

They believed, as I had done, that it was more important to tell people about Jesus' love and message of salvation, as well as help the poor and needy. I agree that these aspects are central to the Christian faith, but I also believe that caring for our neighbour must extend to caring for God's creation.

Since that time, I've discovered that there are a growing number of theologians writing scholarly books on the Scriptural reasons for creation care, for example, Dave Bookless, Douglas Moo & Jonathan Moo and Steven Bouma-Prediger.

But my question remained: How do I help those who remain ambivalent, confused, or resistant? This dilemma is succinctly voiced by Olafur Eliasson, in his 2016 book *Why Art has the Power to Change the World*,

[o]ne of the great challenges today is that we often feel untouched by the problems of others and by global issues like climate change, even when we could easily do something to help. We do not feel strongly enough that we are part of a global community, part of a larger we. Giving people access to data most often leaves them feeling overwhelmed and disconnected, not empowered and poised for action.



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I concluded that it was unlikely many of my friends would have an ecological “conversion experience” like mine, nor would they have the opportunity to follow my example by taking time out for formal study, and nor would providing them with appropriate biblical passages necessarily change them.

This led me on a journey to explore alternative ways to transformative change. My experience in Cambodia with the NGO Chrysalis reminded me of how the arts can act as a catalyst for transformation. As Eliasson writes, “[a]rt does not show people what to do, yet engaging with a good work of art can connect you to your senses, body, and mind. It can make the world *felt*. And this felt feeling may spur thinking, engagement, and even action.” This exploration led me to consider the following question:

Could the transformative role I saw the creative arts have in the lives of the disadvantaged people in Cambodia be transferable? Could it assist in changing the attitudes and practices among evangelical Christians towards Creation care?

This led me to enrol in a Doctor of Ministry so I could explore in practical ways to address this question. I developed the following research question:

What features of an arts-based experiential workshop are most likely to lead to a transformative wholistic awareness of creation care for Christians to more fully integrate their faith with creation care?

The results of my research demonstrated that my research question had been answered.

I have now successfully passed my Doctor of Ministry, but the journey hasn't ended! It's time to find a church/parachurch group in which to trial the workshop template.

I live with my husband in Aldinga Beach, south of Adelaide and enjoy helping others of all ages to experience caring for creation, including at the Hart Road wetlands!



Planting at Hart Road wetlands (Kaurna country) in July 2022

Is Jesus "Green"?

If the environment is so important, why didn't Jesus talk about it more?

by Donna Toulmin, NSW

I wrote a final year 8000-word project at Bible college on Jesus and environmentalism. As happens at a residential college, many people chat with you at mealtimes or in breaks between lectures and ask you what you're writing about. Many people knew that I was enthusiastic about caring for the environment - I tended to talk about it a lot! When I told them that my topic was Jesus and the environment, a number of people, were a bit sceptical and asked, "If the environment was as important as you say, why didn't Jesus talk about it more?" Good question.

An interesting conversation always followed. I've observed how people generally try to answer this question. They often search for Bible passages where Jesus interacts with something that we consider "the environment" - like a fig tree - and use that to interpret what Jesus' position on environmentalism might be. Jesus cursed and killed a fig tree (Matt 21). Does this mean he is anti-environment? A number of people have said this to me.

Jesus said to "consider the lilies" (Matt 6). Does that mean he's pro-environment?

Or is he *against* large trees ... but *for* smaller plants? Of course not. You can see with this question, we can get tied up in knots.

If the environment is so important, why didn't Jesus talk about it more?" To answer this well, we need to consider at least two things:



Darling lily – *Crinum flaccidum* – near Quirindi, NSW

Firstly, context matters. Jesus did not live in the same context as us. We live in a time of ecological crisis, and he did not. Jesus' life would have been naturally more eco-friendly than ours. Not once did he buy anything plastic, and so he never disposed of plastic either. Probably all his food was organic, and his clothes were also likely organic and dyed with natural dyes. He never bought or drove a car or flew in a plane. He never contributed to the overuse of fossil fuels. He might possibly have burned fossil fuels to cook dinner or to light an oil lamp, but there were not enough people at the time to make a measurable effect on the climate. Sure, he didn't talk about things like cars, fossil fuels or plastic recycling in the gospels. But that doesn't necessarily mean he didn't care about the environment. His context was different.

Secondly, there is a linguistic and semantic issue: Our categories are not the same as Jesus' categories. In our language and worldview, we have drawn a line between "the environment" and "civilisation." But is that really a helpful distinction to have?

If I ask you to make a thorough list of what things *are* part of "the environment." What will be on that list? Trees? Forests? Polar bears? What else? If I ask, "What things are *not* 'the environment'?" What will your answer be? Buildings? Houses? Cars?

Our English language forces us to have these two categories in our minds. But in reality, there is no "environment" distinct from civilisation. Everything on earth is connected in complex ways in what the Bible calls "creation." So Jesus wouldn't have talked about "the environment" because he wasn't speaking from a 21st-century, English-speaking viewpoint. Instead, we should ask, "What did Jesus say about creation?"

On that topic, he has quite a lot to say. Find this and other posts [here](#).

Good News for the Earth

A book about the environment and Jesus.



Hello! I'm Donna Toulmin and I'm writing a book.

I'm a translator, communicator, Jesus follower, and earth dweller. I'm theologically educated and for quite a while now I've had an interest in how following Jesus relates to how we care for the environment.

My book is about environmental crises and in what way Jesus and the Christian message are relevant to those crises. At the moment the book is called "Good News for the Earth" with a possible subtitle "Navigating eco-crises in the footsteps of Jesus."

There are lots of books that urge Christians to look after the earth because it's what we're mandated to do in Genesis, the first chapter of the Bible. There are not many that talk about the relevance of Jesus' ministry to current environmental concerns. What does following Jesus look like in this time of ecological crisis? When the environment seems to be getting worse and worse, how do we keep caring? How do we maintain hope?

The book has three main parts, in the first, I outline some of the ecological crises we're currently facing. In the second part, I look at how Jesus' life and communication are relevant to how we think about these crises. The third part profiles several excellent, but very different, real-life initiatives that are all doing what they can to address various aspects of environmental crisis and at the same time walking in Jesus' footsteps. At least, that's what I *think* the book will be about! Let's see how it develops.

I'd love to talk to you about it!

I've been supported by Anglican Deaconess Ministries to do this project. I'm the type of person who needs to talk with others to really think things through. I'd love to hear *your* thoughts!

[Donna's website](#)

[Donna on Facebook](#)



Recommended listening!

A Rocha has always been a voice of hope in the environmental space. The [Field notes podcast](#) is an exploration of the ideas, practice and experience making a difference on the ground, through conversations with people who really know what they are talking about – from conservation scientists, explorers and biologists, to artists, entrepreneurs and theologians. They have hopeful stories to tell.

There are currently 30 conversations to choose from!

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Send feedback and suggested events or articles for the Winter ENews by 15 August to australia.comms@arocha.org

