



Stories of Hope

2022

STORIES OF HOPE 2022

AN A ROCHA UK PROJECT  **IN ACTION**
PARTNERS

2022 was a year of inspiration and hope. We welcomed 12 new Partners into our rapidly growing Partner in Action network, which now stretches from Dartmoor to the Cairngorms, and from Northumberland and the valleys of South Wales to the remote island of St Helena. Many of our Partners undertook some incredible work for nature and community during the year, and we wanted to share some of their good news stories.

We do hope you will find them uplifting and encouraging! Andy Lester and Regina Ebner, A Rocha UK

arochoa.org.uk/partners-in-action/



STORIES OF HOPE

T25: Grasslands, native wildflowers, bees, bats, damselflies & dragonflies, amphibians, house martin

Abernethy Barcaple

Dave Crudgington

All about the partner

Abernethy Barcaple is located in a secluded setting in the rolling hills of Dumfries and Galloway, with 17 acres of grasslands, woodlands and a youth adventure centre.

Creation care

The Barcaple team have created three wildflower meadows: seeds have been sown in all three areas, and on one patch, the method of cutting has changed to maximise flowering. The yellow rattle that had been previously planted started to germinate and, as the areas continue to be managed better, the team look forward to seeing what will grow in the coming seasons.

A vertical garden was created three years ago on the wall of the new sports hall. This was a totally unused space for nature but is a sun trap and therefore was ideal for planting. Plants were chosen to attract pollinators: wisteria, honeysuckle and climbing roses. This helped bee numbers to increase during the year and, for the first time, wren were seen nesting on the wall, which is great news.

Many of the natural house martin nests have struggled due to drought and heavy rain. A couple of years ago, the team began putting up artificial nests for this Target 25 species. The use of the artificial nests has meant that 2022 was a good season with six nests used (half natural, half artificial) and birds successfully fledging from most of them.

In the winter, wildflower seeds were added around the wetland areas. As amphibians are one of the Target 25, it was good to see a lot of frogspawn in the pond, and to confirm that the pond is being used. It is unclear how many turned into froglets as they are elusive creatures!

The team also engaged the community in a lot of tree planting, including adding some hedges behind the archery field to act as a windbreak and help nesting birds.



STORIES OF HOPE

T25: Woodland, butterflies, farm & garden birds, house martin

Adventure Plus

Jon Cox, Matthew Norton. Photos: Em N Ben Somerfield, Andy Clubley-Moore

All about the partner

Adventure Plus is an 80-acre site of meadow, woodland and hedgerows in west Oxfordshire, with a developing Adventure Base for young people, families, schools, youth groups, churches and businesses.

Creation care

Volunteers from Cogges Church in Witney and 'One Planet Clanfield', the local village group, regularly carry out various conservation activities on site. In 2022, this included planting 300 new trees. It is hoped they will survive, but they were planted just before the drought. The volunteers have also been removing tree guards from trees planted a few years ago as they are now doing well. Another 400 trees were planted in the winter.

During the year, volunteers also helped to build a new bridge into the copse. Previous access had meant going off site with a slight detour, but this bridge means the copse can now be accessed through the new woodland.

It has been wonderful to see that house martins have been going in (and out) of the boxes that were put up for them over the last few years. In addition, lots of green woodpeckers were seen over the summer months. These birds were particularly noticeable – three or four of them at breakfast time every day, enjoying their first meal of the day too!

The lovely group of roe deer in the photograph has often been spotted at Adventure Plus. They can be seen grazing near one of the two copses used for bushcraft. Many school groups come from inner cities so their visits here can provide their first in-person sightings of native wildlife. And whilst completing some upland training, team-member Andy managed to get a rare glimpse of a perhaps surprisingly named common lizard!



STORIES OF HOPE

T25: Freshwater, native wildflowers, house martin

Aldermoor Farm

Richard and Kathy Pitt

All about the partner

Aldermoor Community Farm is an urban farm in Southampton with one acre of land and a shop to sell produce, open five days a week. It's a small city-based project focusing on eco-sustainable food-growing and pollination, with a range of tree species, some standing water and wildflower planting.

Creation care

Near the start of 2022, a local school approached the team about taking a student for work experience one day a week for a year. After a few months, it was going so well that the school asked for it to be increased to two days a week! This was a really beneficial experience for both sides. Often there was a look of wonder in the student's eyes, seeing things he'd never seen before; he also gained satisfaction and a sense of accomplishment in witnessing the success of projects he had worked on. One such project was doing woodwork to build new compost bays. Once completed, within a week of adding the compost to the new bay, the temperature in the soil was up to 60 degrees. His response was, 'Wow, this is amazing!' This is just one example of the positive contact people have with the whole cycle of life on the farm.

An average of 35 regular volunteers a month came throughout the year, either weekly, fortnightly or monthly, to enjoy sowing plant seeds, cultivating the produce and eventually seeing their food being grown. The wildflower meadow has also been maintained and is providing valuable pollination habitat for a wide range of insect species.

At the end of September, 300 people of all ages, including many families, came to celebrate all things grown on the farm at a hugely enjoyable harvest festival.



STORIES OF HOPE

T25: Grassland, woodland, native wildflowers, common swift, house martin, spotted flycatcher

Ashburnham Place

Paul Wenham

All about the partner

Ashburnham Place is a Christian conference and retreat centre in East Sussex, with 220 acres of mixed woodlands, grasslands, three lakes and formal gardens, as well as a productive walled garden. It is stewarded by the Ashburnham Christian Trust and is home to a serving international community of Christians.

Creation care

During the year, two moth surveys were held with the community, using three traps at different locations for two nights each. It was a successful time, with 77 different species identified at the first survey and 51 species at the second. All involved enjoyed the experience of trapping and identifying these creatures.

Once a week, as part of the catalyst training programme, volunteers have the opportunity to meet outdoors to pray and learn together about nature engagement, and to take part in different projects on the land, such as learning to grow food in the walled garden and planting fruiting trees in the food forest. Wildflower meadow and woodland maintenance has continued, including pruning and tying up the climbing and rambling roses.

A significant number of new swift and house martin boxes have been put up. In 2022, both species were seen inspecting the new boxes. Hopefully they will begin to nest in the boxes over the coming summers.

In addition, several (open-fronted) boxes for spotted flycatcher were built by the community, and then installed in the woodland on site. During 2022, spotted flycatcher were seen at a few locations and have successfully nested on site. In the years to come, it is hoped that these new boxes will be used, which would help to increase the population of this threatened species.

A variety of exciting bird sightings included nightingale (one seen feeding a young bird), goshawk, firecrest and a quail singing in the long grass just outside the site's boundaries. Passage migrant whinchats were seen in the autumn on their migration path south. Yellow-browed warbler, a new species this year, spent a few days here, and linnet were seen in large numbers in and around the long grass. The population of goldfinch has also increased – the increase attributed to the different cutting regime (three years of this now) and the management of the wildflower meadow, as they feed off the flowering plant seeds.



STORIES OF HOPE

T25: Grassland, woodland, native wildflowers, farmland & garden birds, common toad, bullfinch

Blacknest Forest School

Anne Martin

All about the partner

Blacknest Forest School in Surrey has 12 acres of woodland and grassland areas with a wildflower meadow.

Creation care

Forest school sessions are held throughout the Easter, summer and half-term holidays, with the children always being encouraged to think, 'How are we going to look after woods/gardens and what can we do?' Summer 2022 saw eight weeks of 12 children coming to Blacknest for four days a week, making around 300 forest school child sessions.

In addition, three forest church events were held. These were an ideal opportunity for the children to invite their parents, grandparents and friends to join them in a worship service in the forest school woodland. One service was led by Frog Orr-Ewing who leads a forest church (and heads up Partner in Action Stampwell Farm) near Beaconsfield. The groups were singing, praising God for his wonderful natural world and enjoying being in it, amongst other activities. Afterwards, children took their friends on a guided tour of woodland attractions. Creation care was encouraged, and many adults have since asked when there will be a repeat of an afternoon that gave much pleasure and satisfaction to some 80 people. (The children from the churches already get the chance to come a few more times throughout the year to enjoy the woodland!)

A variety of plants and trees have been added to the woodland this year. One project is trying to get a hedge to grow all the way around the field – a large job as the hedge consists of hundreds of small hedging plants and during the drought, it was very challenging to keep all these alive. However, willing volunteers put compost and mulch all round the edge of every single one, meaning most of them survived.

In addition, two exclusion zones have been established, with fences to keep plants protected from rabbits and deer. There is a wide variety of plants now growing in the exclusion zones and the fences will help to enrich biodiversity and give the saplings (native trees) a chance to grow.



STORIES OF HOPE

Launched in July. T25: TBC

Bryn Gobaith

Joy Watson

All about the partner

Bryn Gobaith is a 336-acre farm in the Welsh valleys hoping to become a place of retreat, refreshment, community and hope. The area includes deciduous woodland, upland moorland, upland wildflower meadows and extensive grassland.

Creation care

In the summer of 2022, A Rocha UK supporter Dr Peter Sturgess assessed the biodiversity on the site to work out what species and habitats were already present. This was very helpful as it showed there is huge potential for Target 25 species and habitats and, with some active management, for further diversity. The farm's upland wildflower meadows have many common species already, but with more focussed and accurate management, the plant diversity can be improved. Further management in the deciduous woodland and upland moorland areas has begun to try and create a diverse mosaic of habitat for nature.

Summer also saw some forest school sessions with children from the local community enjoying nature and carrying out some food-growing on site.



STORIES OF HOPE

Launched in June. T25: Grassland, native wildflowers, bats, slow worms, common swift, common toad

CCT – The Hayes

John Wing

All about the partner

CCT – The Hayes in Derbyshire is set in 138 acres of mature grounds, which include lakes, streams, woodland, countryside and farmland. It is part of the Christian Conference Trust (CCT) which provides residential conferences for large numbers of people, and takes its environmental and social responsibilities seriously, considering it is a privilege to care for God's creation.

Creation care

To encourage nature conservation at The Hayes, several wildlife spaces have been created including wild play areas, nest and bug boxes, new wetland, non-mowed areas and compost heaps for grass cuttings, uncooked waste, fruit and vegetables and other garden waste.

New nesting and roosting sites for threatened and declining birds and animals were looked at, to increase biodiversity and to encourage younger visitors to explore and enquire. The following have been bought and installed: 5 bat boxes, 6 fieldmouse boxes, 10 house martin boxes and 30 bird boxes.

In April, one beehive was installed; another one was added by the end of June, joined by a third in October! Each hive holds 80,000 bees when at full capacity. Consequently, 200 jars of honey were produced this first year, to be served at breakfast and sold in the gift shop. There is a beekeeper on site who looks after these furry friends.

Four hundred trees were planted during the year. Meanwhile, an electric fence was replaced with a 300-metre hawthorn hedge all the way round the lake. In addition, all the reeds were removed from in front of the bird hide, enabling the previously hidden water to be seen! Internally, all toilet paper and hand towels have been changed for recycled paper that only travels 15 miles. Bathroom amenities come in recycled plastic containers. Single-use plastics have been almost eliminated and now non-plastic bin-liners are used. There has also been a switch to 100% renewable electricity. Several hundred solar panels and a new air-source heat pump have been installed. Over 1,000 light bulbs have been replaced with eco-friendly alternatives, and guests are encouraged to save energy by turning down radiators and turning off lights in their rooms when they are not in use.

Creation care

CCT is committed to sourcing as much locally produced food as possible (meat comes from just three miles away), buying in-season produce, reducing food miles, thereby helping to lower carbon emissions and supporting local farms and businesses. Garden spaces have been created to grow fresh herbs which are picked every day. Drinks are served in reusable mugs.

Bike racks are provided to encourage staff to cycle to work, and electric vehicle charging points are available for guests arriving in environmentally cleaner vehicles. Three picnic benches made from recycled plastic bottle-tops were installed and plastic plants have gone.



STORIES OF HOPE

T25: Grassland, freshwater, woodland, native wildflowers, butterflies, bees, house martin, English oak, hedgehog

Chinnor Churches Go Wild!

Brian Griffiths, Jo Whitfield

All about the partner

Chinnor Churches Go Wild! (CCGW!) is a cluster of churches in Oxfordshire. They provide events and activities to encourage creation care using their church buildings and ten acres of land.

Creation care

Several Hedgehog Fun Days were held during 2022 at the different churches that make up CCGW! Attendees learnt all about these creatures and helped create tunnels with food to map their movement. Unfortunately no hedgehogs were found in the church grounds, but a local couple found two baby ones in their large garden.

Berkshire, Buckinghamshire & Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust sponsored the purchase of bird boxes of various sizes to attract different birds, and these provided a focus for a few family events in the churchyards. Information was provided on what birds would use the boxes for and how to look after them. A local person made lovely wooden 'hedgehog highway' signs. CCGW! also ran a bird-box building session and gave information on hedgehogs at the Chinnor Flower & Produce Show which was a fantastic community event. Residents were delighted by the population of swifts at Sydenham Church, and house martins return each year to nest at, at least, one local home.

In October, CCGW! hosted a fascinating talk on 'The Wildlife on the Chilterns' and were delighted to welcome back Ian Gamble volunteer speaker from A Rocha UK. Around 40 people of all ages – some having travelled some distance – enjoyed hearing Ian share his vast knowledge and love of this precious landscape.

Unfortunately, St Andrew's Church no longer has its own beehive, but one has been sited at Aston, and both church grounds continue to provide a healthy food source for foraging bees and insects.

The team have been encouraged to take seriously the biblical mandate to be good stewards of God's earth and provision, and are thinking ahead and planning events and opportunities to enjoy the Chilterns in the coming year.



STORIES OF HOPE

Launched in July. T25: Freshwater, native wildflowers, farmland & grassland birds, maco moths, small mammals, bats, common swift

Corrymeela Community

Tim Magowan

All about the partner

Corrymeela has a residential centre on the north coast of Northern Ireland that hosts over 11,000 people a year, as well as a live-in community of volunteers and staff. There is also a dispersed community of over 150 members who commit to living out Corrymeela's principles of reconciliation in their own communities. The site covers ten acres and is a mix of scrub, gardens, wildflower meadows and food-growing areas.

Creation care

The change in the grasslands here is significant as only in the last two years have the edges of these not been sprayed with chemicals to suppress various weed species, with the result that the margins have now become full of wildflowers. And, since the spraying has stopped, the hedgerows have also shown some signs of improvement, which is great for birds and other insects.

During 2022, to the north of the main house, a banked area of wildflower meadow was created which in spring was full of orchids. During the spring and early summer season it was a protected area, despite being surrounded by cut grass. Wildflower areas have also been created around two of the staff houses. Yellow rattle was in abundance in these areas and the first orchids of the year for the site appeared here too. The density of wildflowers is impressive! Consequently, an amazing number of pollinating insects – including a wide variety of bee species amongst others – have been seen, which is unusual for a coastal area.

The polytunnel was used for food growing and meditation where there was a deliberate attempt to encourage guests to think about the circle of life, from birth through to death and resurrection.

Bat boxes have been put up, but these need relocating as they have not been having much use.

More fruit hedges have been planted which will be great for small mammals and migrant bird species.

Further reflection points have been created with new benches where people can sit and be immersed in nature while looking out to sea.



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T25: Grassland, woodland, bats, macro moths, common swift, red squirrel

Drumalis

Sr Margaret Rose

All about the partner

Drumalis is a retreat centre on the edge of the city of Larne, County Antrim, Northern Ireland. It is owned and managed by the Sisters of the Cross and Passion, and has 19 acres of deciduous woodland, lowland meadows, ponds and formal gardens.

Creation care

Around 800 trees were planted in two different areas. However, in the summer in the meadow area, very few trees could be seen at all! The company planting them had not marked them out properly or created any management for the grassland. The thick, coarse grass had unfortunately smothered many of these trees, so much time was spent clearing and opening the grass areas up, as well as marking out the trees to give them a new lease of life. Over 200 were 'found' by the autumn and the management of this area improved. By keeping grass down immediately around the saplings they were given a chance of rapid growth, while the rest of the meadow was filled with unmown grass, deterring predators such as deer and rabbit. The new native woodland provides a valuable new home for a wide range of species including warblers, small mammals and insects.

Two little banks of land were identified with lots of wildflower species, but the cutting regime had been damaging it until recently. The management of these areas has therefore begun to change: one important change was that ropes were put around three spaces to manage them like wildflower areas. By the end of the growing season, the roped off areas were improving for wildflowers and there were encouraging signs of recovery. In addition, there are a few beehives on site, but until recently there have not been many areas of flowering sites. The creation of these new areas has now provided a food-source for the bees and encouraged pollination.

The main wildflower area is outside the guest lounge, and it is hoped this will become a place where guests can reflect and enjoy the abundance of nature.



STORIES OF HOPE

T25: Grassland, freshwater, hedgerows, native wildflowers, d & d, amphibians, farmland & garden birds, bees, bats, butterflies, macro moths, small mammals, common toad, bullfinch, marsh tit, spotted flycatcher

Foxearth Meadows Nature Reserve

Mark Prina, Andy Jowitt

All about the partner

One of A Rocha UK's nature reserves, comprising 11.5 acres of wetland on the River Stour floodplain in north Essex. It has a variety of habitats including the river and riverbank, wetlands and woodland, an ancient field boundary, a series of ponds and marshy flower-rich grassland.

Creation care

Many events were held during 2022 that connected people with God's glorious creation. These included a family-orientated open event to celebrate National Meadows Day, a Dragonfly ID walk, an A Rocha UK Act for Nature Day, and a bat walk, followed by moth trapping. 'Source to Sea' has become a regular feature, partnering with members of Sudbury Canoe Club as part of the Marine Conservation Society's 'Beach Watch and River Clean'.

Several churches used the reserve for creative times of worship and two open air services were held for all comers. Andy Atkins A Rocha UK's CEO spoke to some 80 people on a glorious May afternoon on 'Caring for God's earth'. In September, nearly 50 gathered from different places and churches for a service entitled 'Wisdom from the Trees', which used the parable of the trees in the book of Judges to think about our part in and response to the environmental crisis. September also saw Foxearth featured on BBC's Songs of Praise.

A church holiday club involved outdoor games, pond dipping for aquatic invertebrates, nature walks and a bug hunt using sweep nets and butterfly nets. The children enjoyed using the 'pooters' to suck minibeasts into pots for examination, although just as much fun was when a game developed as to who could suck up the most spiders (of which there were limitless numbers!).

In autumn, the Bridge Project restarted their monthly visits. An eager crew of students and helpers have thrown themselves into tasks such as tree planting, raking off cut reeds, clearing paths of any obstructing branches and brambles, and laying down shreddings to make for easier walking.

Creation care

A lot of progress has been made on improving habitats, particularly by using dipwell surveillance (to measure the water table), and by protecting riverbanks from erosion through the re-rooting young trees. The foot drains and silt traps were dug out to maintain control of water movement and levels, and vegetation was cleared from ponds to improve dragonfly habitat. More sections of blackthorn have been laid. To restore flower-rich grasslands the regular work parties have been mowing and removing cuttings. Willow stands were coppiced to create dense structure whilst allowing light in to increase numbers of flowering plants. The commitment, good humour and hard work of the volunteers who come each week to do practical conservation work inspires hope of what can be achieved when working together.

Home education and local school visits have continued. One memorable November day, Andy Jowitt, volunteer community engagement officer, was explaining that an old, disused bird box was specifically for a barn owl although it had been many years since this bird species had used it. In 2021 kestrels successfully bred three young there, and for most of 2022, the only activity it saw were squirrels. Then suddenly out of it, over the heads of Andy and the group of schoolchildren, flew a barn owl: large, white and silent across the nearby pond. Hopefully next spring the barn owl box will fulfill its named purpose!



STORIES OF HOPE

T25: Grassland, native wildflowers, bees

Hazelnut Community Farm

Rev John White

All about the partner

Hazelnut Community Farm is a small community farm near Bristol with an acre of land. Inspired by permaculture principles, they aim to create natural spaces of peace where the land and its creatures can flourish and to give away at least 50% of the food they grow.

Creation care

In June 2022, a fantastic Community Farm Open Day was held, partnering with the local Hong Kong Mingle Group who run a cafe. The 500 or so people who came to share together comprised an equal mix of those newly settled from Hong Kong and local residents, and activities included an inspiring talk by a gardener from London who has resettled here from Hong Kong.

The team and volunteers created a herb spiral using permaculture principles, with free bricks upcycled and reused from a nearby chimney project. A microclimate was formed through the spiral in the garden, with lots of pollinator-friendly plants as well as herbs helping to improve insect populations.

Lots of cooking has been done around the fire as a community, using fruit and vegetables grown on site – for example, corn, soup, apple bakes. This is a great way to show the joys of working the land to those who come.

By the end of the year, the team had trained almost 50 people in how to start their own growing projects. There was one online conference with 250 people, looking at the concept of Sustaining Church and how to combine eco theology and hands-on practical action. One of Hazelnut Community Farm's aims is to work with nature in preparation, rather than prevention. In addition, the 'Growing Network', a supportive network and a group of friends who share stories, skills and resources, has grown to consist of 25 different groups. The team at Hazelnut have connected with communities who want to start, or have started, faith-based community growing projects or nature-based worshipping communities.



STORIES OF HOPE

Launched in March. T25: Woodland, farmland & garden birds, house martin

Heatree Activity Centre

Simon Plumley

All about the partner

Heatree Activity Centre is a Christian residential outdoor centre, situated within Dartmoor National Park in south-west England. The land covers 350 acres of woodland, grassland, hedgerows and freshwater habitats including a stream, a few ponds and areas of wetland.

Creation care

2022 was very much the year which saw the beginning of formalising the links between the wider estate and the way the land has been used with the activity groups. This journey is very exciting, and it has been great to talk through ideas with A Rocha UK and other Partners in Action of the directions in which to go.

A management plan for their heathland areas has been written, focusing on the use of conservation grazing and how best to manage the bracken and gorse invasions. The woodland has received a lot of attention, with a consultant developing a management plan, concentrating on native regenerative woodland. However, that did not include conifers or fir trees, so the team have been considering whether to remove the remaining conifer plantation areas.

Last year, some house martin boxes were put up. This year, three nests were used: one built by the house martin and two artificial. Young birds were successfully fledged from all nests and have been noted on iRecord.

Finally, many children and other guests have come on site, encountered nature and enjoyed the wild spaces. A number of times the team have heard children express a comment when walking around the estate or looking at the view and saying, 'Wow, that's amazing!'



STORIES OF HOPE

T25: Grassland, hedgerows, freshwater, woodland, native wildflowers, farmland & garden birds, bees, bats, butterflies (Duke of Burgundy), macro moths, grassland fungi, house martin, spotted flycatcher, English oak

Hilfield Friary

Richard Thornbury, Brother Hugh

All about the partner

Hilfield Friary is an intentional community of Franciscan brothers and lay community of all ages, committed to sharing in the Friary's life and work. It is set in 50 acres of Dorset countryside of grassland, woodland and meadows.

Creation care

In May, over 30 people took part in a Nature Bioblitz: many different species were inventoried, demonstrating a very healthy ecosystem. There were too many fly orchids to count – very good news for a rare flower – while the high quality of dung fauna is 'a testament to good grazing management'.

A new venture, 'Making Connections: Nature, Hilfield and each other', gave local high school students the opportunity to enhance their well-being through wonder and curiosity in nature.

An A Rocha UK 'Act For Nature' event included training on hedges, shrubs, an autumn nature walk, tree planting, and a talk on the work of A Rocha UK, campaigning, and how to speak up for nature.

An Advent Quiet Day featured reflections on the climate and natural environment. Participants and others planted fruit trees, re-establishing an ancient orchard. The trees were heritage varieties (some one-of-a-kind) – mainly ancient varieties of apple trees, as encouraged by Natural England.

The wet woodland has been thinned, trying to slow the rushing of water into the River Piddle, which ends up in the Bristol Channel. Professionals were pulling out trees at 45 degrees, and using horses!

The plans for creatively restoring the Secret Garden are proceeding well. One part of this is to create a devotional walk through the garden, following resurrection themes.

Cattle have been grazing around the trees in many areas. A hedge was laid and a contractor put in a fence on both sides, so animals can't get to it from either side. The management of the wildflower meadow with a significant number of orchids and other beautiful plants has continued, along with maintenance to support other orchids around the pasture. A few new volunteers have joined the team, including a Ghanaian from a cocoa farming business and an Argentinian with a degree in horticulture, who have been growing a wide range of species on site. Perhaps most excitingly in the last few months of 2022, the team and volunteers have dug some new ponds where, within a few short weeks, frogs have already appeared!



STORIES OF HOPE

T25: Grassland, freshwater, native wildflowers, macro moths, English oak, hedgehog

Hugh's Meadow Nature Reserve

Bertie Stirling

All about the partner

Hugh's Meadow Nature Reserve is a seven-acre site of lowland hay meadow/rush pasture, a rare and declining habitat in Ballyclare, Northern Ireland. It is one of the best examples of wildflower-rich meadow in the province.

Creation care

An Act for Nature event in September attracted many local people, including an MP who was 'bowled over by the amount of beauty and diversity of the nature on site'. Family-friendly up-close nature activities encouraged and inspired, while training was available to churches and individuals on specific conservation techniques.

In autumn an A Rocha UK Wildlife Art Competition was held at a few local schools, with students engaging with nature through art and using their creative skills (see photo).

During the first full year as a Partner in Action, the focus has been on the grassland, woodland and wetland areas. There are exciting plans for creating new wetland areas, wild play, educational trails and eventually, an outdoor classroom to be able to engage the local community, schools and churches in nature conservation.

After identifying a lack of wetland areas, some spaces were chosen and prepared to become large ponds early in 2022. A digger was used to create one in the heart of the lowland wildflower meadow where the ground was already damp, with clay in the soil. This set-up with a pond in the centre of a meadow is ideal for nature to thrive: within weeks of creating the pond, dragonflies and damselflies moved in! By summer, it was clear that this is also a wonderful area for butterflies and moths, and there have been some really interesting bird sightings.

The wildflower meadow already has great diversity and its management has continued through the year.

Deciduous tree mixes of native trees have been sown around the edges of the woodland to increase and diversify the woodland habitat area.

Finally a nest-box programme has started, to assist the recovery of woodland bird species.



STORIES OF HOPE

Launched in April. T25: hedgerows, freshwater, woodland, dragonflies & damselflies, butterflies, spotted flycatcher,

Knowlands Farm

Nick and Harriet Lear

All about the partner

Knowlands Farm has 300 acres in Buckinghamshire, farmed with nature in mind. There are meadows, arable farmland, a few ponds (wetland), hedgerows and a woodland of 75 acres which includes old hornbeam, oak and mixed coppice.

Creation care

This year plans for another pond have started to get traction. An encouraging approach from the [Newt Conservation Partnership](#) offered support for creating and restoring ponds, and they have subsequently advised and paid for the creation of a new pond in the woodland clearing, as well as clearing out and deepening another pond.

Over the last few years, local marsh tit numbers have declined. Knowlands is now involved in a nest box project for the species to aid local recovery. Five marsh tit nest boxes were made, using oak grown and planked on the farm, and installed on site. In addition, several house martin boxes were bought and installed.

Excitingly this year, a pair of spotted flycatchers bred on land adjacent to the farm and some passed through in the autumn. One spotted flycatcher box has been created and put in place; more will follow.

It was encouraging to see bullfinch in the woods the morning before coming to the PIA retreat! Other new sightings for this year were goshawk and willow emerald damselfly.



STORIES OF HOPE

T25: Woodland, freshwater, macro moths, butterflies (orange tip), common toad

Lea Brook Valley

Norman Crowson, Wendy Temple

All about the partner

Lea Brook Valley (LBV) in the heart of Dronfield, near Sheffield, is a 20-acre green corridor in a built-up area. It consists of woodland and grassland with a few large balance ponds, which aim to reduce the effects of surface water flooding.

Creation care

Regular workdays in the valley have resumed in 2022 and new volunteers have been recruited from the community to join the pre-Covid Green Team.

A memorial seat was installed for one of LBV's founders, Tony Marron, with a dedication service giving thanks for Tony's vision and inspiration. The bench was placed out in the open with a view of the pond, giving more opportunity to stop and enjoy the peace and appreciate the nature people would previously walk past. In the same area, two rowan trees were planted to commemorate Queen Elizabeth's Platinum Jubilee.

Dronfield Baptist Church hosted a Green Christian Roadshow with a guided valley walk. Sessions on 'Joy in Enough' and 'The Green Christian Way of Life' explored how to build a just economy, while being mindful of how it impacts on our fragile earth.

During the course of 2022, a new woodland education area for outdoor learning has been created, for local schools or other groups to use to help with mindfulness and education. A local organisation installed the seats, and new trees and hedging were planted to form a natural barrier from the main pathway, as well as providing additional habitat for wildlife.

Work began on a new Wildlife Garden, intended to demonstrate to the wider community how to encourage wildlife in their own gardens. Hedging, shrubs, spring bulbs and a few fruit trees, including crab apples, were planted. A boggy area was also prepared by installing a pond-liner as a membrane to reduce water loss the weeds.

The non-native poplar trees planted some 40 years ago to provide a screen from the nearby bypass have been felled in order to allow the 1,000 native trees, planted a few years ago by a large group from the community, to flourish.



STORIES OF HOPE

T25: Woodland, native wildflowers, bats, lesser hoeseshoe bat, house martin, English oak

Lee Abbey

Gordon Crowther, Gordon Lee

All about the partner

Lee Abbey is home to a Christian community that hosts retreats, holidays and conferences on an estate on the dramatic North Devon coast. The Lee Abbey estate covers 280 acres and is part of an SSSI, with its coastal woodland, heathland and pasture habitats, and significant geology and ecology.

Creation care

An A Rocha UK conference was held at Lee Abbey in summer 2022, called 'Living simply to simply live'. The aim was to have an interactive week with the guests looking at how to reconnect with seasons, soil, food and nature, in a time of incredible change for the planet. In addition, participants explored how to bring change to the relationships between land, faith and relationships with each other.

This year there has been continued management of the wildflower meadow sites along the verges and all along the road through the estate; part of the north lawn was also permanently converted to meadow a few years ago. Furthermore, there have been discussions around how to expand the wildflower meadow areas in the coming year.

A number of work parties were held throughout the year, where volunteers helped vital conservation efforts.

In addition, a lot of woodland management took place, resulting in the first ever report of nightingale! It is unlikely that it bred in 2022, but male nightingale were on site for over a week. It will be fascinating to see if they hold territory next year.

In the summer, the team realised a major drought was coming, meaning that house martins would be struggling to find sources of wet mud. Each nest consists of over 1,000 individual drops of mud mixed with the bird's saliva. In an average year, significant areas of muddy puddles are within easy reach of nesting areas at Lee Abbey, but this year they had all dried up. The team filled upturned bin lids with a mixture of mud (from the farm) and water to provide this vital nest-building resource. Their quick thinking and creativity meant that the house martins had a typical breeding season with around 20 or more occupied nests. A Rocha UK provided several additional artificial nests, which were also successfully used.



STORIES OF HOPE

Launched in September. T25: TBC

Lichfield Cathedral

David Primrose. Photos: Emma Cottam.

All about the partner

Lichfield Cathedral is the only medieval three-spired cathedral in the UK, and is situated in the centre of an acre of land. Becoming a Partner in Action has focused the cathedral community's thinking around biodiversity and they have adopted an ethical and sustainable framework to guide their policies and practices as they care for God's creation.

Creation care

The cathedral was host for the premiere of a film called All Creation Waits – a dance theatre performance of the story of St Francis and St Clare in the context of climate change.

A Re>Dress evening was held, focusing on the clothing industry and how the core of sustainability is repairing clothes. The wider themes of exploitation and excessive consumerism were explored, followed by thought-provoking discussion – a most enjoyable time, with a serious edge.

A three-year management plan was written for the cathedral in 2022. One aspect was to look at the grass which had been subject to severe short mowing for decades, specifically in two areas. In one corner, some straightforward rewilding was advised. Another strip of grass was left unmown until early August and showed some goodness, convincing people to put aside a larger area for meadow.

The flower beds have been improved, introducing species which would have been familiar to mediaeval pilgrims and/or have religious connections. Behind a new statue of the cathedral's patron saint, lots of spring bulbs (some non-native) were planted.

Creating new unmown areas has benefitted wildlife and inspired the community.

Over 50 pupils from Lichfield Cathedral School monitored flora and fauna during the Churches Count on Nature survey, unearthing the biodiversity surrounding the cathedral. They discovered over 100 different species, including the amazing blue mint beetle, black medic (plant) and forest cuckoo bumblebee.



STORIES OF HOPE

Launched in July. T25: TBC

Malshanger Estate

Jo Coleman

All about the partner

Malshanger Estate is a 1,000-acre estate in Surrey which has a range of habitats: a working farm, woodland and grassland; recently, a large wildflower meadow has been created.

Creation care

This year new eco accommodation pods have been built for guests to stay in and be immediately immersed in wild nature as they step outside. To achieve this, the new wildflower meadow around these pods had already been under development, using local wildflower seeds. A beautiful array of flowers now exists, including a profusion of cornflowers and poppies. Looking out of the eco pods now, it is possible to see several incredible acres of really intensive wildflowers, a wonderful sea of blue, from right outside the door.

The creation of new wildflower areas is beneficial for many pollinating insects that use the estate and surrounding farms.

The team has worked on a management plan to continue working on their chosen T25 species and habitats: grasslands, native wildflowers, woodland and garden birds, and bees.



STORIES OF HOPE

T25: Grassland, woodland, amphibians, butterflies, moths, bees, common swift, common toad

Monkton Combe

Rachel Glasgow, Sarah Sidders, Abigail Button

All about the partner

Monkton Combe is a preparatory and senior residential school near Bath set in almost 250 acres of lowland meadow, mixed woodland, hedgerows, food-growing areas, a river valley and parkland.

Creation care

Throughout the week all pupils take part in outdoor enrichment activities. At the prep school this 'Adventure Education' includes helping out on the farm, planting seedlings in the allotments, feeding the goats and sheep, making fires in the forest or building bridges over the streams. The 'Wild Monkton' enrichment time for the older pupils involves helping with conservation projects or simply helping them connect with and enjoy nature, such as building geodomes, clearing streams, making bark chip paths, planting bulbs, making compost piles, or walks. This year's conservation projects included developing a new large wildflower bank, a bog, and putting up bat and tawny owl boxes.

In October there was a 'Wild Monkton' Saturday event, where the prep school pupils took part in nature-based activities, including tree measuring and leaf identification in the woods, forest artwork, obstacle courses, and making bird and bug boxes. The day was full of creativity and learning about nature, and was highly enjoyed by both staff and students. 'I enjoyed it when we made bird houses because it gave me a warm feeling that I was helping the birds and was enjoying it with my friends,' said one pupil.

A Sustainability & Wellbeing Day has been planned for early 2023. It will involve gardening, along with other activities exploring themes such as sustainable fashion, food production, climate politics, carbon footprints and environmental stewardship. The main aim is to educate the pupils on the current environmental challenges, and what efforts are already being made to combat them.

The population of swifts and house martins at Monkton Combe has been doing well this year. A survey in July revealed that there are around 28 house martin nests on site, and seven out of the eight artificial boxes set up around school buildings are occupied. This is notable, and makes this possibly the biggest colony in the local area. Large screaming parties of swifts were also observed, and four out of seven artificial nests were occupied.



STORIES OF HOPE

Launched in November. T25: woodland, bees, spotted flycatcher

Nether Springs – Northumbria Community

Catherine Askew

All about the partner

Nether Springs in Northumberland is a conference and retreat centre as well as the Mother House of the wider dispersed Northumbria Community. Its two and a half acres comprise grassland and woodland areas, formal gardens including a beautiful walled garden with a vegetable-growing area, and a prayer labyrinth.

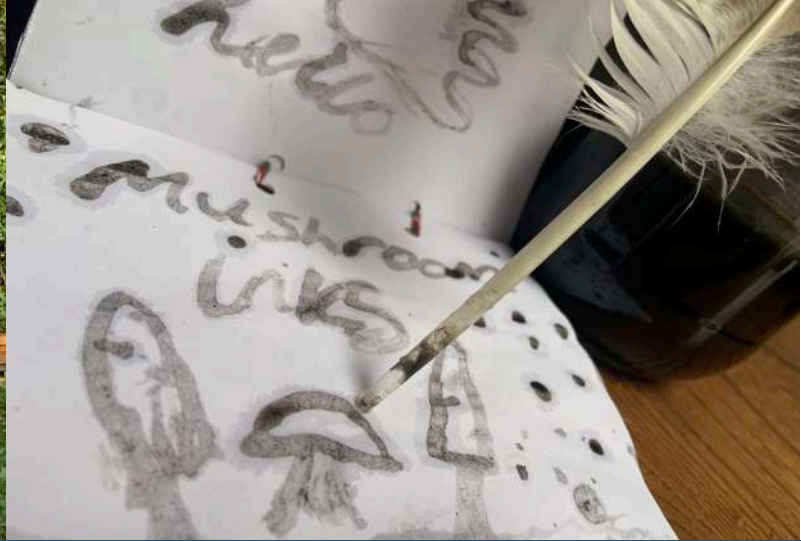
Creation care

The team are keen to make their spaces amazing for nature and people, and for people to connect with nature in new ways.

The courtyard right in the middle of the building is a large area of gravel surrounded by bedrooms and enhanced with a few simple pot plants. In spring it was identified that this sun-trapping area was ripe for improvement. A plan was made to put in a mini-pond, herb beds, different plants and planting routines to encourage different insects, as well as some seating. This enclosed space will hopefully become ideal for pollinating insects and birds, and for people to enjoy nature and to meditate and reflect.

Further ideas are to have beehives, and to look at providing bird boxes for house martin, swift and spotted flycatcher. Spotted flycatcher numbers have plummeted over the last decade in the north-east and beyond, but they are still currently present nearby, and the hope is that the new spotted flycatcher boxes placed in the Nether Springs woodland will attract them to nest in spring 2023.

The dispersed Northumbria Community members around the UK will also, over time, be encouraged to take action for nature wherever they are, and to be engaged in helping Target 25 species.



STORIES OF HOPE

Launched in March. T25: Grassland, grassland fungi, house martin

Nettle Hill

Abigail Lynch

All about the partner

Nettle Hill is a residential conference and retreat centre in Warwickshire with a mixture of grassland and woodland habitats over seven acres. It is pleasing to be on a journey with like-minded and hearted people, endeavouring to restore the earth and reveal God in the everyday.

Creation care

The team enjoyed being able to take part in the St Madoc Bioblitz this June and are looking forward to planning one on their own site in 2023.

During the last year, the focus has been on the seven acres of grassland which had been heavily mowed due to the on-site wedding business. The wish was to now allow larger areas of rewilding and wildflower meadow to develop, to help wildlife and to encourage the children who use the fields as part of their forest school journey to look after the grass areas. They have enjoyed playing in the long grass and seeing more butterflies, insects and other wildlife. This has also had a beneficial impact on the beehives on site: three healthy hives have been seen, an increase from two in 2021.

In the last few months of the year, the team had great fun recording fungi and learning together with the children at the forest school about the different types of fungi on site. Other enjoyable activities with the students included making ink from the shaggy ink cap fungi on site, and collecting feathers for quills to draw with in journals the young people had made.

A Rocha UK provided house martin nest boxes which have been put up.

The journey with iRecord has just started and is already showing how this will help to create a great picture of the site and how to take better care of the nature here.



STORIES OF HOPE

Launched in March. T25: woodland, coastal habitats, native wildflowers, small mammals, bees, house martin, English oak

Othona Community – Bradwell

Richard Sanders

All about the partner

Othona Community – Bradwell is an open and inclusive Christian community with a centre and 29 acres at Bradwell-on-Sea on the quiet coast of Essex. Most of the environment is man-made, as the site is behind the sea wall and the land was originally part of the salt marsh.

Creation care

In May, Othona hosted the Essex Green Week in collaboration with Trustlinks, a Southend mental health and environmental charity. Over 150 people came together to hear speakers from A Rocha UK, Operation Noah, Tearfund, Green Christian and many more. There were art and conservation workshops, five bands including folk musicians, a barn dance band, a gospel choir and mushroom music! It was a great green-themed weekend with lots of environmentally minded people from across Essex, who came together to enjoy a time of learning, community, great vegetarian food and a chance to network.

The team recently took over management of 11 acres of land previously used for intensive arable farming, and the conversion of about five acres of this land into a wildflower-rich grassland for camping and community use has begun. In 2021, grasses and a few wildflowers were sown. In spring 2022, after collecting some seeds from across the site, the bulk of these five acres was sown with wildflower seeds. The seeds have been successful so far and already wild parsnips and other species can be seen growing! A dead hedge has been started, to create a boundary between the new land and the adjacent intensively farmed land.

One T25 focus is small mammals. Apple cores left on the ground this year have disappeared. This suggests a family of water voles in the pond, and they were occasionally seen. In addition, there has been an increase in field voles this year due to changing the arable field into more of a meadow. Consequently a kestrel has made Othona its winter territory and a barn owl was roosting frequently. Stoats and weasels are also now regularly seen, indicating good numbers of small mammals.



STORIES OF HOPE

T25: grassland, hedgerows, farmland & garden birds, macro moths, bees, bats, house martin

Ringsfield Hall

David Townsend

All about the partner

Ringsfield Hall is a woodland youth activity and retreat centre in Norfolk with 15 acres of land comprising mixed woodland and ponds, with managed grassland and some meadow regeneration.

Creation care

Many young people come from across the UK to enjoy the centre, its land and activities throughout the year. There is a regular toddler and family group called Muddy Puddles who enjoy lots of activities and adventures on site. The team helped the children make homes for our animal friends, cook scrambled eggs, build Star Wars lightsabers, and much more!

A Home Ed family group and various school groups also enjoy the land. Activities included fire lighting, hammock tricks, pizza toastie, shelter building, clay creations, Nordic weaving and much more. In addition, the team helped the young people gain their John Muir Discovery Award, which encouraged awareness of, and responsibility for, the natural environment.

Along the boundary of the meadow/grassland and the neighbouring farmland, new hedgerows have been planted with saplings provided by The Woodland Trust. Alongside this, the laying of portions of existing hedgerows has begun, with a view to regenerating and thickening these areas.

In the woodland, a management cycle has restarted in areas of past coppiced woodland. Some team members spent a very useful day with the Suffolk Wildlife Trust learning about woodland management. In addition, the woodland and trees were professionally surveyed for both ID purposes and for tree health.

Around other areas of the site, wildflower seed has been sown, including into some grassland areas. Several new native trees were planted into a few areas of the parkland, some of which were new species not present elsewhere in the grounds. The grass was mown at varying heights and times of the year, to diversify and allow insects more habitat and feeding opportunities. This is a continuation from the practice in previous years. Furthermore, the garden areas continued to be maintained. Any planting here was bee-friendly as there is currently one hive on site, the management of which also continued.

Recently a barn owl visited (the first for a number of years) and also tawny owls were seen.



STORIES OF HOPE

T25: Hedgerows, woodland, native wildflowers, butterflies, bees, bats, small mammals, common oak, hedgehog

St Edward's School

Stephan Whelan

All about the partner

St Edward's School in Hampshire is a specialist school with 187 acres of extensive semi-improved grassland, wildflower meadows, replanted woodland, mature woodland, ponds and hedgerows.

Creation care

Over 50 blackthorn saplings were planted this year in a hedgerow on the southern aspect of the estate, to supplement and extend a well-established blackthorn hedgerow. This is to create a valuable habitat for various species of butterfly at risk in this part of Hampshire.

In the Walled Garden, over 150 hedgerow saplings were planted to create a hedge in the shape of a cross. Species include: hawthorn, blackthorn, hazel, dog-rose, maple, wild cherry, beech and elder. Not only are these designed to flower in different colours at different times of the year, they will also provide valuable habitat for insects. These insects will in turn provide food for the birds, hopefully attracted to the 33 bird boxes built and installed by the Religious Education Department in 2022.

Across a meadow in the south, over 1,000 trees were planted. Over 400 of them were protected with tall tubex tree-guards, to enable an extensive reforestation of this area to take hold.

There are plans to transform over 30 hectares into lowland woodland pasture, for which work has just started. This will provide a varied habitat for invertebrates amongst undisturbed standing and fallen deadwood alongside traditional grazing.

Two areas of the grounds have been identified for a project to restore species-rich grassland. This will increase the number and spread of important plant species as well as encouraging bumblebees, butterflies, birds and bats into the area. 12 bat boxes were put up around these grasslands and the Walled Garden; the hope is that the work done in these areas will provide a valuable food source.

The initial design stage has begun for a Franciscan labyrinth in one part of the Walled Garden. This will provide a valuable therapeutic resource for pupils and staff. It will be designed to help pupils self-regulate their emotional state and will give staff an area within which they too can find tranquillity.



STORIES OF HOPE

T25: Wetland, grassland, native wildflowers, dragonflies & damselflies, house martin, common toad

St Madoc Activity Centre

Heather and Rob Lyne

All about the partner

St Madoc Activity Centre is based on the coast of the Gower Peninsula, Britain's first AONB. The team host groups in bunkhouse style accommodation to engage with nature through our woodland, beach, sea view and idyllic chapel. Across spring to autumn, they provide youth adventure weeks for local (and further afield) schools and youth groups.

Creation care

There were two key events in 2022 – both done in partnership with A Rocha UK. In June, a bioblitz was carried out, surveying marine life, birds, bats, moths, butterflies, other invertebrates and plants. Over 15 experts came together to spend a few days unearthing the large number of species who use this coastal site and its varied habitats. An excellent bioblitz report was written and the team look forward to implementing some of the recommendations, particularly those concerning bird and bat boxes, when schoolchildren come back in 2023.

An Act for Nature Day in autumn included an explorative nature walk with knowledgeable ecologist, Peter Sturgess, creative nature-themed activities and talks from the St Madoc's manager and A Rocha UK staff on how everyone can speak up for nature through campaigning, amongst other things. It was an inspiring time and God blessed attendees with beautiful weather and seeing some dragonfly larvae.

In March, over 400 trees of different species were planted, but unfortunately, many did not survive due to the 2022 drought. The plan is to plant more next year and to protect them with mulch.

A group of volunteers carried out some pond clearing, in preparation for replacing the rotten jetty in 2023. In addition, a good amount of bramble was cleared from the old quarry. In springtime, a local farm's sheep grazed on the top fields. Then in the autumn, a number of cattle were moved to graze there.

As always, many young people enjoy their time here as they are encouraged to be in the beauty of nature, particularly in the woodland, across the sand dunes and on the large sandy beach. Pond dipping continues to be a highlight. The young people especially enjoyed meeting the two pigs who joined the family in February. The ducks and chickens were looked after and a source of joy.



STORIES OF HOPE

T25: Woodland, freshwater, hedgerows, grassland, native wildflowers, house martin, common swift, hedgehog

Scargill House

Phil Stone

All about the partner

Scargill House is set in a 90-acre estate in the spectacular Yorkshire Dales. It is home to a Christian community that hosts people for holidays, conferences and retreats, and whose priority is to make the estate's grassland, woodland, fresh water and hedgerows a welcoming place for plants and animals as well as people.

Creation care

Back in May 2021, A Rocha UK helped create a new freshwater habitat – a pond and sensory garden, behind the chapel. This is an ongoing project in which water plants were planted in the pond itself in 2022, along with other plants at the water's edge, so that small mammals can drink unseen by predators. Some fruit trees were planted, while a stumpery and raised beds were built in the surrounding garden. In addition, one of the boundaries of the area has been marked by a dead hedge. Excitingly, as the pond has developed, frogs and newts have moved in!

In August, the annual butterfly survey was carried out, recording a number (107) of Scotch Argus (*Erebia aethiops*) butterflies on the estate. Scargill is one of very few sites in England where this species is found. Since it is a privilege to live alongside this species, there has been continuous management of the land to encourage these butterflies to stay and flourish here.

Access to the woodlands has increased through the creation of new paths for people to wander, wonder and enjoy the natural world. Log piles have been made in the woodland, and these are shelters for insects, amphibians and small mammals.

As the meadows continue to improve under conservation management, an increase in wildflowers is providing food for butterflies and other pollinating insect species.

Moreover, a sensory garden has started to take shape this year on a patch of land between two different woodlands.

This is a small flavour of the considerable variety of nature and activity which the team are fortunate enough to manage and enjoy on the estate.



STORIES OF HOPE

T25: Grassland, native wildflowers, bees, house martin, common swift

Southwell Minster

Paul Rattigan, Hugh Middleton

All about the partner

Southwell Minster in Nottinghamshire is The Cathedral and Parish Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and is surrounded by 20 acres of gardens, grassland, woodland and wild meadow. The Archbishop's Palace Gardens have four distinct parts: a medieval herb parterre; a Tudor knot garden; a border planted in the style of Edwardian plantswoman Gertrude Jekyll; and wildlife areas including a winter border.

Creation care

Various events took place around the grounds of the Minster in 2022, including Family Fun Activities in the summer, a plant fair and Saints vs Monsters, along with the annual autumnal bulb planting.

In the Minster Yard, the soil appears species-rich with cowslips and ivy leaf toadflax, and a temporary wildflower rectangle has been sown which will help to increase plant diversity. In addition in 2022, within the Palace Garden, another wildflower area was created. It will be interesting to see what returns and how these two areas develop. The gardens also encourage wildlife through the inclusion of bird boxes, insect hotels and log piles.

A new outdoor learning space has been built in the garden for visitors to sit out and enjoy nature. 'The Octagon' was inspired by the eight-sided Chapter House and the Early English arches in the Minster.

In a newly opened area of the paddock, a labyrinth was formed which leads to a hidden bench found amongst the wildflowers and poppies.

Through support from the local community, a cluster of bird boxes were installed on Trebeck Hall, just beyond the west end of the Minster. In response to an article in the local community newspaper publicising and offering a contribution towards the cost, members of Green Southwell placed two swift boxes, members of the Minster community a house martin box, and a local farmer, two twin house martin boxes.

Other action for nature includes new composting bays, management of the woodland areas to tackle invasive ivy, and new plans being put in place to attract more bird species to the garden areas.



STORIES OF HOPE

T25: Freshwater, grassland fungi, bullfinch

Stampwell Farm

Frog Orr-Ewing

All about the partner

Stampwell Farm was bought by Frog Orr-Ewing and his wife Amy in 2012 to restore the land and its building for community use. Set in 70 acres of land in Buckinghamshire including woodland, hedgerows, meadows, ponds and orchards, they carry out 'community farming for the next generation'.

Creation care

Churches from across the UK come and visit regularly and enjoy all Stampwell Farm has to offer. However, the community events this year centred around engagement with a group of Romanian churches from nearby, inner city areas and abroad. There were several Christian family-fun-day events spread over several weekends, attracting more than 1,000 people in total. The events involved food, music and worship; activities were centred around farm-based activities, using the outdoor space to develop positive parent-child relationships outdoors and including a slack-line assault course, carpentry and building Archimedes bridges. There will be four similar day festivals for urban young people in 2023.

Another development this year has been the positive relationships with neighbouring groups: the National Farmers' Union, those working on the trees on the nearby train-line (who found 110 badger sets on the land adjoining the farm!), and in particular the Buckinghamshire Fungus Group. The latter's annual visit in November recorded 250 varieties of fungi in three hours, including some never-seen-before either in the county or in England.

A main conservation focus this year was around restoring a second pond (the first one was restored the previous year), that was so densely covered it has been hidden from direct sunlight for at least three years. With the help of a mini-digger, a lot of hard clearance work and the drought allowing greater access, it was possible to reach but not disturb the clay bottom. Around the edge of the pond, the old hazel trees were pollarded, dry hedging was added, and a third of the circumference left in shade. Subsequently during winter, the pond refilled, and new aquatic species for the site were observed.

There were breeding hobbies and kestrels this year, as well as a lot more sparrowhawks seen. Finally, despite not creating any skylark refuges, they nested on the meadow anyway. Three chicks were discovered in the short grass behind where the sheep strip-grazed, which feels like a real success for farming alongside nature.



STORIES OF HOPE

T25: Freshwater (ponds), butterflies (Duke of Burgundy), macro moths

Steyping Downland Scheme

Matthew Thomas

All about the partner

The Steyping Downland Scheme (SDS) began when the Goring family set aside 165 acres of the Wiston Estate in the South Downs National Park, West Sussex, for the benefit of the community, the land and its wildlife. The site is made up of open grassland, a stream, ponds and mixed woodland.

Creation care

Various nature events took place in 2022, including a Dawn Chorus Walk, a 'Mothy Breakfast', a summer Bushcraft Day for 8-14 year olds and a Bat Safari. These events attracted a range of families and individuals who thoroughly enjoyed learning more about nature and seeing creatures up close.

Each year, hundreds of pupils from the local schools get involved in conservation work and environmental education on site.

In 2022, vital wildlife restoration work was carried out on the Old Chalk Millpond to enhance the habitat for wildlife. This included felling trees, remodelling a bank, mending leaks and removing silt. A traditional fence was also put up around the pond, to guide dogs towards a dedicated 'dog splash' area. Hopefully this will result in clear, undisturbed water full of aquatic vegetation. The pond has been filling up fast and already looks beautifully clear, with plants and wildlife returning.

The summer heatwave saw the first recorded wildfire, which damaged a boundary fence and burnt some important habitat for the rare grayling butterfly. However, within weeks, feeding spotted and pied flycatchers were seen in good numbers. These migrant birds seemed to be taking advantage of the easy food supply as insects were easier to spot, using perching and vantage points over the cleared area. Grayling butterflies soon reappeared too, attracted by the open, stony habitat created by the fire.

A new resident barn owl was warmly welcomed after its owl nest box was put up in June. It has been a good year to spot the hummingbird hawk moth, pictured here feeding on scabious. Moreover, some baby 'cootlings' arrived on the Lower Pond! Finally, in partnership with Wakehurst Place Kew, the team have been working to reintroduce a very rare plant called 'Starfruit', which has been extinct in Sussex for decades.



STORIES OF HOPE

Launched in July. T25: Grassland, native wildflowers, farmland, garden birds, bats, small mammals, house martin, red squirrel, common oak

SU – Alltnacriche

Hannah Steeds

All about the partner

SU – Alltnacriche, part of Scripture Union Scotland is located near Aviemore in the Cairngorms National Park, offering outdoor activities and residential stays, primarily for young people. It has 17 acres of mixed woodland (including hanging ash, beech, sessile oak), Caledonian forest, grassland, upper meadows and freshwater habitats (a river).

Creation care

To celebrate the Partner in Action launch, Andy Lester and Regina Ebner helped run a youth camp with the team on the theme of 'Adventure in creation'. It was a week for 13–16 year olds to have fun whilst exploring God's amazing creation, noting that life and faith are both an adventurous journey. They engaged with wildlife through various activities including nature walks around the site and local loch, observing orchids, birds etc. A particular highlight was from the two nights of moth trapping, where the young people helped set up and collect from the traps. In addition, Andy and Regina were able to share why God cares for creation and have good discussions with the young people.

The site provides a variety of habitats and is already fantastic for a variety of upland wildlife species including red squirrel, pine marten, crested tit and crossbill. Some time ago, wild cat was on site, but it has not been seen in recent years.

The native mixed woodland is of good quality, and the wildflower meadow has been blooming. The place has several areas of unmown grass to encourage native wildlife, with wildflower field margins running all the way up the drive. There is a wide range of native upland flowers and therefore a good diversity of pollinating insects, including butterflies, moths and solitary bees.

It was fantastic to see house martin breeding in summer from at least two nests, with five young successfully fledged.

The team at Alltnacriche is passionate about giving young people experience in outdoor adventures, exploring and learning about the complexities of the natural world while developing their Christian faith. It is exciting to begin walking this exciting journey together.



STORIES OF HOPE

T25: Grassland, freshwater, native wildflowers, butterflies, amphibians, house martin, red squirrel

SU – Lendrick Muir

Tim Forsythe

All about the partner

SU – Lendrick Muir, part of Scripture Union Scotland, is on 120 acres, about half of which is untamed grassland and woodland. Since becoming a Partner in Action in winter 2021, they have been seeking to increase the site's biodiversity, fulfilling the team's wish to 'do something more exciting than just "cutting the grass"' by developing the site's fantastic potential for wildlife.

Creation care

Work on a new meadow area has begun by digging up the rough grass and sowing yellow rattle (*Rhinanthus minor*) seed. Over the next year or two, there should be a greater range of plants, flowers, insects and butterflies in this area.

At the start of 2022, a lot of construction vehicles were on site to remove the two and a half acres of pine and larch trees damaged by Storm Arwen, and the opportunity was taken to extend and make a few changes to the lochan/wetland area. It has been made bigger and better than ever. The trees that were felled will be used for fence-posts and fuel for the biomass boiler. The team will replant the damaged area with native species.

The team have also successfully established a lot of wildflower areas on site.

Bird-box kits were created to be assembled by the school groups that visit – a popular activity with the pupils. The boxes have been put up around the site and hopefully in time they will become well visited!

Another initiative was to welcome outside groups to help plant trees. With some advice on the best locations and types of trees to plant, a volunteer group from a local business spent a day planting over 100 trees. A section of rhododendron was also cleared. A second group helped rip up more of the coarse grass and then sowed wildflower seed.

It has been great to see the site changing in a way that will encourage the flourishing of nature. The team wants to see the children and young people who visit experience the joy of being outside in God's creation: getting their hands dirty and taking part in his call to care for our world.



STORIES OF HOPE

Launched in October. T25: woodland, dragonflies & damselflies, butterflies, amphibians, red squirrel

The River Rectory

Sarah-Jayne Pomeroy

All about the partner

The River Rectory is a family smallholding owned and managed by the Pomeroy family (mum Sarah-Jayne, dad and seven children) in Northern Ireland near Omagh. The site is an incredible mixture of six acres of scrub woodland, orchards, food growing areas, hay meadows, small ponds and wet grassland.

Creation care

The family has an amazing vision to transform and impact all their land for nature, growing everything themselves and living off the land. The aim is to create a circular space, a holistic system – from the food they eat, to how to manage their water, to growing trees and wildflowers, as well as home-schooling and teaching the children how to do everything and how to do it properly.

This family, living differently, has a heart and passion for broken land and broken people, and wants to connect those two. Consequently, another aim is to help people who are struggling with the offer of living with them for some time if needed. Their vision is to welcome both nature and the broader community in a season of ecological crises. The family has therefore engaged with the local home-schooling and church communities.

Prior to becoming a Partner in Action, there had already been a significant amount of work on drainage and ground preparation, with a management scheme put in place for their wildflower meadows. In addition, there had been lots of work around fruit growing in the orchard.

Future plans include creating new wetland spaces, flashes and pond areas for amphibians. Another aim is to manage the woodland really well for woodland birds, which will involve putting up nest boxes where appropriate in the wood. Furthermore, red squirrel need a lot of help in Northern Ireland, so the family has been considering how to make sure their land provides the best landscape for this T25 species to thrive. There has also been some thinking about how the main house could benefit bats and house martins.

Sarah-Jayne Pomeroy recently gained her postgraduate certificate in wildlife and conservation management. She will help the family to plan a strategy for nature on the site in years to come.



STORIES OF HOPE

T25: TBC

The Rock Christian Fellowship

Delia Du Preez

All about the partner

The Rock Christian Fellowship on the South Atlantic island of St Helena is a church community keen to enjoy, protect and share God's creation with those around them.

Creation care

Throughout 2022, the team engaged with the church's young people, a local Brownie group and the wider congregation through various nature events. These usually involved walking through the Millennium Forest, with places to pause for Bible readings, prayer topics that the children could relate to, fun puzzles along with nature and prayer activities – all with the aim of learning more about God's glorious creation.

Early in the year, a special outdoor service was held to celebrate the Rock's first anniversary as a Partner in Action – outdoors in warm sunshine; despite the downpours the previous day and early on the Sunday morning! The service was different from usual: as well as sung worship, it included planting six indigenous trees – five gumwood and one ebony.

Most excitingly, towards the end of 2022, the team bought a building with a beautiful garden surrounding it. They are hoping to turn this land into an amazing place for people and nature. A Rocha UK will work with them to create spaces for wildlife and food-growing, as well as exploring what their Target 25 focus will be. The church community will carry out some recording activities, and there will be a focus on endemic plants including how to protect both them and the insects they support.

Many people have been connecting with The Rock Christian Fellowship and thanking God for the wonderful creation around them. To further develop this work, a creation fest has been planned for early 2023. This will be a week engaging the church and local families in creation care through a range of activities on their own new site.



STORIES OF HOPE

T25: Grassland, bats, hedgehog

Tinhay Retreats

Suzy and Rob Weston

All about the partner

Tinhay Retreats in Devon is a wild camping and retreat space comprising eight acres of grazed meadows, a river valley and floodplain, scrub woodland and hedgerows.

Creation care

The key events in 2022 centred around bats – encouraging local Scouts and schoolchildren, along with the campers on site, to look out for them. There was a lot of excitement as families found bats using the detectors and then learned more about these amazing creatures. More bat boxes were installed during the year and it has been great to see them being used. A professional overnight bat survey was carried out, which discovered there are an estimated nine different species using the site. This remarkable number included very good numbers of pipistrelles: for example, on one night, nine of this species were seen emerging from one building!

The wildflower meadow management has continued, providing a good source of food for the bats. The intention is to manage the wildflowers effectively by only using grazing, and this has gone well this year. The sheep have also grazed the hedgerows around the edges of the field, which has been really successful in helping the bat population to grow.

After several years of trying, yellow rattle has finally appeared in the meadow. Two lots of yellow rattle seed were sown as test patches during 2021, only one of which germinated and flowered really successfully. Learning the lesson from the successful patch, it would seem that the seed needs to be sown on a bare patch of soil but next to grass because rattle is a parasitic plant.

More gentle wetland management has been carried out. Dormouse tubes were added, to assess their presence in the woodland and hedgerows. In addition, there has been perseverance in the creation of 'no-dig' beds for fruit and veg on the allotment this year. It is unclear how to prevent big weeds from pushing through, but the improved condition of the soil on the one trial bed from the previous year is very encouraging.

There has been an increase in the variety of birds visiting this year, including black redstart, greenfinch, fieldfare, sparrowhawk and goldcrest. Another exciting sighting was a ruby-tailed wasp.



STORIES OF HOPE

T25: Grassland, native wildflowers, bees, amphibians, small mammals, dragonflies & damselflies, common toad

Wolf Fields Nature Reserve

Kailean Khongsai / Andrew Samuel

All about the partner

Wolf Field is A Rocha UK's urban community nature reserve in Southall, West London. It covers three acres and has an orchard, community allotment, beehives, braille and audio interpretation, sensory garden, meadow, art installation area, prayer labyrinth, ponds and a story-telling area for children.

Creation care

During 2022, there was a real focus around community conservation to re-engage with the local community and local churches after the pandemic. One of the ways this was achieved was through the creation in summer of a new wildflower prayer labyrinth, which is impressively large for this small site. The churches who helped create it wanted to connect people's mental health, spiritual health and nature recovery. This has therefore been the theme while managing the area, to really engage people who walk round the labyrinth. 'A mental health group from Southall were among the first to use it.

Despite there being no Reserve Manager for the last four months of the year, there were many events and visiting groups: nearly 400 people used the site for various nature activities, including GP referrals.

Another focus was around water conservation, particularly in anticipation of the summer drought. The team tried new mulching techniques for the fruit-growing areas, plus ways of shading the pond area, to retain as much moisture as possible during the extreme drought periods. These interventions meant that the whole site did not completely dry out. This meant that the dragonflies & damselflies had a successful year, with at least seven species recorded and many ovipositing into late spring and early summer. It was also a good year for a range of UK butterflies: at least eight species were recorded over the spring and summer.

It was noted that the wildflower and fruit and veg beds were being damaged by pests, as well as being inaccessible to wheelchair users or those with visual impairments. Subsequently, the food-growing area was revamped: new raised beds were created, allowing access to the soil without having to bend down to the ground, and these have been really popular with those new to the site.

Furthermore, there has been continued maintenance of the two wildlife ponds, three beehives and sensory garden. Several trees were planted, and over 40 varieties of wildflower species sown.



STORIES OF HOPE

T25: N/A

Woodland House of Prayer

Rachel Oates

All about the partner

Woodlands House of Prayer (formerly at Brunel Manor, Torquay, home for 58 years) seeks to be a community where everyone is welcome to come and spend quality time with God, supported and encouraged by others who are also searching to find or deepen their relationship with Jesus.

Creation care

After the closure and sale of Brunel Manor in 2020 during the height of the Covid pandemic, 2022 was a year of both transition and celebration. In the summer, friends and supporters gathered for a garden party to celebrate 80 years since the charity began in 1942 during the dark days of the Second World War. In winter, a very special 'birthday weekend' celebration was held, hosted by Lee Abbey, a neighbouring Partner in Action in Devon.

Over 2022, the team continued to wait on God, seeking to re-envision the charity for its next chapter. There was a strong sense of calling to help those in need of rest and restoration to find new strength and hope through reconnecting with God, each other and nature. This is essentially Christian wellbeing, found in the biblical concept of 'shalom' or 'wholeness'.

At the same time, the search for a new home has taken a new turn. After more than 18 months of prayerful property hunting, it was decided that if nothing suitable appeared by Pentecost, it would be taken as a sign that God wanted the resources to be used differently – to support another similar charity.

Subsequently, after considering various options, a collaboration has begun with Lee Abbey, which has a similar history of hosting Christian conferences and providing space for large church groups to come away together. In practice, this means Woodlands House of Prayer (WHoP) will provide grant funding to help make Lee Abbey more environmentally and financially sustainable – for example, by supporting a project to install solar panels. A bursary fund has also been created so those most in need, but can't afford it, can visit Lee Abbey to experience God's rest and restoration. Furthermore, Lee Abbey have offered space in their programme for WHoP to run some wellbeing conferences. The year ended with hope for 2023 and a prayer that, as God continues to transform the charity, blessings will be given to all those contacting and connecting with WHoP.