

## EXPLORE YOUR CHURCHYARD: INTRODUCTION

In October 2018, the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released a report on the impacts of an increase in average global temperature of 1.5° C from pre-industrial levels. This report highlighted the dangers inherent even in this level of temperature rise. Climate change is already having an impact. Recent years have seen record high temperatures. Wildfires are becoming more frequent and spreading over larger areas. The summer of 2018 even saw wildfires above the arctic circle. Climate change is affecting the intensity of storms, such as hurricanes, and parts of the world are experiencing more severe periods of drought than previously. Pollution of water, air and land and the destruction of habitats are also affecting the environment.

All of these things impact wildlife. Plants are flowering earlier, which can result in a lack of food for pollinators when they become active in the spring if they are out of sync with the plants that provide their food. According to the RSPB, changes in climate can impact on the migration routes of birds and may force them to have to change their feeding and breeding grounds<sup>1</sup>. Some sea birds are already experiencing population declines as the result of a lack of food.<sup>1</sup> Many other species are likely to be impacted by the continuing effects of climate change in coming years.

Christians believe that God cares for the whole world. Psalm 50, verses 10 and 11 remind us that the creatures of this world belong to God: “For every wild animal of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. I know all the birds of the air, and all that moves in the field is mine.”<sup>2</sup> Christians have a duty to be good stewards of creation. It belongs to God and he has left it in our care.

To care for God’s world properly, we have to know about it and understand it. This is a point at which faith and science intersect. To be good stewards, we need good science, as well as a faith that understands caring for creation as part of our worship and service to God.

Churchyards can provide vital habitats for many plant and animal species, and a sometimes surprising diversity of wildlife can be found in them. Explore Your Churchyard is an event designed to help churches discover and appreciate the wildlife on their doorstep. This event is particularly designed to involve children and families, and to help children engage at a very basic level with ecological science. This is done through identifying plants and animals (including insects) found in the

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.rspb.org.uk/get-involved/campaigning/climate-change-effects-on-nature-and-wildlife/effects-of-climate-change-on-wildlife/>

<sup>2</sup> Ps 50.10–11, NRSV Anglicised Edition.

churchyard and thinking about how habitats function (e.g. are some of the animals/bugs found only in some parts of the churchyard and not others and why). It also aims to connect this with a theology of creation care, by combining the exploration activity with an act of worship that gives thanks for and prays for the wellbeing of creation.

Both the activity and the worship can, of course, be adapted to fit the context of the church and the time of year. It can even be worthwhile doing the activity more than once, at different times of year, and looking for changes in the plants and animals found in different seasons.

Explore your churchyard requires plenty of advance planning, a good team of volunteers, and on-the-day organisation and management. It is, however, well worth doing. This activity is a chance to discover the hidden life of your churchyard, to get children excited about science, the natural world and God, and to have a lot a fun!

## EXPLORE YOUR CHURCHYARD: WILDLIFE SURVEY

*You will need:*

### **Volunteers**

Volunteers are essential to help with identification and ensure safe handling of any wildlife found (consult your local wildlife trust about rules on approaching/handling wildlife). If you are fortunate enough to have professional botanists, entomologists or ecologists in your congregation or community, do try to get them involved. Many will be happy to be part of a community educational event such as this.

If you have a local environmental group, they might also want to get involved. Local schools might also be interested in taking part.

Check your diocesan safeguarding policy to find out how many of your volunteers will need to be DBS checked.

You may also wish to serve refreshments. If so, it's helpful to have a dedicated team to take on this part of the day.

### **Equipment**

'Pooters': Pooters can be purchased and are available from a variety of sources (including [www.nhbs.com](http://www.nhbs.com) and [www.forestschoolshop.co.uk](http://www.forestschoolshop.co.uk)) or you can make your own (see instructions at <https://www.discoverwildlife.com/how-to/make-things/how-to-make-a-pooter/>)

Identification sheets: The web site wildlife watch has a large selection of colour identification sheets for plants and animals, including insects. (<https://www.wildlifewatch.org.uk/spotting-sheets>)

Recording sheets (see below)

Gathering place: It's helpful if you can set up a gazebo or similar both as a place to gather at the start of the event to give instructions and handout collecting equipment, but also for use as an area for inspecting any insects found. This is especially handy if it's raining or a particularly sunny day, when people will need to be able to take a break in the shade.

### **Risk assessment**

Make sure you carry out a risk assessment. Churchyards can contain hazards (overgrown grave stones, uneven ground, etc), and you'll need to be aware of any participants who have allergies to bee stings, etc. Make sure that children are accompanied by a parent/carer at all times to prevent mishandling of

wildlife, and to minimise the risk of accidents (including the ingestion of potentially harmful plant leaves, berries, etc).

## EXPLORE YOUR CHURCHYARD - SURVEY RECORDING SHEET

Participant(s): \_\_\_\_\_

### Survey findings

#### Plants

Plant species/name	Number identified	Identified by (circle as appropriate)
1.		leaves / flowers / seed head / berries, fruits or nuts
2.		leaves / flowers / seed head / berries, fruits or nuts
3.		leaves / flowers / seed head / berries, fruits or nuts
4.		leaves / flowers / seed head / berries, fruits or nuts
5.		leaves / flowers / seed head / berries, fruits or nuts
6.		leaves / flowers / seed head / berries, fruits or nuts
7.		leaves / flowers / seed head / berries, fruits or nuts

#### Invertebrate

Invertebrate species/name	Number identified	Identified by (circle as appropriate)
1.		markings / shell / web or nest / other
2.		markings / shell / web or nest / other
3.		markings / shell / web or nest / other
4.		markings / shell / web or nest / other
5.		markings / shell / web or nest / other

markings / shell / web or nest / other

6.

markings / shell / web or nest / other

7.

Birds & Mammals

Animal species/name	Number identified	Identified by (circle)
1.		markings / call / nest or habitation / droppings/ footprints / other
2.		markings / call / nest or habitation / droppings/ footprints / other
3.		markings / call / nest or habitation / droppings/ footprints / other
4.		markings / call / nest or habitation / droppings/ footprints / other
5.		markings / call / nest or habitation / droppings/ footprints / other
6.		markings / call / nest or habitation / droppings/ footprints / other
7.		markings / call / nest or habitation / droppings/ footprints / other

More (if you found more than 7 species in any section, record your extra finds here)

Species/name	Number identified	Identified by
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		

*Call to worship: Psalm 148.1–13*

Praise the Lord!

Praise the Lord from the heavens; praise him in the heights!

**Praise him, all his angels;**

**praise him, all his host!**

Praise him, sun and moon;

praise him, all you shining stars!

**Praise him, you highest heavens,**

**and you waters above the heavens!**

Let them praise the name of the Lord,  
for he commanded and they were created.

**He established them for ever and ever;**

**he fixed their bounds, which cannot be passed.**

Praise the Lord from the earth,  
you sea monsters and all deeps,  
fire and hail, snow and frost,  
stormy wind fulfilling his command!

**Mountains and all hills,**

**fruit trees and all cedars!**

**Wild animals and all cattle,**

**creeping things and flying birds!**

Kings of the earth and all peoples,  
princes and all rulers of the earth!  
Young men and women alike,  
old and young together!

**Let them praise the name of the Lord,  
for his name alone is exalted;  
his glory is above earth and heaven.**

### *Confession*

Living Creator God, sometimes we think the whole world and all its resources are simply for our benefit. Forgive us when we forget it is your world not ours.

Living Creator God, sometimes we are so consumed by our own concerns and wrapped up in our own tiny worlds. Forgive us when we fail to be awed by the beauty and wonder of your creation.

Living Creator God, sometimes we are so driven and busy that we fail to see all the living things around us. Forgive us when we forget to care for and protect all plants and animals as you do.

**Living Creator God, forgive us and help us to live according to your way.**

Grant us the freedom of your forgiveness through Jesus Christ, through whom everything is created and by whom you are restoring all things to yourself.

**Amen**

### *Collect*

Loving God, you created the heavens and earth, and filled the earth with a wonderful diversity of life: teach us to see the earth and all its inhabitants as you see them and to respect them as your creatures; build us up in faith and hope, so that we might live lives of kindness and care towards all, making a better world and revealing your love, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

### *Bible reading: Mark 16.15*

Jesus said to them, 'Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation.'

### *Short talk*



*Hymn: All things bright and beautiful or another suitable hymn/song*

### *Prayers*

*You may wish to invite those taking part in the event to write their own prayers, giving thanks for creation and the different animals that share our world and asking for guidance and strength in caring for the planet, its habitats and creatures. Alternatively, you may wish to use prayers from Praying for the earth. (Church of England, Diocese of Newcastle, 2011).*

### *Lord's Prayer*

Our Father in heaven  
Hallowed be your name  
Your kingdom come, your will be done  
On earth as in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread  
And forgive us our sins  
As we forgive those who sin against us.  
Lead us not into temptation  
But deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours.  
Now and for ever. Amen.

### *Blessing & dismissal*

### *Copyright Acknowledgements*

Bible passages from the NRSV Anglicised Edition.

Confession adapted from *Celebrating God's Creation*, a Test of Faith resource. [www.testoffaith.com](http://www.testoffaith.com).  
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