

A ROCHA

INTERNATIONAL NEWS



Christina from Canada and Claire from Ireland gardening together at Les Tourades. (Melissa Ong)

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Miranda (Peter Harris)

According to the Bible (Acts 17), community is not something you join, but rather something we are all part of already. In this 'given' context we have the possibility of getting to know God, each other and a unique natural history. However, most of us probably need to start by identifying and embracing the community in which we have been placed. In A Rocha that may be a field study centre or a conservation site where team members are based in their own homes but share office space and other resources, working and often eating together. The 19 National Organizations form a sort of global community, sustained by mutual visits, letters (a threatened species!), emails, phone calls and prayers, infinitely enriched and strengthened by the Leaders' Forum every two years. All those involved in A Rocha International constitute another community of people and of course you, our friends and supporters, are a vital part of our community.

COMMUNITY: THE HEART OF A ROCHA

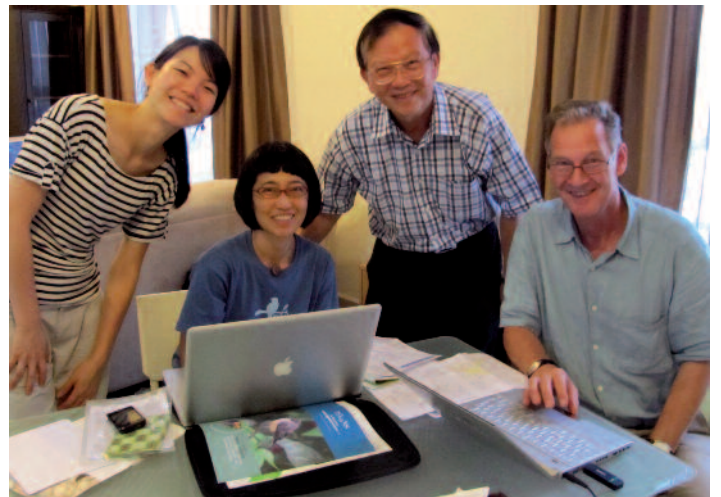
Miranda Harris and her husband, Peter, founded A Rocha in the early 1980s. After ten years as wardens of Cruzinha in Portugal, they helped set up another residential centre in France. Since 1995 they have provided coordination and leadership, visiting many A Rocha teams and other countries where new groups are emerging. Recently they returned from two weeks in Singapore and Malaysia, travelling with Melissa Ong, our Singaporean film-maker, and Au Yong Hoi Wen, a climate scientist. Miranda is passionate about community in all its forms and so we invited her to introduce the theme of this issue.



Increasingly, I'm discovering that community can be at the heart of the travelling life too. On our recent visit to Singapore and Malaysia we travelled and worked as a team of four, which

A Rocha is committed to five core values which characterize not only what we do and how we do it, but who we are. [See page 8 for the five values]. Community has many definitions, but for A Rocha it includes being intentional about living and working interdependently; being committed to specific geographical locations; bringing together human communities who might otherwise be wary of each other, or even in competition; and serving poor communities. It also places a high value on hospitality – relationships deepen more holistically in the kitchen than in the meeting room! This newsletter focuses on Community, and includes an appeal inviting your support in building community through the work of A Rocha in all these ways and more. Please participate if you can, remembering that alongside financial help, prayer is an effective way of contributing to A Rocha's conservation efforts around the world.

Hoi Wen and her father (standing), Mel and Peter, planning a route across Kuala Lumpur. (Miranda Harris)



sometimes involved living at very close quarters, and inevitably meant that we shared both strengths and weaknesses. Fatigue, whether induced by jetlag, a packed programme, or simply adjusting to strange beds (or floors) is a reliable fast-track to self-revelation, which can be a good thing! Mel and Hoi Wen rapidly began to feel more like daughters than colleagues.

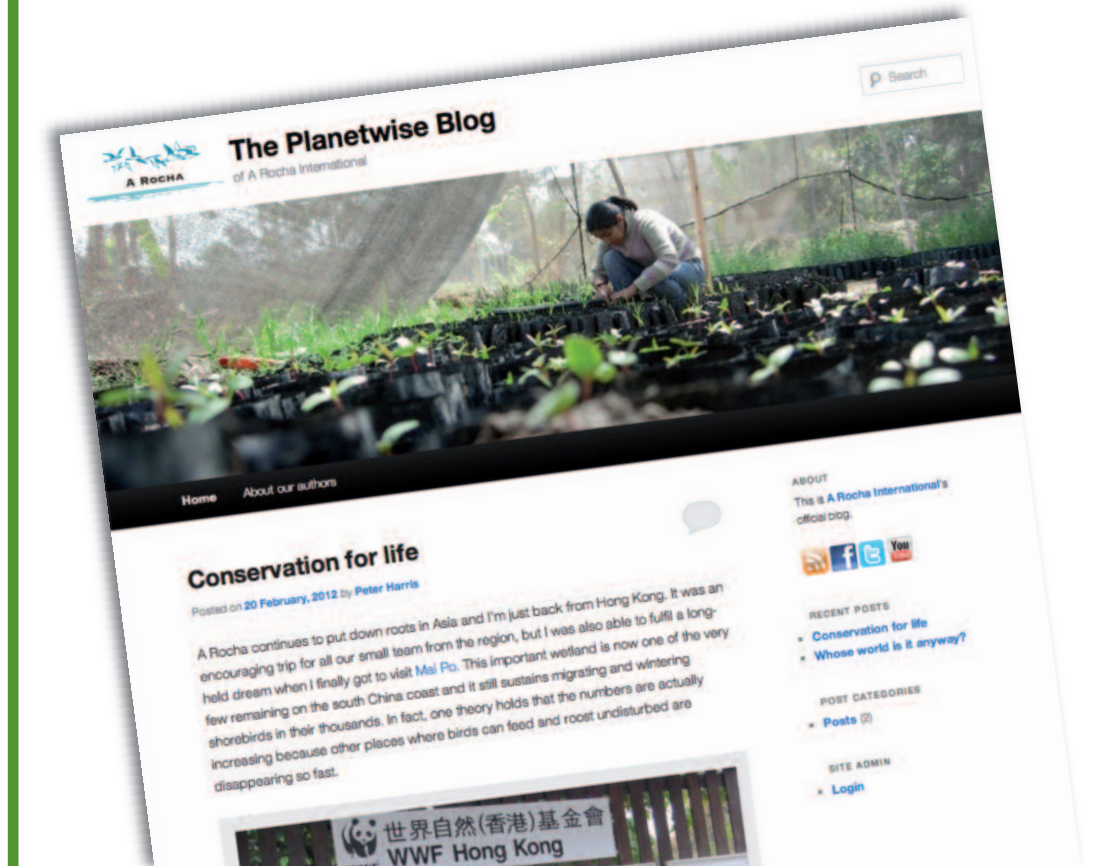
Another kind of community was developing as we continued to build a Malaysian network. Students, church leaders, conservation organizations, conference delegates and business people start as strangers and then are drawn into A Rocha's vision and work. Many of them become real friends. On this trip we visited two who have been fighting serious cancers and have felt carried by the prayers of the A Rocha family. This Asian network will be nurtured by those who emerge as national leaders, as well as through emails, skype calls and perhaps further visits by various A Rocha people. When you are motivated by an understanding of creation care that is essentially relational, the personal connection can go deep quite quickly.

All these communities overlap, and at the heart of them all is A Rocha's conviction that we are made for relationship with the living God, with each other and with nature. 'Belonging is a terrible but beautiful reality,' wrote Jean Vanier. 'We do not discover who we are, we do not reach true humanness in a solitary state, we discover it through mutual dependency, in weakness, in learning through belonging.' This is the adventure we have embarked upon and it's turning out to be quite a ride!

HAVE YOU SEEN OUR NEW PLANETWISE BLOG?

Do you ever wonder how much the Earth really matters to God? Do you sometimes struggle to answer other people's questions about the biblical basis for environmental action? Dave Bookless, author of *Planetwise* and *God Doesn't do Waste* is answering 12 key questions during the year. His themes will include 'Mission: saving souls or saving seals?' and 'What's the future for Planet Earth?' Other contributors will include Miranda Harris and Peter Harris, Co-founders of A Rocha.

Do you have contacts who would benefit from the blog: perhaps a church leader, colleague or friend? Or could you ask a Christian organization or church magazine to link to it? If so, just go to www.blog.arocha.org and use the 'Please share' buttons (Email, Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn) to pass on the news.



Death of A Rocha India's National Director

In the last *A Rocha International News* we interviewed Vijay D Anand, National Director of A Rocha India, about his passion for elephant research and conservation.

It is with great sadness that we report his death on 21 December, following a cerebral haemorrhage. He was 40 and is survived by his father, his wife Sunita and two children. Vijay's funeral was attended by over a thousand people and there was a memorial service on 3 March, with A Rocha International represented by Chris Naylor and Dave Bookless. The A Rocha India board, led by Rev Prem Mitra, is determined to continue and build on Vijay's pioneering work.



Vijay (Melissa Ong)



(A Rocha France)

Amanda McMillan

Nationality: American

Time as a volunteer: 11 months

Reason for volunteering:

I wanted to work abroad after college and was excited by the opportunity to work with Peter and Miranda Harris. Knowing I was coming to live in a Christian centre with locals and internationals was a bonus.

Highlight:

'It struck me that community is a dim reflection of heaven on earth. Relationships with other people are the source of joy and richness that reflect God's plan for us in the future. I love this place – it has become a part of who I am.'

Ludovic Noël

Nationality: French

Time as a volunteer: 4 months

Reason for volunteering:

I needed a place to do a fieldwork project for my degree in Nature Conservation and Management. A Rocha France offered me the chance to study the local butterfly population. Working and sharing with foreign people, studying in a beautiful place, learning more and more – sounded good!

Highlight:

'Living in community made me more efficient in my work. It allowed me to be myself in work and in play. Sharing with *Touradiens* is the most important thing I remember, and I miss it.'



Playing pétanque in the drive at Les Tourades. (Ludovic Noël)



Ludovic examining a butterfly caught for identification on a transect. (A Rocha France)



OUR FIELD STUDY CENTRES: THRIVING ON CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

A Rocha runs field study centres in half a dozen countries. Each centre is unique, but typically, the centre is run by a core of long-term team members assisted by volunteers.

Running conservation science programmes from a field study centre has certain obvious advantages:

- Living and working on site encourages a deep commitment to the area.
- The long-term presence enables strong relationships to be built with a wide range of local groups.
- Long-term research programmes become possible, and with time, a broad spectrum of scientific data is collected.
- The team becomes part of the local population, facilitating understanding of local issues, relationships and the possibilities for change.

Another wonderful advantage of a residential centre is that it enables volunteers and interns to join the team for a few weeks, a few months or even a few years. Sarah Walker, now our International Coordinator, began her A Rocha experience as a volunteer. We asked her why living and working as part of a centre community was so important to her – and to Amanda and Ludovic who volunteered alongside her.

'Les Tourades is A Rocha France's field study centre just outside Arles. It is a beautiful place, on the flood plain of the Rhone River. The two houses are surrounded by trees, green space and various eco-projects: vegetable and herb gardens, compost heaps, a pond, a reed bed waste filtration system, wildflower plots and a prayer garden. The mistral often blows but the sun also shines, frogs sing, and owls come to roost – as do many local and international visitors and volunteers.

The constantly changing community offers hospitality and keeps the work underway. Volunteers with different world-views and of different walks of life join in, usually living on site in shared accommodation. Meals are eaten together, prepared by people in turn. There is regular prayer time, gardening time and chore time, all – except for the last! –

offered in open invitation. I wanted to connect my faith, my interest in environmental issues and my desire to join with others to try and live lightly. Les Tourades offered me that.

Living in community asks a lot of a person. It can be incredibly good fun – some of my close friends now are *Touradiens*. In fact, I married one of them! However, it can also be difficult. Constantly being with others quickly brings your true self out in the open. Basic challenges of finding personal space, communicating (often cross-culturally – I'm Canadian, for example) and forgiveness are real, but joy can come from the depths of sharing everything, from laughter to conflict to peacemaking. On the whole, experiencing the ups and downs of shared purpose, work, meals and play is life-giving.'

The combination of a permanent local presence supplemented by international volunteers has a real impact. There is enough continuity to move forward in the work, complemented by the energy, knowledge and perspectives that new people bring. Recent programmes have included entomological inventories, the monitoring of terrapins, a long-term Roller study and a leading role in the conservation management of the Vallée des Baux.

Sarah Walker & Barbara Mearns

Want some experience? Have a skill to share? Calling retired folk, students and everyone in between! Visit <http://arocha.org/volunteer> and then submit your application form. Sarah will be glad to help you find the best place to use your skills.

The stony hills, shady woods and gardens around Les Tourades provide a wide range of butterfly habitats for species which include Knapweed Fritillary *Melitaea phoebe*. (Richard Mearns)

In the Xhosa language, Vuya Endaweni means ‘be happy in that place’. However, the Vuya Endaweni Community Conservation Partnership was born not out of happiness, but out of strife: out of a community in crisis. The development of an informal settlement, called Kayamandi, on the Papegaaiberg hillside above the prosperous town of Stellenbosch resulted in the escalation of tension between the very different suburbs of Kayamandi, Middelvlei Farm, Enkanini and Onderpapegaaiberg. Christians representing each suburb decided to take action as neighbours – rather than as enemies. They resolved to conserve Papegaaiberg’s natural heritage by investing in the communities living around it and raising their interest in conservation.

The whole area is part of the Renosterveld fynbos, one of the most complex and critically endangered ecosystems in South Africa. The dominant plants are Ericas (heathers) and only 4% of the original coverage survives.

The group created the Vuya Endaweni Partnership, now an affiliate project of A Rocha South Africa. One of their first endeavours was a crèche to provide badly needed day care to the Kayamandi settlement, which only has emergency communal water and sanitation services and no direct access to electricity. More recently, they have built an Environmental Education Centre there, right next to a proposed nature reserve.

‘We built the Centre to care for the vulnerable parts of God’s creation on Papegaaiberg – the children of the settlement and the critically endangered fauna and flora of the area,’ says project initiator Dr Leanne Seeliger, the Environmental Education Officer of the Partnership.

Volunteers from a church in Stellenbosch have already started a children’s club at the Centre. It runs from 8-11am every Saturday morning and has monthly themes planned for this year, starting with birds, insects and snakes and ending with a focus on water and beach ecosystems.

FROM CRISIS TO COOPERATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

Children will be exploring these themes through art, music, dance, theatre and hiking. ‘We put up a blackboard last week calling parents and children to join us for a bird-related event and were delighted with the turnout,’ says Dr Seeliger. ‘The children were so keen to learn.’

Vuya Endaweni is working in local churches and schools to develop a greater awareness of the value of the whole natural environment. They are in the process of piloting an environmental education initiative in two previously disadvantaged schools on Tourism and Life Sciences and have initiated a tourist nature trail.

Dr Leanne Seeliger & Barbara Mearns

Visit www.vuyaendaweni.com to read more about the projects which are building a better community – one of hope and celebration instead of conflict.

The informal settlement of Kayamandi on the Papegaaiberg Renosterveld. (Chris Naylor)



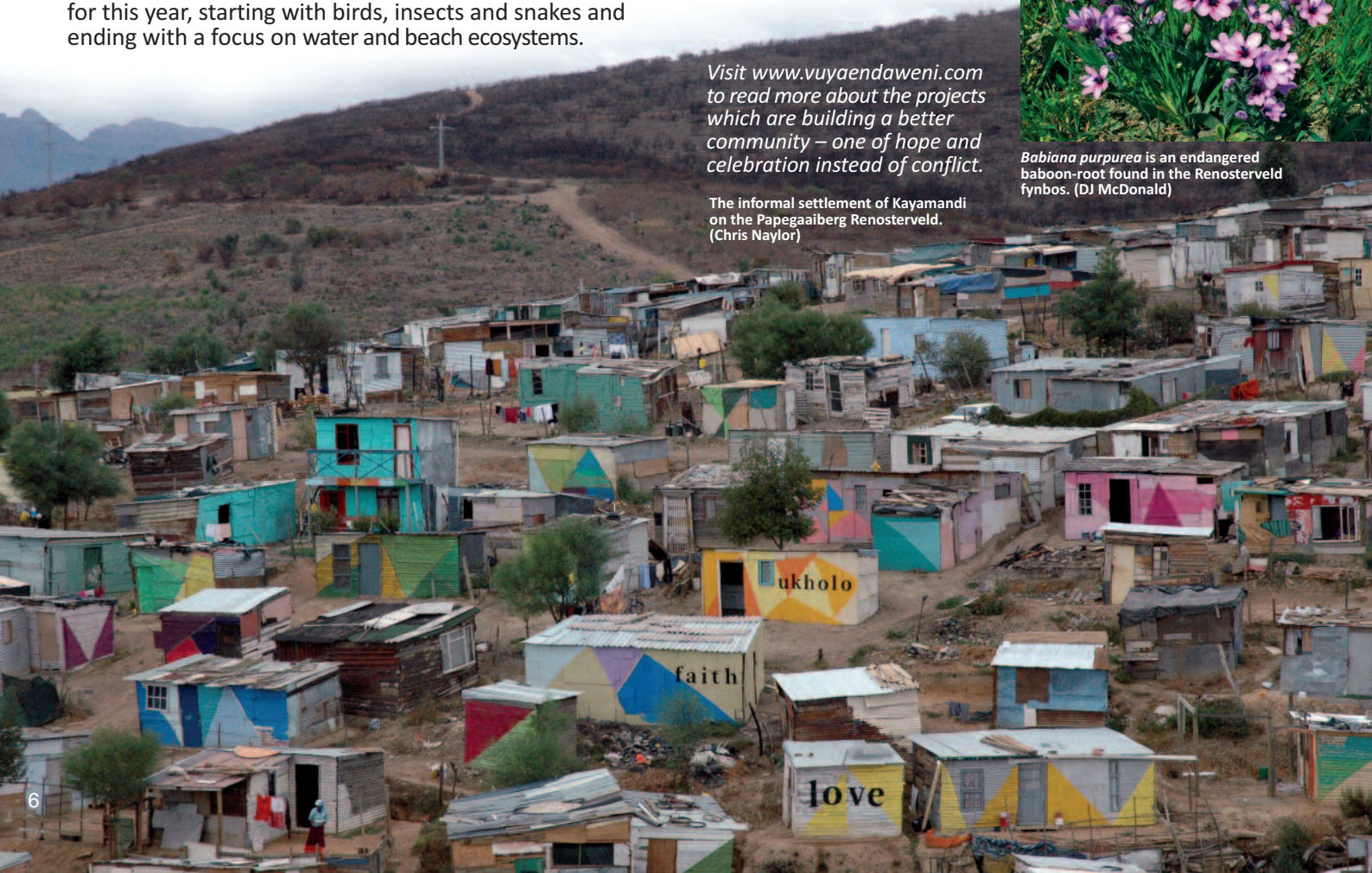
Children outside the new Environmental Education Centre. (Vuya Endaweni)



The Vuya Endaweni Committee with fynbos trainee tour guides. (Allen Goddard)



Babiana purpurea is an endangered baboon-root found in the Renosterveld fynbos. (DJ McDonald)





THINGS AREN'T ALWAYS ALL THEY APPEAR TO BE



When you hear the city name Santa Barbara, you probably think of beautiful beaches, mansions in the hills, maybe even Hollywood stars. All of that really is here. But as you may guess, it's not all the story.

The reality is that about 75,000 people live below the US federal poverty level. When those numbers are adjusted for Santa Barbara's high cost of living, more than half the population falls within the poverty level. An ugly companion to this poverty is poor nutritional health and food insecurity. Nearly 40% of Santa Barbara's adults are listed as food insecure, meaning there is limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods. Ironically, this food insecurity does not translate into hunger but into obesity and health-related diseases. Over 50% of adults in the area are listed as overweight or obese.

At a recent Santa Barbara Earth Day festival a homeless woman asked me a very important question. We were surrounded by vendors peddling the latest hybrid and electric cars, solar panels and compostable products. The event was honoring a well-known, wealthy individual for his innovation in green building (his multi-million dollar mansion) and environmental advocacy. 'Is this environmental thing just for the rich?'

Santa Barbara A Rocha is striving to make a difference in our community, to demonstrate with our lives that God cares for this world: the rich, the poor and the very earth on which we stand. This past growing season, at our tiny Five Loaves Farm, we managed to grow and donate over eight tons of organic produce to the hungry people of our area. Our produce goes directly to the migrant workers,



Five Loaves Farm at Santa Barbara, California. (Marty Robertson)

homeless, widows, orphans, critically ill and elderly poor of our city. We have run several very popular summer creation care camps. We partner with local environmental groups to provide labor and encouragement. We study watersheds and work to better educate our community as to what they can do to help make these healthier.

We speak to churches, schools, foodies and greenies about our need to better care for this world. We hold community festivals that have drawn hundreds of people to the farm. This all sounds pretty good, and it is!

But while we've shared a lot with our community, we, like our city, are not entirely as we may appear. We're small stuff. We're always on the brink of thinking it will all fall apart – that we won't have the funding or the time or the resources to continue. We hold on by faith, and in the end are thankful for the ways in which we can ultimately identify, just a little, with those we serve, who live with the insecurity of not knowing where their next meal will come from.

Marty Robertson, Director, Santa Barbara A Rocha 7

Help us have a healthy heart!

Help A Rocha have a healthy heart!


Community is at the heart of A Rocha's work:

- our research and conservation programmes are community based
- our field study centres are welcoming Christian communities
- our community gardens bring good food, better health and a new sense of belonging to some of the neediest local people



(www.rogiebos.com)

Please support our Community appeal by giving a gift online

at  www.arocha.org/donatecommunity or go to www.arocha.org and click on 'Donate'.

If you have a credit card, you can donate here in almost any currency, from anywhere in the world. You can make a one-off gift, or you can set up a regular payment, which is even more helpful, as it helps us to plan with confidence.

If you can't donate online, or you prefer not to, please contact the International Office and we'll advise you on the easiest way for you.

CORRECTION: *The photo on page 3 of the December 2011 A Rocha International News showed Daryl Bosu with a 3 year old Kapok tree, not a Mahogany tree as stated.*



A ROCHA

Christians in Conservation

A Rocha is an international Christian organization which, inspired by God's love, engages in scientific research, environmental education and community-based conservation projects.

The name 'A Rocha' is Portuguese, and means 'The Rock'. In all the countries where we work, A Rocha is identified by five core commitments and to a practical outworking of each:

Christian

Underlying all we do is our biblical faith in the living God, who made the world, loves it and entrusts it to the care of human society.

Conservation

We carry out research for the conservation and restoration of the natural world and run environmental education programmes for people all ages.

Community

Through our commitment to God, each other and the wider creation, we aim to develop good relationships both within the A Rocha family and in our local communities.

Cross-cultural

We draw on the insights and skills of people from diverse cultures, both locally and around the world.

Cooperation

We work in partnership with a wide variety of organizations and individuals who share our concerns for a sustainable world.



A Rocha has National Organizations in 19 countries: Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Ghana, India, Kenya, Lebanon, Netherlands, New Zealand, Portugal, Peru, South Africa, Switzerland, Uganda, UK and USA.

Visit www.arocha.org for the latest news.

Visit arocha.org/videos for stories to watch and share.

Visit arocha.org/enews to request our monthly e-newsletter.

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A Rocha International is a member of IUCN, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature.