A ROCHA INTERNATIONAL

# Field notes

Updates from the A Rocha world

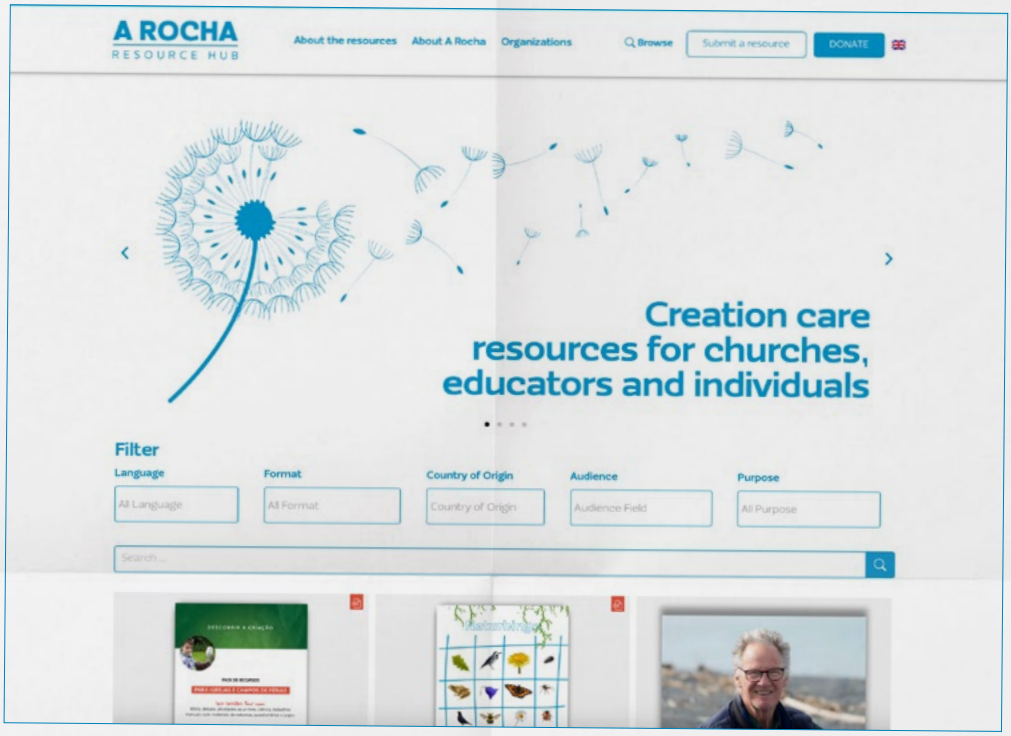
issue: 69

THEME

# Micro to macro

October 2025

# A Rocha RESOURCE HUB

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# Micro to macro

Over 2025 we've been organizing our storytelling along a scale from miniscule to global. At times we've interpreted our theme very literally, focusing on the size of the plant or creature we're studying, caring for or protecting. But we've also applied it to how challenging the problems can seem (often overwhelmingly vast) and our own efforts to tackle them.

In this issue we dig into soil, celebrate citizen science, ask who rules the high seas and, if you've not yet heard of or responded to the Korean Invitation, we've got you covered. In all these things, we are mindful of our Creator God whom no scale could measure and whose loving faithfulness has no bounds. We are grateful for you – your interest and support make all the difference. Thank you!

Jo Swinney

**Jo Swinney,**
Director of Communications,
A Rocha International


## Contents

**New in the A Rocha world** ..... p4

**Miniscule** ..... p6

**Small** ..... p8

**Large** ..... p10

**Vast** ..... p12

**Global** ..... p14

**The Korean invitation** ..... p16

**Evidence and urgency in conservation – a conversation with Jeremy Lindsell** ..... p18

# NEW in the A Rocha world

## A Rocha expands

Our family has grown! A Rocha Costa Rica and A Rocha Singapore were officially welcomed at the A Rocha Leaders' Forum in the Philippines in May. They are both beautiful expressions of our five core commitments – Christian, Conservation, Community, Cultural Diversity and Collaboration – and bring something fresh and new to what it means to be A Rocha. We are excited to share stories and updates in the coming months and years.


## Increasing pressure on A Rocha sites

When you dedicate yourself to the care and protection of a place, it is costly to live under the threat of seeing it harmed, and heartbreaking when the threat becomes actuality.

We ask for your prayers for the land around the field study centre where our A Rocha India team is based, currently for sale and at risk of development. Please also pray for the team at Brooksdale, A Rocha Canada, following the decision by local government to allow the creation of a parking lot for trucks adjacent to their property, where it will do huge to the local ecosystem. A Rocha Kenya and Ghana face relentless encroachments by poachers and nomadic herdsmen into forests they are working to protect, and A Rocha Portugal's struggle to safeguard the Alvor Estuary is now over four exhausting decades long. Thank you for standing with us in prayer and solidarity.


A brand new one-year part time virtual course kicked off in September with a bold vision to equip Christians to be effective and hopeful conservationists. The 20-strong cohort represents 12 countries – finding a time to meet across all the time zones was challenging, to say the least! The Certificate covers biblical theology, practical conservation tools, leadership, communication and influencing, with content delivered by a world-class team of conservation practitioners.

Please register your interest for next year as soon as possible to ensure a place:

**arocha.org/the-conservation-certificate**

## The IUCN World Conservation Congress

A Rocha representatives were at the Congress in October, a once-every-four-years gathering of nature conservation experts, leaders and decision-makers from around the world. As a member organization, we were able to vote in the Assembly and our exhibition stand was a great opportunity to network and introduce ourselves as a Christian presence in the conservation world.

IUCN World Conservation Congress Abu Dhabi 2025

**arocha.org/IUCN**

micro to macro

# Miniscule

**We are soil-creatures. In Genesis, God got on his knees and dug up the loamy humus to mold the human. In the end, we will return to earthly dust, and the soil sustains us every moment in between. In fact, God upholds all life through the foundation of soil which nourishes plants, recycles nutrients, filters water, stores carbon, regulates the climate and supports biodiversity.**

Netherlands ant reserve – William de Jong

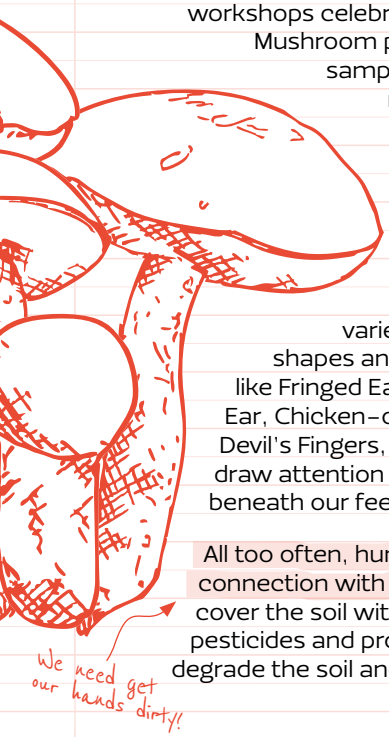
Healthy soil pulses and crackles with life. Half (50%) of its volume is taken up by gaps and pores where water, air and plant roots penetrate and countless creatures make their home. A Rocha Netherlands is taking a closer look at life underground in Bennekom, where they help maintain the country's first ant sanctuary. On just a small strip of the heath, you can find as many as 30 ant species, with complex relationships with the wider ecosystem.

One of these species, the Narrow-headed Wood Ant *Formica exsecta*, builds dome-shaped nests which can house up to half a million ants. These nests are often large, dome-shaped structures made of small pieces of wood, needles and other plant materials that are piled up above the ground. The dome shape ensures that the nest catches more sunlight and the temperature inside the nest remains stable. This provides comfortable habitat for other creatures like woodlice, millipedes and beetles.

With ants come the creatures who eat them, like Wild Boar who root around the dome nests, Green Woodpeckers who lick up the ants with their long, sticky tongues and Barn Swallows who catch flying ants in the air. Sand Lizards and even Green Sand Beetles also have ants on their menu.

Formica exsecta – Theodoor Heijerman

Meanwhile in the Czech Republic, the A Rocha team is exploring a different set of organisms within the soil: fungi. Many Czechs have spent their childhoods foraging for mushrooms in the forest in late summer and into the autumn. Loved ones gather together to spy their favourites and use them to prepare delicious meals. Of the 10,000 mushroom species that can be found in the Czech Republic, about 2,000 are edible, so proper identification is essential. For instance, the poisonous Panther Cap *Amanita pantherina* is easily mistaken for the edible and widely collected Blusher *Amanita rubescens*, especially when young.




A Rocha Czech hosts exhibitions and workshops celebrating local fungi. Mushroom pickers bring their samples to display; a mycologist offers identification tips and school children become immersed in their cultural and ecological heritage. With varied textures, striking shapes and intriguing names like Fringed Earthstar, Hare's Ear, Chicken-of-the-woods and Devil's Fingers, these mushrooms draw attention to the hidden life beneath our feet.

All too often, humans lose this connection with the soil. When we cover the soil with concrete, spray pesticides and produce waste, we degrade the soil and leach harmful substances into forests, waterways and the wider ecosystem. On the A Rocha Canada farm, caring for the meshwork of life within the soil allows it to nourish us in return. Apprentices and conservation residents attend sessions on soil health where they learn how to identify soil texture by feel and how soil organic matter content impacts nutrient holding capacity, and look at soil organisms under microscopes.

Of course, they get their hands dirty too! Behind the Brooksdale barn, a gigantic pile of steaming hot compost is prepared to fertilize the soil. Two of the three acres of the farm have been transitioned to a no-till system: this sequesters more carbon, allows for more food to be grown in less space, provides better water retention in the soil and allows plants to grow stronger, more resilient and more nutrient-dense. A Rocha donates a third of their harvest to vulnerable community members. What remains nourishes the people staying at the environmental centre and the wider community. When we look deeply at life in the soil, it fills us with wonder, respect and gratitude.


Mushroom education – A Rocha Czech


Hot compost – A Rocha Canada


Mushroom exhibition – A Rocha Czech


No-till bed – A Rocha Canada

# Small

## Celebrating the pekapeka-tou-roa: the stealthiest locals of the Karioi landscape

**Not many creatures in Aotearoa New Zealand are as mysterious and miniature as the native Long-tailed Bats *Chalinolobus tuberculatus*, or 'pekapeka-tou-roa' in Māori. If you blink, you'll miss them. Even if you don't blink, you might still miss them: creatures the size of your thumb, lighter than an AAA battery, with calls high-pitched beyond our hearing range.**

Ecologist handling bat – A Rocha Aotearoa New Zealand

A Rocha's monitoring team placed acoustic recorders across the Whāingaroa Raglan landscape on New Zealand's west coast, from the windswept tops of Mt Karioi to sheltered wetlands and hedgerows in the mosaic of farmland that typifies much of rural Aotearoa. The recorders captured the night-time comings and goings of these elusive mammals each night for a few weeks. They record the ultrasonic echolocation calls of the bats to build up a picture of the relative activity levels of bats across the locations surveyed.

Imagine our delight when our latest bat monitoring survey showed a flurry of activity centred around the farmland of Te Mata valley, a few kilometres east of forest-covered Karioi and right to the tops of Karioi – the area that is the focus of the A Rocha's conservation work. These tiny night-flyers are living their best lives in the valleys where streams gurgle their way to the sea. While pekapeka-tou-roa do use agricultural areas, large tracts of forest are generally considered their preferred habitat for tree-roosting and edge foraging. Even small forest remnants are important to their survival in rural landscapes like Te Mata.

Love this!

Long-tailed Bats are a critically endangered species, one of only two native land mammals remaining in New Zealand. They've been quietly flitting through our forests and valleys for millions of years, navigating in pitch-black with echolocation more sophisticated than any iPhone. And yet, they still manage to remain unseen, unheard and underappreciated.

But no more. We're on a mission to change that. Thanks to surveys carried out in 2023 and 2025, we now have a clearer picture of where these quirky wee creatures are still holding on. With continued care and protection for their remaining habitats, they just might hang around for another few million years, fluttering

above our heads, reminding us that sometimes, the most magical creatures are the ones you almost never see.

By celebrating the pekapeka-tou-roa and protecting the forests on which they depend, we hope to ensure they remain part of this landscape for generations to come. For anyone who lives around Karioi, it's a call to pause as dusk settles in, to look up – and, if they're lucky, catch the blur of a bat flitting above the tree canopy, weaving through the air, hunting mosquitoes.

Acoustic bat monitoring – A Rocha Aotearoa New Zealand

## Night Calls: Bats on the Line

34 bat species are found in France, making up a third of the country's terrestrial mammals. All 34 are protected, meaning they cannot be killed nor their habitats destroyed. Unfortunately, many of their natural habitats are disappearing due to changes in land management practices, overuse of pesticides and long population regeneration times, inducing a reduction in overall survival rates.

Like many species that have suffered from a bad reputation, bats have remained relatively unknown until recently. Their distribution across France is notably poorly understood. Some rare species are regularly monitored during their hibernation, and we know that most populations are declining. Most common species keep their distance from humans and live dispersed across a wide variety of landscapes, making it harder to follow population trends over time.

A Rocha France's Domaine des Courmettes hosts at least four different bat species, identified during previous mammal surveys but under no regular monitoring until recently. Last summer, an intern, Antonin Vier, conducted a bat listening protocol for the first time, using a small portable detector that plugged into a phone to record and identify the bats heard.

Following Vigie Nature guidelines, Antonin selected 10 different locations which represented different habitats across the Domaine. Vigie Nature is a citizen science programme led by the Natural History Museum of Paris that covers several species of interest, such as snails, butterflies, bumblebees and bats. Its approach to bat monitoring is based on counting and identifying them during their hunting activities, to account for the biology and behaviour of the most common species.

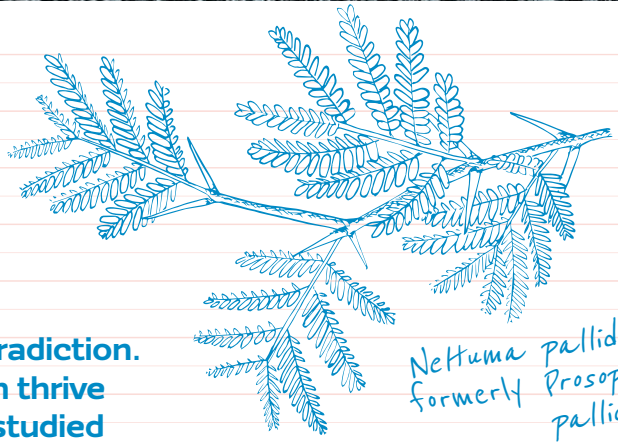
While no conclusions can yet be made, the team will be repeating the protocol annually in hopes of generating a detailed list of the species present on site, as well as their distribution. This will lead to updated records, sharing of data with the Natural History Museum and better informed land management practices – and hopefully inspire others to take part in the programme.

A Rocha Netherlands is using water to increase humidity in an underground bunker to attract bats. In winter 2024, three Brown Long-eared Bats Plecotus auritus were found!

micro to macro

# Large

## Ode to the Algarrobo




**A dry forest may sound like a contradiction. How can a forest develop and even thrive in an arid landscape? These understudied ecosystems are home to dozens of species found nowhere else, many of which depend on the magnificent Algarrobo *Neltuma spp*. This contorted, ancient tree is believed to have a lifespan of up to 1,000 years, and creates an oasis in which others can survive.**

Algarrobos survive years with almost no rainfall until they are reinvigorated by the intense rains of an El Niño year. In the meantime, their small leaves conserve water and a robust taproot stabilizes the soil and increases its nutrients. This helps other plants thrive, like the medicinal Sapote *Colicodendron scabridum*. Without these powerful roots, entire sand dunes would migrate and the dry forest would be desertified.

In the summer, blooming Algarrobos attract bees and birds. For instance, the threatened Peruvian Plantcutter *Phytotoma raimondii* depends on Algarrobo leaves as its main source of food and water. By December, Algarrobos begin producing long, yellow seed pods, used by locals to make algarrobina, a delicious and medicinal syrup. The pods can be crushed to make flour or a coffee and cocoa substitute. They also feed livestock and wildlife like the rare Desert Tegu *Dicrodon guttulatum*. Known by locals as the Cañán, this burrowing lizard emerges during hot, sunny hours to forage for food, with up to 95% of its diet sustained by the Algarrobo.

Desert Tegu (Cañán) – A Rocha Peru

Algarrobo trees – A Rocha Peru

Algarrobo seeds – A Rocha Peru

Algarrobo tree – A Rocha Peru

Algarrobo trees are an enduring symbol of Peruvian identity. When surveyed, the most common reason local community members expressed for valuing Algarrobos was their role in producing clean air. Ironically, the second most common reason was their use as fuelwood. Burning the trees for fuel not only destroys the forest faster than it can regenerate, but it pollutes the air, clouding Algarrobos' other benefits.

Early in the morning, trucks can be seen leaving the forest loaded with the dense, honey-coloured wood of aged Algarrobos. Algarrobo charcoal is sold in urban centers, where it is prized by bakeries and pollerías (rotisserie chicken restaurants). Meanwhile, firewood is mainly used in local homes. Its smoke infuses food with a rich flavour in contrast with the unpleasant taste yielded by pricy gas stoves. When cooking specialty dishes, Algarrobo wood is the fuel of choice, despite the negative health impacts reported by locals who are harmed by smoky indoor cookstoves.

In response, A Rocha Peru is growing a diverse community of forest guardians. Beginning in local households, they are installing improved cookstoves, which lead to a 24.3% reduction in charcoal use. Each cookstove also leads to improved indoor air quality and saves approximately 2.64 tonnes of $CO_2$ per year.

Students and church members who take part in A Rocha's environmental education events learn about biodiversity in the dry forest and the threats it faces. Craftswomen attend A Rocha workshops on making non-timber handicrafts, which they can sell to tourists. Local farmers are embracing agroforestry, which restores soil health and reduces erosion. A Rocha is also installing apiaries in the dry forest, where honeybees forage on the flowering Algarrobo trees. The honey produced is sold to create sustainable livelihoods and to support dry forest conservation.

This year, A Rocha Peru formally created a Local Park Rangers team, an initiative that generates solutions from within the territory, led by those who know and love it. Through regular patrols, they help prevent logging, detect threats and raise awareness among the community. All this supports an ambitious reforestation effort. In the 2025 season alone, over 100 Algarrobo seedlings raised in A Rocha's nursery have been successfully planted, adding to hundreds more over the years.

A Rocha's creative solutions honour local Peruvian culture, cuisine, crafts and livelihoods – which make use of the Algarrobo – while protecting the landscape. As newly planted Algarrobos grow into old age, they will likely see many more threats and changes to the landscape. Now, more than ever, they need this community of people who are bringing life back to the land.

These trees are good for everything and everyone!

Algarrobo planting – A Rocha Peru

micro to macro

# Vast

## Keeping species connected across landscapes

Elephants crossing – A Rocha India

**Every night in southern India, herds of elephants step quietly through narrow forest paths, routes that link one wild place to another. These wildlife corridors are lifelines, not just for elephants but for countless species, ecological links that allow species to move between habitat patches. Without these connections, populations are more likely to become isolated, species lose diversity and econflicts between people and wildlife grow more frequent. In landscapes undergoing rapid change – often caused or influenced by humans – the maintenance of these corridors is essential to counter the adverse effects of habitat loss and fragmentation. India currently has 101 elephant corridors identified in collaboration with the Forest Department, experts, research institutions and NGOs.**

Bannerghatta National Park and the Hosur Forest Division – encompassing the Cauvery North and South Wildlife Sanctuaries – form an integral part of the vast Brahmagiri–Nilgiri–Eastern Ghats Elephant Landscape. Spanning four Indian states, this transboundary conservation area supports approximately 50% of the total elephant population in India. Habitat fragmentation within this region exacerbates human–wildlife conflict as people and elephants are pushed into close quarters with each other.

A Rocha India has contributed to the scientific understanding of this landscape with a focused emphasis on the identification, assessment and management of established wildlife corridors. Working hand in hand with a network of stakeholders, including the Forest Department and partner conservation NGOs, A Rocha has gained valuable insight into the seasonal patterns of movement, use and ecological functionality of corridors that connect habitats across administrative and ecological boundaries. Our research shows that these corridors aren't just lines on a map – they are essential links between fragmented habitat patches, allowing Asian elephants *Elephas maximus* and other wildlife species to find mates of genetic diversity to prevent inbreeding, access food and survive in a rapidly changing landscape.

Community engagement – A Rocha India

Elephant origami – A Rocha India

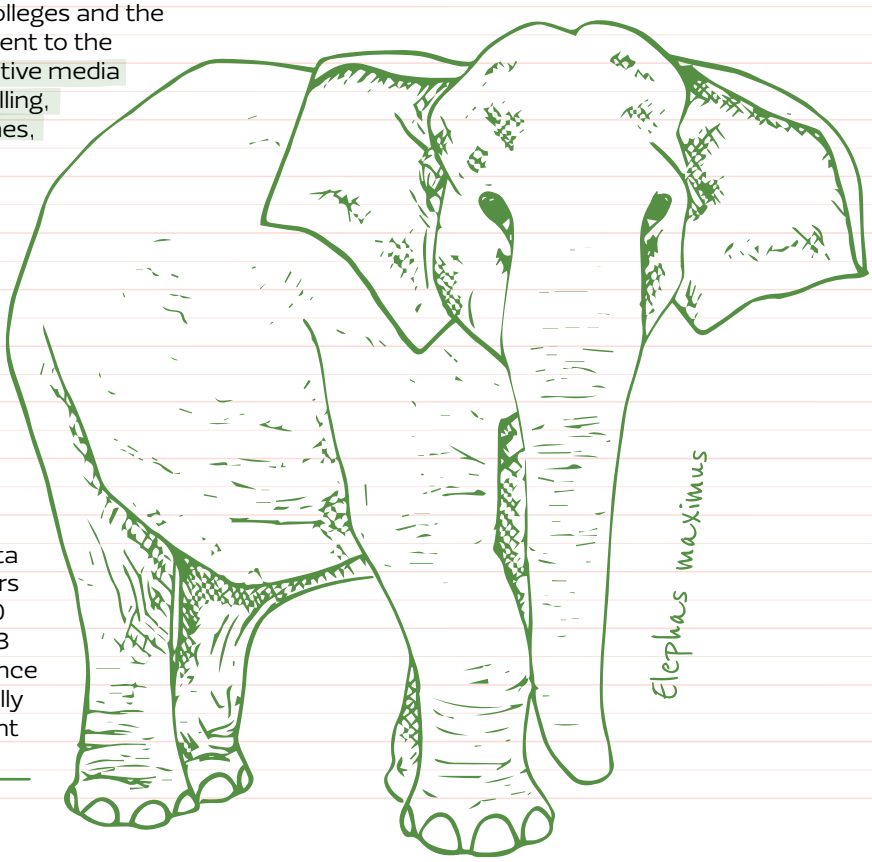
Elephants on the move – A Rocha India

It is a priority conservation strategy to preserve and restore these wildlife corridors to build biodiversity resilience, particularly under the pressures of climate change.

Equally vital is the incorporation of community engagement into conservation planning. Educational initiatives and participatory management approaches, which can foster a sense of local stewardship, enhance long-term sustainability of conservation measures. To that end, A Rocha runs education and awareness programmes for schools, colleges and the local people in villages adjacent to the wildlife corridors. Using creative media such as painting, clay modelling, origami and interactive games, students learn about the challenges elephants face when navigating corridors intersected by farms, infrastructure and traffic. For adults, street plays and focus group discussions highlight the ecological importance of elephants' historic pathways and their role in maintaining ecosystem health.

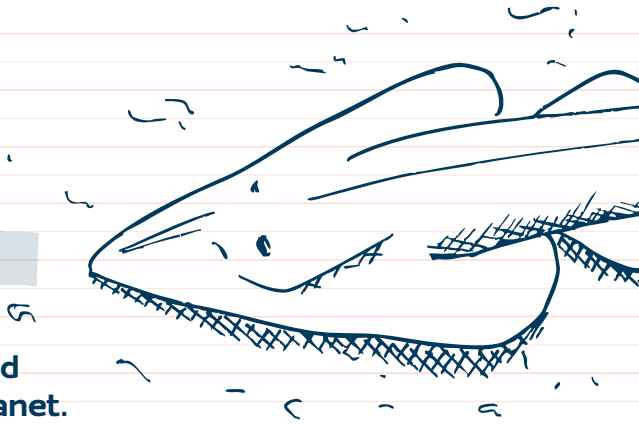
These outreach initiatives have fostered stewardship, increased tolerance towards elephant conservation and led some villages to initiate their own conservation actions. Our strategy for safeguarding these corridors and reducing human-elephant conflict integrates all of the above: scientific research, inclusive planning and community-led action.

To migitate human-elephant conflict, signal boards have been deployed in 16 locations in Bannerghatta National Park and sensors have been installed in 10 locations. In a month, 43 alerts of elephant presence were detected, potentially averting vehicle-elephant collisions on roads.



micro to macro

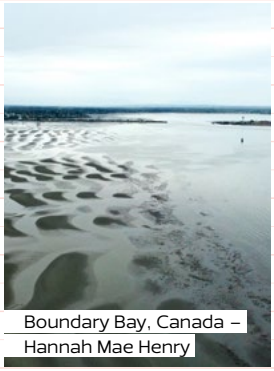
# Global



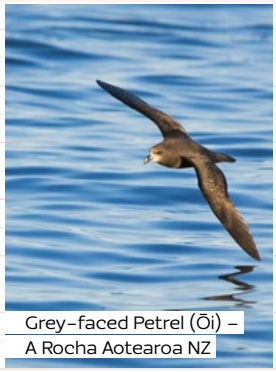
## For the love of the ocean

**Although maps reference five named oceans, they form one interconnected body of water covering 71% of our planet. That interconnectedness reminds us why understanding 'the ocean' – as it is increasingly referenced – matters: what happens in one place affects the whole. What happens on land also eventually filters into the ocean – just look at the spread of microplastics on beaches, in fish and throughout marine ecosystems.**

Around the globe, A Rocha is caring for the ocean in diverse ways. Each September, we take part in the International Coastal Cleanup, a global act of habitat restoration. In Ghana, we care for coastal mangrove forests, whose roots shelter young fish and provide food for tiny invertebrates like snails. In Florida, we help restore the Indian River Lagoon, home to manatees, dolphins, pipefish, horseshoe crabs and more. In Portugal, thanks to the persistence of A Rocha, the Alvor Estuary is thriving.



Boundary Bay, Canada – Hannah Mae Henry

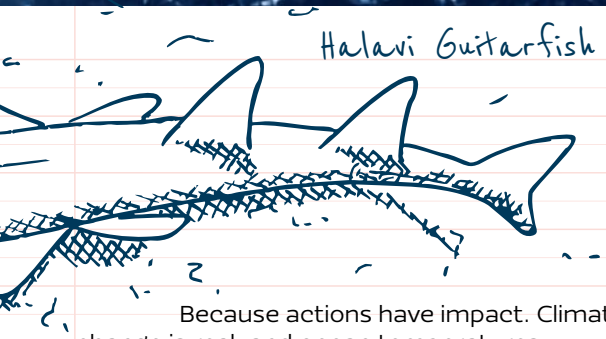


Grey-faced Petrel (Ōi) – A Rocha Aotearoa NZ

Alvor lagoon – A Rocha Portugal

From a species perspective, the picture is urgent: 32% of the world's sharks, rays and chimaeras are now threatened with extinction, mostly due to overfishing[1]. A Rocha Kenya monitors sharks and rays in Watamu Marine National Park, studying behaviour and habitats. In Aotearoa New Zealand, our habitat restoration and predator control on Mt Karioi has a direct, positive impact on the breeding success of seabirds like the Ōi (Grey-faced Petrel *Pterodroma gouldi*). In Canada, A Rocha reignited the Shared Waters Alliance to clean up the Tatalu (Little Campbell River) to improve water quality in Boundary Bay, BC, in turn helping the Semiahmoo First Nation move towards reclaiming traditional food sources like crab, shellfish and salmon. It's a reminder that what happens upstream affects the ocean downstream.

1 www.iucnssg.org/news/new-global-study-finds-unprecedented-shark-and-ray-extinction-risk
2 www.manoramayearbook.in/current-affairs/world/2025/06/11/high-seas-treaty-explained.html




Because actions have impact. Climate change is real, and ocean temperatures are rising. Coral reefs illustrate what this can mean. These vibrant ecosystems – home to thousands of species – are deeply sensitive to warming. Corals are animals that live in colonies, building calcium carbonate skeletons that house tiny algae. The algae photosynthesize and feed the coral in a delicate, mutual relationship. When temperatures rise too high, the algae overproduce and the corals expel them, revealing the white skeleton beneath. Many then die – but not all.

Corals that survive bleaching often exhibit increased thermal resistance. A Rocha Kenya is studying reef resilience through coral gardening in Watamu Marine National Park – growing and transplanting corals that survived the 2020 and 2024 bleaching events. While adult colonies have persisted since 1998, natural recovery has been slow due to limited new coral recruits. Coral gardening will hopefully speed up the recovery of Watamu's reefs.

Then there is a massive part of the ocean which is under no one's care or governance. Nearly two-thirds of the global ocean lacks coordinated protection, making it vulnerable to overfishing, climate change and the looming threats of deep-sea mining and geoengineering. In 2023, the High Seas Treaty was proposed, a legally binding agreement to protect international waters. Once ratified by 60 countries, it will protect 30% of the ocean, fund marine conservation and regulate marine resource use3. Over the writing of this article, the country count crept up from 50 to 52... then on 19 September, the 60th state (and counting – 69 in total now) ratified the treaty, triggering a 120-day countdown after which the High Seas Treaty will enter into force. Amen! We are thankful, and pray for positive impact.

The ocean is diverse, beautiful and vital. Stand with us in caring for it and for all who live in or near it: every action matters. Join a beach cleanup. Say no to single-use plastic. If you eat seafood, ask where it came from and how it was caught. Explore A Rocha's Microplastics Toolbox and lead a Bible study or a nurdle hunt. And take a moment simply to enjoy the ocean – its rhythms, its beauty. Let its waves remind you of the Creator's peace, power and presence. Wherever you are, you are connected to the ocean – and through it, to the whole of creation.

Reminder


Beach cleanup, Watamu – A Rocha Kenya


Coral – Bob Sluka


Marine research – Bob Sluka

# What is 'The Korean Invitation' & why do we need it?

***By Rev Dr Dave Bookless***

As its name suggests, 'The Korean Invitation' came from a forum held in South Korea in late 2024, just after the massive 4th Lausanne Conference (L4) of 5,000+ Christian leaders from around the world. The Global Creation Care Forum (GCCF) minimised carbon as so many key people were already in Korea for L4, and was the first worldwide gathering of Christian leaders in creation care since a meeting in Jamaica in 2012. Holding the GCCF was a personal dream of mine since I knew about L4, and I had a wonderful core team to help with organization, comprising Jasmine Kwong, a Lausanne Creation Care Co-Catalysts and Canadian OMF mission partner in the Philippines, and two amazing Korean women, Ryoung Kim and Jee Hye, who managed all the on-the-ground details.

The GCCF was deeply inspiring and encouraging, with nearly 150 people from over 40 countries across six continents, a largely young and diverse gathering. A Rocha was well represented amongst speakers and participants but it was a much wider gathering. Ideas, stories and resources flowed from all corners of the world, and for some attendees, the experience was life-changing. However, one concern and frustration was clear: despite all we'd each been doing, much of the wider Christian church – and particularly the Lausanne Movement of evangelical mission leaders – still hasn't fully grasped the biblical foundations and urgent necessity of creation care. That's where the idea came from:

**'The Korean Invitation is not a statement but an invitation to respond in faithful action to God's call and the world's need.'**

The full title is 'The Korean Invitation: Good News for all the Earth' and is written in two halves. The first half sets out in plain, passionate and biblical language why creation care is central to God's mission and to ours. It begins with creation's goodness and God's providence, goes on to summarise God's covenant promise to all creatures and the whole earth, and reminds us of the intimate link between land and people in the Old Testament. It continues with the implications of Jesus' birth, life, death and resurrection for all creation, the Spirit's work in sustaining the earth and equipping the church to

be Christ's body in caring for creation, and God's final purposes to liberate creation from despair and decay and renew all things in Christ. This is the whole Gospel we are to 'declare and display' (a phrase the Lausanne Movement often uses) – the good news which sets free both individual people and all creation.

The second half of the Korean Invitation invites urgent action, in seven detailed paragraphs. The first urges a worldview shift from one with people at the centre to one with God at the centre, leading to a new relationship with God's created world, seeing ourselves as part of nature and called to depend on it, study it, enjoy it and care for it to God's glory.

The next six paragraphs **build from the personal to the global... or, if you prefer, from micro-to-macro**, looking in turn at lifestyles, churches and Christian organizations, workplaces, communities, human society and global ecological issues.

Drafting the Invitation was a global effort – and quite the process with about 150 people involved! We began at the GCCF with group work and an editorial team. Late-night sessions wrestled with phrasing, theological nuances and how words would translate. Afterward, we continued virtually, allowing those unable to attend in person to contribute via a shared Google Doc.

The result is a document with a great sense of collective ownership: the Korean Invitation truly represents the global church speaking powerfully, biblically and prophetically. It is now on the Lausanne Movement's website (lausanne.org/statement/good-news-for-all-the-earth) and increasingly being translated and used around the world by national evangelical bodies, seminaries, Bible colleges and mission organizations. Have a look yourself and, if you wish, consider adding your name to those who have signed it. By stepping into this invitation, we take part in God's great story of restoration, where every act of care brings creation closer to the wholeness he intends.

***A Rocha representatives at the Global Creation Care Forum (GCCF) held in South Korea 28 September – 2 October***

# Evidence and urgency in conservation

*Jo Swinney in conversation with Jeremy Lindsell from A Rocha International*

We are used to hearing that biodiversity loss and climate change are full-blown emergencies. Some are now talking about a new emergency – 'the evidence emergency': we need new evidence to tell us how to do conservation because what we are doing isn't turning the tide quickly enough and the stakes could not be higher.

I sat down with Jeremy Lindsell, A Rocha International's Director of Science and Conservation, to explore why gathering, interpreting and acting on evidence is so vital in tackling environmental challenges. What unfolded was a thoughtful and candid conversation about triage, trust and how AI is changing the evidence game.

**Jo Swinney: Let's start with the basics. Why is scientific evidence so crucial in conservation?**

**Jeremy Lindsell:** When you're doing conservation, you're effectively doing triage. You have limited time, money, people – so you need to figure out where your efforts will matter most. Just like in medicine, triage means identifying who or what needs urgent attention and what interventions will work best. That requires evidence.

For example, we have tools like the IUCN Red List or maps of Key Biodiversity Areas. These aren't just nice to have; they're evidence-based tools that help us decide which species and places need urgent action. But then we also need evidence to decide what to do. Which intervention will work best? Which is most cost-effective?

**Jo: So evidence helps us not just prioritise our efforts, but make sure they actually have impact?**

**Jeremy:** Exactly. We might have a room full of passionate people, but we don't want just to do what we've always done or what sounds good. We want to do what works. That means learning from past projects, sharing what we've learned and being willing to test new approaches.

**Jo: Can you share an example where evidence made a real difference to an A Rocha project?**

**Jeremy:** One that stands out is the Atewa Forest campaign in Ghana. The campaign gained momentum after compelling evidence emerged – starting with photos of the White-naped

Mangabey *Cercocebus lunulatus*, a rare primate species, living in the forest. This catalysed media attention and global support, and eventually informed a legal case. The evidence placed Atewa on a global biodiversity priority list, which influenced investment decisions and put pressure on development plans.

Another example would be how the team in New Zealand is tackling invasive mammals threatening native birds. The evidence is clear: invasive predators have driven declines, and reducing them brings seabirds back to nest. It's all evidence-led, and they're adding to that evidence all the time.

**Jo: Let's talk about the challenges. What are the hurdles to using evidence more consistently?**

**Jeremy:** First, conservation is often driven by passion and urgency. There's a powerful drive to act, but that can mean skipping the step where we ask, 'Does this work?' There's also a perception that evaluating a project is somehow separate from doing the work, or even in competition with it. People don't always have the time, tools or training to find and interpret the evidence.

Another challenge is that a lot of conservation work is complex. We often do many interventions at once – green livelihoods, education, habitat restoration – and it's hard to isolate what caused any changes we see.

**Jo: What about working with communities? Gathering evidence often depends on good communication and trust.**

**Jeremy:** Yes, and for A Rocha, trust is foundational. When we work with farmers or fishers, the most important evidence to them may not be charts or studies; it's the trust in the relationship. Are we still around a year from now? Did we keep our word?

That said, it's up to us as practitioners to ensure that what we're recommending is sound. Communities shouldn't have to become scientists. We take on the responsibility of asking the right questions and gathering good evidence. But trust remains the bridge.

**Jo: Are there any new technologies you think could make a real difference to our ability to take an evidence-based approach to conservation?**

**Jeremy:** Definitely. One big challenge is how scattered evidence is – it's buried in journals, literature and technical reports. AI tools are starting to help by harvesting, summarising and synthesising that information. These tools could make it easier for practitioners, who are often juggling fieldwork and logistics, to access the evidence they need.

**Jo: That's encouraging. What about A Rocha's own long-term data – any examples that could be goldmines for future analysis?**

**Jeremy:** One promising project is a review of our 24-year 'Assets' programme in Kenya, which provides school fees as a conservation intervention. The idea was that if you cover educational costs, parents don't have to resort to illegal logging to raise the fees. Now we're asking: is that still true? If not, what's really going on? It's an opportunity to test a theory of change over two decades.

Ideally, we'd embed evaluation in every project from the beginning – not as an add-on but as a core part of the work. We're constantly learning, adjusting and building a solid foundation for others to build on. Evidence doesn't have to be perfect or slow things down – but it does have to be intentional.

***Further reading:*** *visit conservationevidence.com, a free, authoritative information resource designed to support decisions about how to maintain and restore global biodiversity.*

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