

**A ROCHA**

Conservation and Hope

# Field notes

Updates from the A Rocha world

**issue: 65**



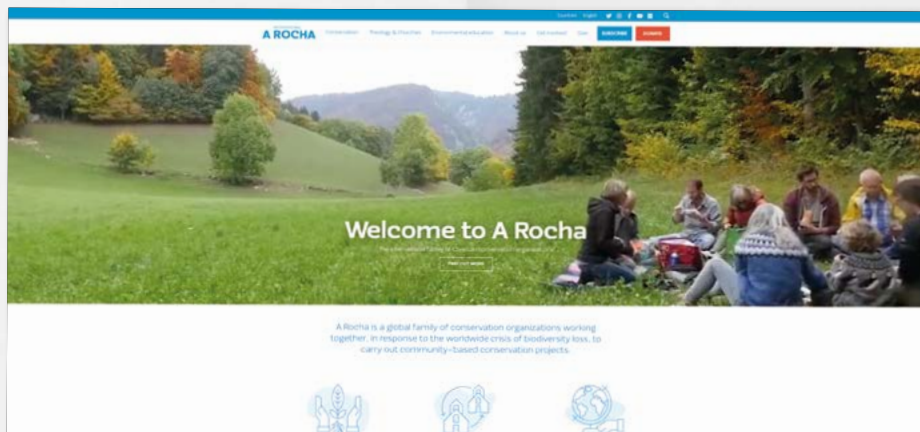
THEME

# Creation-friendly farming

Winter 2021

# Ways to stay in touch

[www.arocha.org](http://www.arocha.org)



Come and explore our brand–new website, launched in November 2021. There you can find lots of ways to get in contact with us and information about visiting our national organizations.

## Field notes eNews

Sign up to our monthly email, Field Notes, for inspiring stories of our work around the world, news, events and resources.

[www.arocha.org/en/mailings/](http://www.arocha.org/en/mailings/)



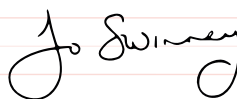
Listen to our **podcast**, an exploration of the ideas, practice and experience making a difference on the ground through conversations with people who really know what they are talking about – from conservation scientists, explorers and biologists to artists, entrepreneurs and theologians, all with hopeful stories to tell.

# Farming in faith

Food is a major human preoccupation by necessity and choice, desire and dependence. For the increasing numbers of us living in urban areas, there is little need to engage with our meals before the purchase of their ingredients, and so perhaps we don't.

I will put my hand up and confess to having been among the wilfully ignorant until not long ago. I'm trying to change because we can't stand back and blame farmers for soil degraded by pesticides and overwork, the air full of methane from vast herds of beef cattle and the water toxic with fertilizer if we aren't demanding better as consumers and making choices which reflect the esteem in which we hold this world and its maker.

In these pages you will read stories of A Rocha's work with farmers, an interview with a farmer whose Christian faith led him to go organic and an overview of what the Bible has to say about food production. The issues and challenges can seem overwhelming but together, and with God's help, we can bring about change.



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



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# NEW in the A Rocha world

## Welcome Sweden

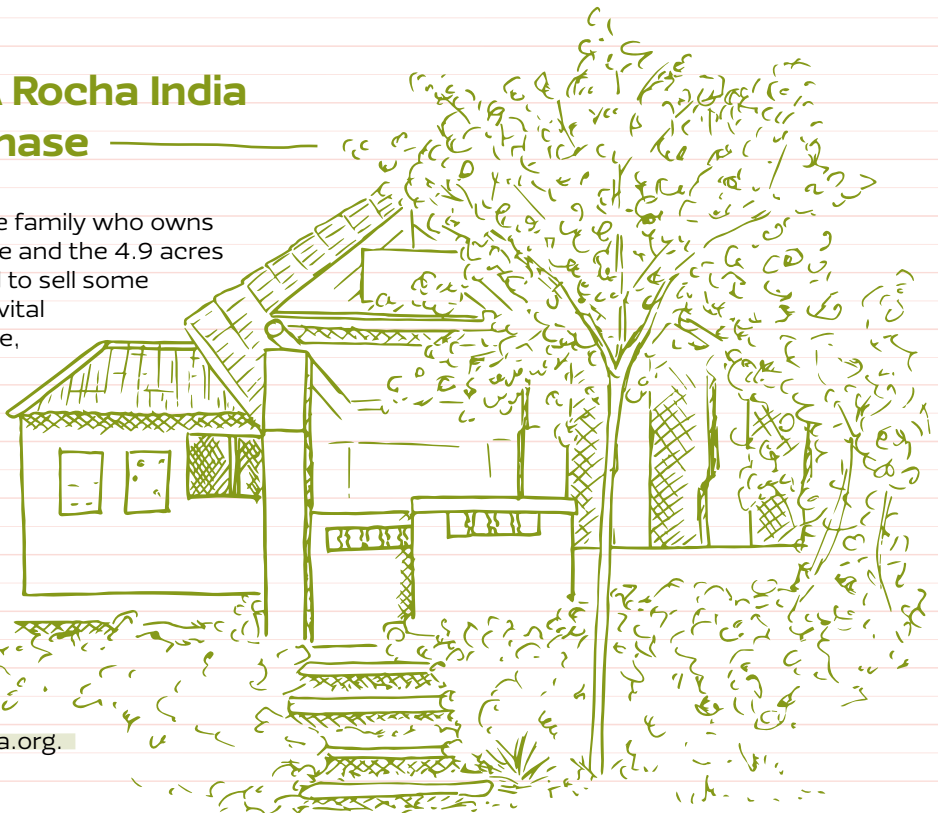
We are delighted to welcome a new A Rocha Associated Project in Sweden! Kristna för Naturvård i Sverige (KriNa) is helping people care for and protect places for biodiversity. Their Hyllie Park Gardens Project with the local church and adult education college focuses on environmental education and the creation of a meadow, wildlife habitats and nature trail.



## Update on A Rocha India centre purchase

Due to COVID-19, the family who owns A Rocha India's centre and the 4.9 acres on which it sits, need to sell some of their land. For our vital work to continue here, A Rocha India needs to purchase the 2.6 acres where the office and most of the activities are based. The total purchase price is likely to be around £200,400.

If you're interested in knowing more, please write to [international@arocha.org](mailto:international@arocha.org).



## Raising the profile of data for the conservation of four forested African landscapes

Access to information on the wildlife and/or habitat we are trying to protect is vital. The A Rocha family helps to protect 450,000 ha of tropical forests across four African landscapes. Yet a wealth of information we have gathered is currently inaccessible, buried in reports or museum collections.

We are therefore delighted to have received a grant from the JRS Biodiversity Foundation under the Global Biodiversity Information Facility to digitise a significant proportion of this data. The work requires careful attention to detail as we transcribe information from one format to another. In some cases, for example,

plants described in old documents have since been reclassified and changed names!

As a regional initiative, this project realises a rare chance of bringing five A Rocha organizations and seven key conservation partners together. By the end of it, we all will know more about African wildlife, knowledge which will equip us and others to care for and protect it more effectively.



## A new marine plastics resource

A Rocha's Lead Marine Scientist, Dr Robert Sluka, has written a new Grove booklet called *Marine Plastics*. He offers theological insights and practical ways that we can use plastic better to bring healing to our relationships: with God, each other, nature and ourselves. Copies can be ordered from [grovebooks.co.uk](http://grovebooks.co.uk).

## ARI at IUCN Congress

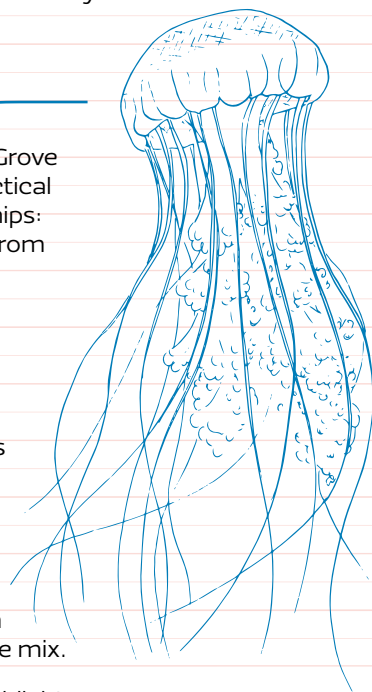
Every four years, the IUCN World Conservation Congress brings together thousands of leaders and decision-makers for the largest global gathering in the conservation movement.

Due to the pandemic, this year's gathering in Marseille was smaller than usual, but A Rocha International and A Rocha Ghana were both able to attend and participated in the Members Assembly. Decisions made here can inform international climate and biodiversity policies, so our presence demonstrated that a Christian organization is able to advocate for conservation across a wide variety of topics and that A Rocha is clearly respected for its solid scientific work.

The exhibition area, which functions like a trade fair for the conservation movement, welcomed 25,000 visitors. A Rocha France joined the A Rocha delegation to present Eglise Verte, a programme supporting French churches to go green. There were many significant

conversations held at our stands with people from around the world, with a generally positive response to finding a Christian organization in the mix.

One particular highlight was the celebration of Prof Alfred Oteng-Yeboah, the board chair of A Rocha Ghana and trustee of A Rocha International. In recognition of his enormous contribution to biodiversity conservation in Ghana and around the world, he was bestowed the IUCN's highest honour, the John C. Phillips Memorial Medal, joining the ranks of distinguished conservationists such as Sir David Attenborough, Mrs Indira Gandhi and Professor E.O. Wilson.



# Stories

## of A Rocha's work on creation-friendly farming

Where people and crops flourish together



Photo credit: A Rocha Netherlands

Dorpsakker De Parel is an ecological vegetable garden on the edge of Amerongen in the Netherlands. It is a place where people meet, pay attention to each other and the garden, work together and enjoy and share in the yield of the land. Dorpsakker De Parel was started in 2012, and since 2019 has been carried out by A Rocha Netherlands with the support of the Missionary Deaconesses House.

During the weekly work mornings, volunteers together grow vegetables and herbs and sow flowers. Dorpsakker De Parel has all the materials needed for the gardening tasks. At the end of the morning, The harvest is shared with

each other and vegetables are also delivered to the food bank. All levels of experience are welcome – there is always someone to show you the ropes, even if you do not have 'green fingers'. And of course, there is also plenty of time for a cup of coffee and some socialising.

Esther Gijsbertsen, the previous coordinator of Dorpsakker De Parel, said before handing over to Trudy Kool, 'I like to work with people in a green environment. We garden in a natural way without pesticides and with attention to flowers and insects. This is how we ensure the growth and flowering of both crops and people here at De Parel.'

## Sustainable farming brings the community together

A Rocha Canada has been operating a Community Shared Agriculture programme (CSA) at their farm in Surrey, BC since 2005. Members pay a set fee at the start of each year and get a delivery of seasonal vegetables each week, grown in a way that cares well for both people and earth.

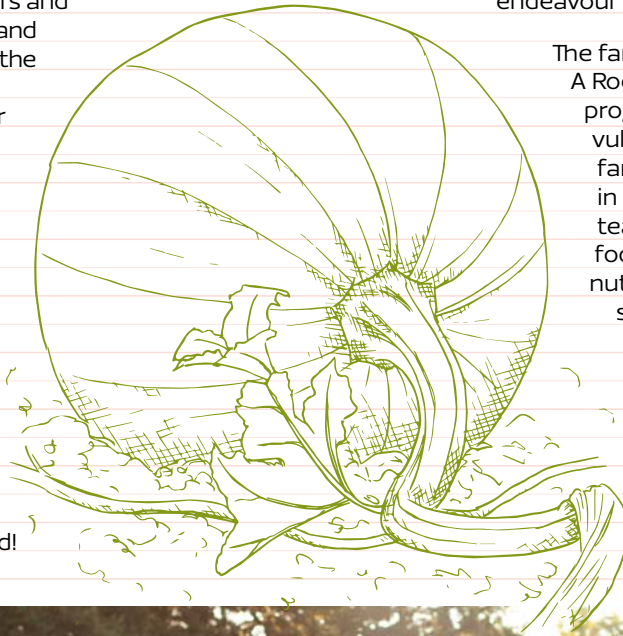
During the pandemic, interest in local, seasonal food grew all around the world. In a time of uncertainty, many wanted to reconnect with where their food came from, and A Rocha Canada ended up growing more food than ever before.

A new online platform enables customers to customize their orders and the upgraded washing and packing area improved the operation's efficiency. COVID-19 meant fewer interns on hand to help, but an incredible group of volunteers stepped in, including a number of A Rocha staff whose own work was on a virus-related pause.

For A Rocha farmer Jenn Cline, it was an exhilarating if exhausting time: 'We grew food with so few staff and on so little land!

When I talked with farmer friends and told them how many people we were growing food for in our CSA and farm markets on just a few acres, their eyes nearly popped out of their heads. Then they'd ask, "How many skilled staff do you have?" Then their eyes would pop even further out of their heads when I told them it was just the two of us.

Sometimes it was crazy challenging, but also crazy amazing because even in the most significant crunch times, volunteers just seemed to come out of the woodwork. To watch the community around us support this endeavour was very special.'



The farm is also home to A Rocha's Farm to Families programme which serves vulnerable children, families and seniors in the local area by teaching gardening, food preparation and nutrition, provides shared meals and take-home vegetables to participants and builds cross-cultural communities of support.



Photo credit: Whitney Buckner

## Rancher training in Peru

A Rocha Peru has had many encouragements in their dry forest conservation project. Households in Jatanca and Santa Maria which installed ecological cookstoves report a 22% reduction in firewood consumption for the households using them, and a new buddy system is in place to ensure they are maintained. New conservation agreements have been formalized, hundreds of native Algarrobo *Prosopis* seedlings are being produced in a local nursery to reforest 1 ha in the municipality, with monthly monitoring of over seven hectares already reforested. The team is tracking plant growth and assessing the impact of the application of hydrogel and garlic-based repellent to address pests.

However, in carrying out all this good work, the team realised that forest resources were being used by local ranchers and herders in an uncontrolled manner. The ranchers have now agreed to make a financial contribution



Photo credit: A Rocha Peru

to compensate for their negative impact on the dry forest areas, and have been invited to join workshops on forestry management, herbaceous pest control – e.g. lemon verbena and tobacco – and forestry and wildlife law.

*Prosopis pallida*



## Alternative livelihoods for Ghanaian women

In A Rocha we believe in finding ways for everyone to thrive. In God's world, there is no need to pit people against planet – he created us for peaceful co-dependence. Muni-Pomadze, a Ramsar site, is a coastal lagoon where three species of turtle lay their eggs and migrating water birds find refreshment en-route. However, over time, the human population severely

degraded this important habitat by over-collecting firewood, overfishing and allowing cattle to graze the bush.

In response, A Rocha Ghana ran a mangrove restoration project with three communities. One is Akosua, a small fishing village, where 15 women monitored the number of turtles coming ashore and prevented eggs being dug up by poachers. The women also helped raise mangrove seedlings and planted them at a degraded area around one of their main fishing areas.

In return for their commitment, the women were trained in alternative livelihoods, including snail farming. Each woman was given equipment and four mature snails and produced a large stock for harvest. Snail is a delicacy in Ghana and can be enjoyed at home or sold, providing much needed income.





## A natural sanctuary in an urban sprawl

Wolf Fields is a three-acre site in Southall, West London, that was at one time used as a brick works. It's thought that some of the bricks made there now form part of the outer wall of Buckingham Palace! The site fell into disrepair and became a neglected wasteland used only for rubbish dumping and drug and substance abuse.

A Rocha UK acquired the site in 2012 and worked to clear the land. They removed 54 tonnes of rubbish – including hundreds of glass bottles, over ten mattresses, furniture, animal remains and asbestos. With the rubbish taken away, new paths were laid to improve access across the site. Committed members of the

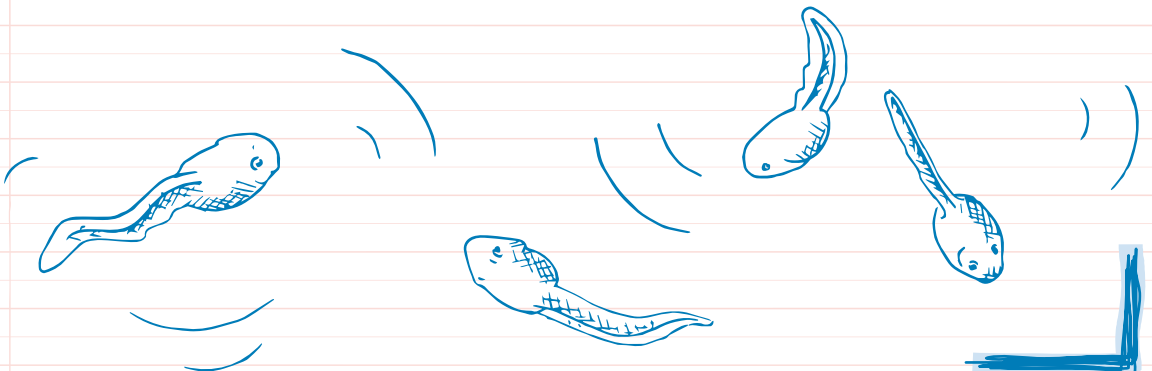
Wolf Fields Friends group volunteer each week to keep the site maintained, and report that species diversity continues to be on the rise. Local churches and youth groups also help with path clearing and litter-picking.

Reserve Manager Kailean Khongsai says, 'We want to make sure that everyone who comes feels safe, happy and comfortable on the site. 2020 was a hard year and we are still not out of the woods, but we managed to work out a system where volunteers were still able to carry out maintenance. Wildlife has done well with less noise from Heathrow Airport and the pond we recently relined has tadpoles and ducks – it is amazing! We've recently been able to restart our project to make the site more accessible to wheelchair users. Our plans include the creation of a prayer space, extending the wildflower meadow and installing two more beehives.'

As well as a being a beautiful nature park, the site is used for growing organic fruit and vegetables. Funds from the Veolia Environment Trust made it possible to plant more than 30 different native varieties of fruit trees and bushes, from apples, cherries and plums to mulberry, quince and medlar. Food is grown all year round at the community allotment, lovingly tended by local residents.



Photo credit: A Rocha UK



# Gifts with a Difference



A Rocha's catalogue of 'Gifts with a Difference' is supporting community members and nature through the items you buy. From tippy-taps to tree nursery training, every gift directly funds sustainable livelihoods or conservation projects.

## Supporting nature-based livelihoods for Syrian refugees

£25-75

Ibrahim Saffieh arrived with his family in Lebanon in 2012 as refugees fleeing the war in Syria. Initially he managed to find employment slaughtering chickens. Then in 2015, A Rocha Lebanon offered him work, first at our nature park in Qab Elias and more recently at Mekse, helping with practical conservation and site maintenance. He also grows food for his family on currently unused land and sells any surplus produce for income.

Ibrahim loves the outdoors and is a loyal worker. He can turn his hand to anything that needs to be done on site – from tree planting and pruning to pond maintenance and irrigation. When extra labour is needed, he arranges work for other refugees, paid on a daily basis, thanks to Gifts with a Difference and the wonderful individuals whose purchases have supported nature-based livelihoods for Syrian refugees.



Ibrahim

£6-20

## Fruit trees for schools, Uganda

In Uganda, 122,000 hectares of forest are currently being lost each year. A gift of fruit trees for a school can help restore the habitats of plants and wildlife, improve soil and water quality and provide food for families – improving the health of local children.



mangoes, you see!

# shop.arochoa.org

How about purchasing a Gift with a Difference on behalf of a loved one this Christmas? We'll send you a free card for your friend or relative explaining the gift.

**More gifts for your food-growing friends:**

## Sack gardening, Uganda

Sack gardens offer families a way to grow their own vegetables where space is limited or flooding is frequent. Gardening not only provides a healthier diet but also brings people closer to nature. The gift of sack gardening will provide one day of training, allowing 10 people to learn how to make and care for their sack gardens.

£15



Kiddawalime children



Beehives



Bee

## Beehive, Kenya

£79

The gift of a beehive will equip a farmer in Dakatcha Woodlands Important Bird Area with a sustainable source of income using the forest's rich resources. Each farmer will receive a hive and beekeeping training: the basic entrepreneurial skills to increase their income and reduce their dependence on unsustainable forest products. They will also be taught about the conservation value of the forest and its rich diversity of life.

# Good news written in the landscape

By Matthew Phan

Charles Hunter Smart has been a long-term supporter of A Rocha's work around the world and in the UK. Here he talks to Matthew Phan, another great friend of A Rocha, about the convictions that led him to take on the challenges of regenerative farming on the Bradwell Grove Estate.

Charles is the farm manager at Bradwell Grove Farm in the Cotswolds of West England, and a close friend of A Rocha's founder and President Emeritus Peter Harris. Charles led the farm's conventional-to-organic transition, and this piece captures some of his thoughts, framed by my interpretations, gathered during several conversations. Much of what we discussed concerned lessons he had learnt for regenerative agriculture, as well as how his spiritual walk had progressed in parallel and in communion with his farming journey.

Charles said prayer first thing in the morning is something he needs. It might be scattered – as perhaps with many of us, sometimes reading is his way into God's presence, sometimes meditation, sometimes writing – but if he does not make time for it first thing, the day takes over. Making time is one thing perhaps we can control, even if the process of prayer itself, and certainly the result, is not.

Giving up control is a key element of the organic farmer's life. You cannot control the weather. In giving up chemicals,

you have also given up ways of manipulating natural growth processes. Farming is a hard life; as businesses, farms in the UK remain hugely dependent on subsidies. Finances are uncertain. During a period of depressed crop prices in the mid-2000s, Bradwell Grove was doing poorly. Charles felt he had lost control and prayed, 'I don't know where I'm going. If you don't want me where I am, take me out, but show me where to go'. Soon after, Charles was led to open up to a fellow farmer in his church group who was trialing an organic approach. Their conversation got Charles interested, which ultimately led to an improvement in the farm's fortunes.

Charles also recognizes that being the manager and not the owner of the farm is another factor limiting his control. 'I can witness but I won't proselytize, and it's the owner's', says Charles. Is he speaking here of farming, or of faith? In the immediate context, it is about farming, though for Charles the two are deeply intertwined. In any case, his boss is now

extremely engaged in the latest environment plan that Charles has drawn up





for the farm, as a way to earn more of the environmental subsidies that will replace the UK's existing farmland subsidies in the years to 2028. Whether this is financially motivated or out of a belief in environmental stewardship, and the extent to which the latter is motivated by faith, Charles says he does not know but is happy that in practice they are going in the same direction. And ultimately, God is sovereign. 'I own the cattle on a thousand hills' (Psalm 50:10) goes through Charles' mind every so often walking with the dairy cows, a reminder that he is just a temporary steward. And, despite being a 4th generation owner, so is his boss.

Going organic was, for Charles, also a way of more deeply integrating faith into life. We'd already spoken about how, when Charles was in his early thirties, a lawyer training to be a vicar had knocked by accident on Charles' door. In explaining himself, it had woken in Charles a desire to have a more personal walk with Christ.

In response to his daughter's question, 'Who was that man?' Charles said, 'I don't know, but I think he was sent by God!'

But he wasn't yet integrating his faith with his work. He describes meeting Peter Harris and reading his book, *Under the Bright Wings*, as 'mind blowing' and 'life changing'. It wasn't that Charles suddenly decided that using chemical herbicides was wrong, but that he just started to see it from a different angle. In a talk he gave at his church on Plough Sunday in 2019, Charles said he had 'never quite so clearly seen it to be part of my walk to care for creation in an active way... The memories of when I killed a partridge population and the use of weed killers that damaged wildflowers became very clear ... I was beginning to feel quite uncomfortable about what we were doing...'

It is a continual journey to integrate faith with the whole of life. Charles says he recently ▶

felt compelled to walk around the estate and pray over it – so he and his wife did so over the course of a week, walking around it and stopping to pray every so often.

We went on to discuss broader concepts, like death and life. Charles thinks that in modern developed society we may have lost respect for death, yet at the same time we are terrified of it. We want to prolong and control life, but we have also lost respect for life's power to renew itself. Farming makes one conscious of this: 'Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies'. (John 12:24)

Then technology – when is technology God-fearing or, in more secular terms, when is technology respectful of the forces of life and death? If technology is the human way of extending control and gaining power, where does advancement leave space for respect for

uncertainty and grace? Clearly technology can be good. As a concrete example, hydroponic urban farming can be executed in a chemical-free way and may solve significant food challenges. Yet it is synthetic and soil-free, so how should we think about it?

Living in Hong Kong, it is perhaps absurd that I am writing about farming and nature. So I am grateful to friends who remind me that nature is everywhere, bursting in on us even where our walls keep it out. One friend recently sent a snap of a heron perching near a highway at Tsing Yi, a container port and industrial and housing estate. God's power is beyond our power. How fantastic it is that there is a world out there bigger than our human one.

*Matthew Phan is a financial journalist and friend of A Rocha Founder, Peter Harris*



# @ecoRobotix: reducing the environmental impact of industrial farming

By Steve Tanner

In 2014, I launched ecoRobotix with a friend, a company whose goal is to develop machines that drastically reduce the usage of chemicals in agriculture. This year, we started selling our ARA machine, an ultra high-precision sprayer using artificial intelligence to spray products with centimetre accuracy on specific plants ([www.ecorobotix.com](http://www.ecorobotix.com)). This means it is possible to spray herbicide only on the weeds, reducing the use of chemicals by up to 95%, or to spray natural, non-selective herbicides like acetic acid.

It remains challenging to automate organic farming when it comes to weeding, because the only current technique for removing weeds in organic agriculture is mechanical weeding, which lacks accuracy and selectivity. No-tillage techniques, which emit less CO<sub>2</sub>, are also harder to use in organic farming because of the difficulty of weeding without disturbing the soil. Spot-spraying with organic products means you can weed non-tilled fields and represents an interesting solution for low-carbon, organic agriculture.

More generally, artificial intelligence used in agriculture can bring more accuracy, preserving resources and avoiding damaging side-effects. For instance, our machine can recognize the plant species and decide not to remove certain plants which are beneficial to insects. It can also deposit natural repellent only on the plants we want to protect and not everywhere, resulting in reduced damage on the auxiliary insects present in the field.

This year, we tested an organic product to fight against aphids in sugar beetroot. Applied only on the leaves of the beetroot thanks to our machine, it penetrates the plant and targets only the aphids which suck the leaves, causing no damage to other insects.

Obviously, technology alone won't solve the ecological problems of agriculture. But building better and smarter machines can strongly reduce the impact of our food production system on the biodiversity and soil health.

*Steve Tanner is Chief Technology Officer and co-founder of ecoRobotix and a trustee of A Rocha International.*



# Farming God's Way

## What is Farming God's Way?

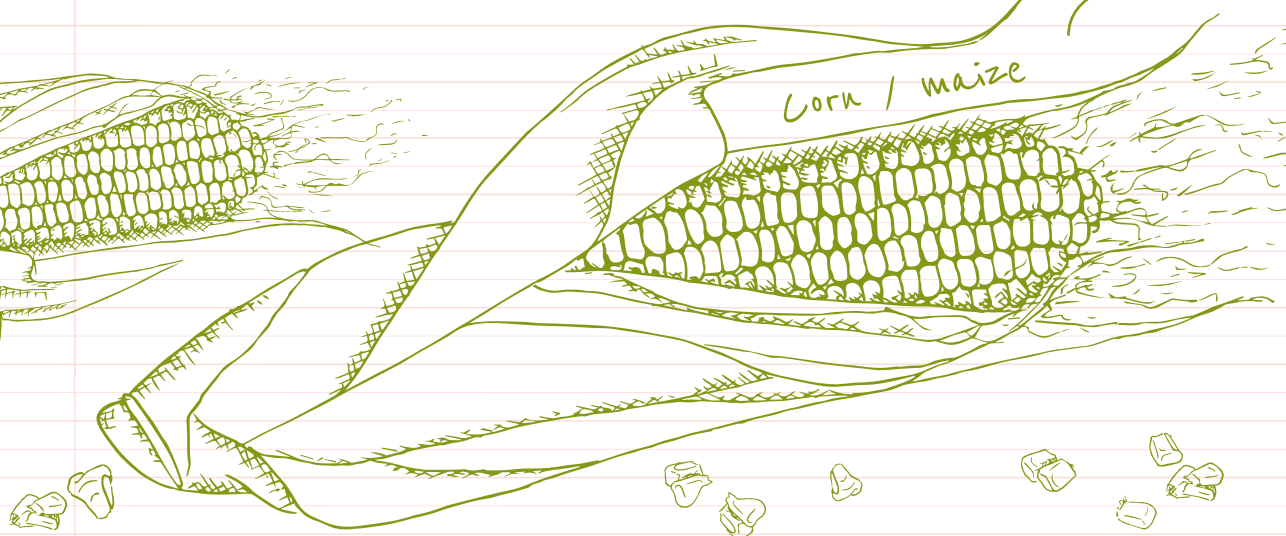
Farming God's Way is a form of conservation agriculture which brings together well-balanced biblical principles, good management and technological solutions. It was first pioneered in 1984 by Brian Oldreive on his largescale commercial farm in Zimbabwe and aims to provide a godly solution to the food security and poverty crisis for the rural poor.

Agricultural practices focus on minimizing soil disturbance, maintaining its organic composition and maximizing the diversity of species that the land supports. Instead of ploughing the soil, which damages the structure, it is loosened to a very shallow depth. This minimizes the growth of weeds, encourages the growth of soil microbes and improves soil aeration and its ability to hold water – making it more tolerant to drought.

Seedlings are carefully spaced to maximize crop yields and planting is timed according to the seasons. Then the plots are covered with a thick layer of mulch, minimizing erosion and run-off, suppressing weeds and reducing evaporation from the soil surface, keeping it moist and cool. As the mulch decomposes, nutrients are released back into the soil, increasing its fertility. This is also enhanced by rotating grain crops with legumes, which free up nitrogen in the soil.

## – Nigeria

Eden Creation Care Initiative, A Rocha's Associated Project in Nigeria, is advising farmers on the principles of Farming God's Way to grow crops and plant trees. The team is running a demonstration plot to compare the results of inorganic, organic and mixed farming techniques. They test the soil before and after each planting year and share what they learn with the farmers.





## – Kenya

A Rocha Kenya is working closely with Kenya Wildlife Service to identify and address issues of governance for the Watamu Marine Protected Area (MPA), in partnership with the University of St Andrews and others. The project aims to bring together stakeholders to identify and tackle issues that are threatening or degrading the MPA and the people who depend on it.

One component involves exploring alternative food livelihoods for fishing communities, particularly when it's difficult to fish. During the kusi, or 'long rains', the ocean becomes rough and many fishers struggle to get a good catch. By training community members in the principles of Farming God's Way, they can learn how to get high crop yields while protecting biodiversity and minimizing pressure on the MPA.



## – Uganda

Since 2012, A Rocha Uganda has been working with schools and farmers in communities around Kampala to train them in the principles of Farming God's Way. Although 70% of Uganda's population is employed in agriculture, the sector contributes to only 25% of the economy<sup>1</sup>, meaning that few farmers manage to grow enough food to sustain them throughout the year.

But with Farming God's Way, the results are clear. Farmers like Solome Kaweesa have told us that the fertility of their soil has improved and their yields have increased.

'One day when I was cutting grass to mulch my garden, my neighbours laughed and wondered why I would waste all that time', says Solome. 'They did not know about my bumper harvest! The following season was just as productive, so now I use Farming God's Way to grow beans, maize, yellow corn, cowpeas, groundnuts and other vegetables on all of my three acres.'



Photo credit: Amigos Kira Farm



Photo credit: Amigos Kira Farm

<sup>1</sup>[www.worldbank.org/en/country/uganda/overview#1](http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/uganda/overview#1)

# The GENESIS farmer

## What does it mean to 'rule' and 'subdue'?

By Rev. Dr. Dave Bookless



The Harvesters by Pieter Brueghel the Elder

Genesis 1 has a lot to answer for! According to a hugely influential journal article by Lynn White Jr.<sup>1</sup>, it places humanity, made in God's image, on a pedestal above the rest of nature with permission to exploit and destroy, and is thus the primary cause of our current ecological

crisis. Today, some Christians argue for a hierarchical 'dominionism', stating 'humanity has a superior status in creation, and that this status provides a moral basis for humans to wield power over nature, and to compel it to serve human needs and interests.'<sup>2</sup>

It's easy to see how this conclusion can be reached. Genesis uses strong language: the Hebrew *radah* ('rule' or 'have dominion') suggests royal authority, and *kabas* ('subdue') can mean to trample underfoot. Does being made in God's 'image' really give us licence to set ourselves apart from nature, to exploit animals, soil, forests and oceans without limits to sate our own desires? We've certainly acted that way, and today's climate, biodiversity and agricultural crises are the consequence.

Yet, this interpretation is a long way from what Genesis really means, and is ultimately simplistic, self-centred (anthropocentric) and selfish (narcissistic). Let me explain. It is simplistic because it ignores both the contexts of Genesis 1–2 and the rest of the Bible. It is self-centred because it fails to place humanity within God's care for all creation, and it is selfish because it does not take account of the consequences of 'dominionism' on the poor, on future generations or on other species. Let's look at those and tease out some genuinely biblical principles for farming and agriculture.

### Farming as God's representatives

Being created in God's image means being God's representatives within creation. It primarily concerns our responsibility to reflect God's purposes and character: the God who delights in the diversity and interdependence of creation, repeatedly affirming 'it is good', and who continually creates, provides, shows compassion and recreates. Rather than setting us above to dominate, it places us amongst to lead from within what Richard Bauckham calls 'the community of creation'<sup>3</sup>. *Radah* reflects this; it is the rule or dominion of a shepherd caring for their flock, the Old Testament vision of good kingship. With New Testament eyes, we see Jesus, the servant king, washing feet and touching lepers. *Kabas* literally means 'to place one's foot upon' but in the sense of occupying or taking possession of (see Joshua 18:1) rather than aggressively crushing underfoot. That's why it's used in tandem with 'fill the earth' which, I believe, was fulfilled in Egypt (Exodus 1:7) and is not about having huge families today! In agricultural terms *kabas* includes the hard work of removing rocks and weeds to make the soil fertile and productive.

### Farming for the good of all

The big picture, which guides our interpretation, is that the world is made primarily for God (Psalm 24:1, Colossians 1:15–16) and only derivatively and conditionally for us. Other creatures, not only humans, are important to God's purposes and are given the same breath of life and permission to eat green plants (Genesis 1:30). Elsewhere, God mocks Job's self-absorbed attitude and points to humanity's ignorance and insignificance in the face of natural forces and wild creatures beyond human understanding, yet within God's care (Job 38–39). God has compassion on all he has made (Psalm 145:9) and as his image-bearers, so must we, ensuring our farming practices and land-use enhance rather than destroy biodiversity and do not lead to cruel treatment of other creatures. In Genesis 2:15, Adam is commissioned to *abad* and *samar* the Garden, words often translated as 'till' and 'keep' but perhaps better understood as 'serve' and 'preserve'. This acts as a commentary and counterbalance to Genesis 1:28, ensuring that our ruling and subduing are to the end that the whole garden of God's creation might flourish.

### Farming for the future

Taking the whole Bible, we are called not only to be 'Genesis farmers' who reflect God's image, but also 'Covenant farmers' (Genesis 9) bound together in a sacred contract between God, people, the land and its creatures. The Bible repeatedly treats the land as a living community and not a commodity, and so must we (Psalm 66, 96; Hosea 4:1–3; Leviticus 18:25). As Christ-followers, we must be 'Christ-like farmers', serving and cherishing, studying and observing birds, plants and the rhythms of nature to learn both Kingdom and agrarian lessons. Finally, in the light of God's promise that creation will be liberated from bondage to decay (Romans 8:21), we should be 'visionary farmers', seeking to anticipate, however poorly and partially, the day when the earth will no longer be tied to decay but be filled once more with the glory of God, as the waters cover the sea (Habakkuk 2:14).

*Dave Bookless is the Director of Theology at A Rocha International*

<sup>1</sup> L. White Jr., *The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis*, Science, 1967

<sup>2</sup> S. Vantassel, *Dominion over Wildlife*, Resource Pubs. 2009 p.2

<sup>3</sup> R. Bauckham, *Bible and Ecology*, DLT. 2010



# theBigGive

## CHRISTMAS CHALLENGE

30 NOV—7 DEC 2021



**From noon (GMT) on #GivingTuesday 30 November until noon on 7 December any donation you make through the Big Give's Christmas Challenge website will be doubled (while match funds last) by generous donors and the Big Give's philanthropic partner, the Reed Foundation.**

Last year, fabulous supporters like you raised more than £30,000 to help coordinate and support A Rocha's global environmental education programme – equipping and empowering children and communities to live sustainably with the world around them. We believe muddy hands and nature encounters are fundamental to environmental conservation, whether that's by teaching young Ugandans how to grow vegetables in sacks or exploring rockpools with Kenyan students. And that's why A Rocha International will be participating in the Big Give again in 2021!

**Find out more at [aroc.me/big-give-2021](https://aroc.me/big-give-2021)**

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