

June 2024: Churches Count on Nature

During June, the Church of England is encouraging all churches to take part in **Love Your Burial Ground Week** and **Churches Count on Nature** (8-16 June) where everyone is invited to explore their churchyards or burial grounds for wildlife and help to survey what they find.

The Rt Rev'd Graham Usher, the Church of England's Lead Bishop for the Environment, said, "I hope many congregations will take part in Love Your Burial Ground Week and Churches Count on Nature. It is a great way to engage local people with the biodiversity around them, as well as offer a missional invitation to become involved with the life of their local church."

Relatively untouched by modern agricultural practices, and usually managed with a gentler touch than gardens, churchyards and burial grounds can be places where nature is still able to thrive. Locally we are blessed that local churches have worked with the High Peak Borough Council to develop more environmentally sensitive ways to manage closed churchyards, resulting in increasing numbers of flowers, insects and birds. Throughout June the Church of England, in partnership with the conservation charity Caring for God's Acre, is running a series of webinars on ways to care for the land we have dedicated to God. Caring for God's Acre has numerous resources <https://www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk/get-involved/resources-for-love-your-burial-ground-week-and-churches-count-on-nature-events/> to help people get involved with caring and recording, including a downloadable 'Starter Guide' in its 'Things to do' section, showing the common species we can expect to find in most churchyards, together with details about how to record what we find.

In a secular sense, we know that enabling nature to thrive is good for us, with measurable benefits for mental well-being, food security, and mitigating some of the worst impacts of the climate crisis. But people still ask me if it matters theologically. In other words, why should Christians care? I believe there are two main reasons, one simple and one more profound. At a simple level, whether we look globally or locally, it is the poorest people who are affected most by the consequences of biodiversity loss: by poorer air and water quality, by increasing food prices and by decreasing mental well-being. As Christians we are called to love our neighbour, with a particular care for the less fortunate. At a more profound level, the natural world is God's beloved creation, revealing his image and sustained by his life just as we are. Theology and science tell us the same truth – that when we hurt part of the body, every part suffers. Personally I am certain that how we treat the life which God created and loves is one of the clearest evidences of our love for God himself.

So this June, my prayer for us all is that appreciation of all of God's creation will be a regular part of our prayer, and that we will all be encouraged to reflect on steps that we can take to 'tread more lightly.'

Yours in Christ,
Louise Petheram
rev.louise.p@gmail.com 01433 621918

If you would like to sign up to receive the regular newsletters from churches and Christian groups across Hope Valley, please go to <https://mailchi.mp/f29b1286b3df/2t1gk3uwy2> or email me and I can sign you up.