



IDEAS &
RESOURCES

AUTUMN PACK

FAITH
ACTION
FOR NATURE

Places of safety – a reflection on shelter

Nature in the Bible – a quiz to get people talking

Children's activity – build a shelter

Worship resource – Birds in the Temple

Churchyard homes – making room for birds and bugs

Easy animal homes – adding shelter to your garden

Wildlife gardening – tips for the autumn season

Shelter

At the turning of the year, wildlife will begin to prepare for the coming winter. Some will stockpile food. Some will migrate to warmer climates. Others will seek somewhere safe and warm.

The theme for our autumn resource pack is shelter. It's something that all animals and birds need, especially at winter. Whether you are in a rural or urban context, there are things you can do at church or at home to provide shelter to more of God's creatures.

These resources have all been produced to inspire Christians and churches to get outside into nature, to appreciate it, care for it, and find the creator through it. Use and adapt whatever you like, and pass them along to others. Please let us know what you find most useful, and it will help to guide future resource packs – there is a short survey at www.faithactionfornature.org

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PLACES OF SAFETY

There are numerous passages in the Bible where God is described as our shelter. In Isaiah 25, God is compared to a tower, a safe place for refugees, a shelter from the storm and a cloud that brings shade.

Different writers in the Bible saw different needs for shelter. David spent time on the run, and God as a hiding place was a powerful metaphor for him. Isaiah lived at a time when the nation of Israel was threatened by a foreign power. The prophet's words would have resonated with those displaced by an invading army. The opposite may be true in Scotland, but as a desert people, there was comfort in the prospect of cloud – finally, some respite from the baking heat of the sun.

We would all have our own idea of what safety might be, and the wildlife around us will have a different perspective too. Small garden birds find safety in the tangled branches of shrubbery, something they can dart into when the shadow of a larger bird passes. For those birds of prey that they fear, shelter might mean a nook in a cliff face or a high branch of a tree. Others find shelter lower down. The deer feed in the open and return to the forest at night. Hedgehogs are at home in a pile of leaves. Puffins burrow themselves an underground nest.

As the autumn brings the colder weather, now is a good time to look at your garden and your church grounds, and think about making them a place of shelter for wildlife. What birds and animals could take refuge here? What could you add or enhance in order to create more safe places? We are invited to find peace and rest in the presence of God. How can we share and pass on that sense of welcome and protection to the wildlife around us?

You are a tower of refuge to the poor, O LORD,
a tower of refuge to the needy in distress.
You are a refuge from the storm
and a shelter from the heat.
For the oppressive acts of ruthless people
are like a storm beating against a wall,
or like the relentless heat of the desert.
But you silence the roar of foreign nations.
As the shade of a cloud cools relentless heat,
so the boastful songs of ruthless people are stilled.
Isaiah 25:4-5 (New Living Translation)

NATURE IN THE BIBLE QUIZ

The Bible is full of references to nature, from beginning to end. Once we start noticing it, we see these references everywhere, and it can enrich both our Bible reading and our view of the world around us. This quiz is a fun way to make that point, and provoke your congregation's curiosity to go and find out more.

There are a couple of ways to use it. You could ask the congregation in a service, but since it contains some very obscure references, it might be fun to ask a minister instead. Sit them in a chair at the front and put their Bible knowledge to the test. You could also get children to read the questions.

- 1 **Q: Where was the first place that God met with humans?**
A: In a garden - the Garden of Eden.
- 2 **Q: Which element existed with God before creation?**
A: Water. Genesis chapter 1 tells us that the spirit of God was hovering over the waters.
- 3 **Q: Which king of Israel kept pet monkeys?**
A: Solomon. His trading ships brought him apes and baboons. (1 Kings 10:22)
- 4 **Q: True or false – Jesus once compared himself to a chicken.**
A: True. In Matthew 23:37 Jesus says he'd like to gather Jerusalem "as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings."
- 5 **Q: According to a story in the Bible, which plant is elected King of the trees?**
A: The bramble (or thornbush). It's in a story told by a man called Jotham in Judges chapter 9.
- 6 **Q: True or false – there are giant eagles in the Bible**
A: True – In Ezekiel 17 there is a story about giant multi-coloured eagles planting trees.
- 7 **Q: Which Old Testament prophet had a day job looking after trees?**
A: Amos. He tells the king that he is not a professional prophet, but looks after sheep and fig trees.
- 8 **Q: True or false – there are dragons in the Bible**
A: True. Dragons appear in Job, Isaiah, Ezekiel and Revelation.
- 9 **Q: True or false – there are house cats in the Bible**
A: False. Cats had not been domesticated in Israel in Bible times and do not appear in the Old or New Testament. (There is one mention in the Apocrypha)
- 10 **Q: Which birds brought food to the prophet Elijah?**
A: Ravens. They brought him bread and meat every morning and evening in the wilderness.

CHILDREN'S ACTIVITY: BUILD A SHELTER

An outdoor activity to do on a walk or during outdoor children's work. Some wildlife reserves have a place set aside for children to play, or an area where there are den-making materials. It's worth asking around to see if your local reserve can host your activity, but otherwise use whatever woods or wild space you have available to you. You could even use an urban park, though you will need to bring more materials with you to get you started and you might need permission.

Depending on the space and what you have available, you could take along a tarpaulin or two, old sheets, rope, string, pegs, etc. (Make sure you take it all away with you afterwards!)

The aim of the activity is to get children active in a wild space, thinking creatively about the materials around them, and appreciating how wildlife might view things differently to them. Use it alongside the worship resources in this pack to create an outdoor church session.

- 1.** Walk with the group to a safe area where there is space to roam, but not to get lost. If you have brought materials with you, unpack them and put them in a pile.

Explain: Imagine that we have just arrived in the area, and we need somewhere to sleep for the night.

- 2.** Get the children to build themselves a shelter, either as a group or in twos or threes. Move between groups to help if needed. Ask questions to get them thinking about what shelter means – how will they stay dry? Will they be warm enough? Are there any predators to watch out for?
- 3.** When you've built a shelter, crawl inside and share a snack.

Bonus ideas:

- Encourage the children to contrast their own needs with the needs of animals that might live in that place. What kinds of shelter would they need? Where would they build them, and what materials might they use?
- For older children or teenagers, you could do this on a residential and sleep out in your shelters. Obviously you'll need a lot more preparation to ensure everyone is warm and dry!
- The Israelites had an annual festival where they made temporary shelters and spent a week in them to remember the Exodus. Look up the Feast of Tabernacles in Leviticus 23:33-44.

WORSHIP RESOURCES: BIRDS IN THE TEMPLE

How lovely is your dwelling place, LORD Almighty!
My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the LORD;
my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.
Even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself,
where she may have her young - a place near your altar,
LORD Almighty, my King and my God.
Blessed are those who dwell in your house;
they are ever praising you.
Psalm 48:1-4 (New International Version)

In Psalm 48, the Psalmist expresses his longing for God's presence. It's like a hunger or thirst, a physical yearning for the peace of the temple and the refreshment of being with God.

As he thinks about the temple, he observes the wildlife that have found a place there. Sparrows visit the temple, perhaps picking up the scraps from the market or leftovers from the grain offerings. Swallows are nesting in the temple, raising their young on the high walls and in the eaves. How blessed it would be, he muses, to live like those birds, always in the presence of God. Their whole lives would be praise.

Today we have the Holy Spirit. The presence of God is no longer uniquely found in the temple, but we may still experience a hunger for connection with God, or for the fellowship of God's people.

And today we have a variety of creatures that live in and around the church. Each of them live out their animal lives to the glory of their creator, and they are worshippers at this church in their own ways.

Let's look out for them, just as the Psalmist watched the birds in the temple. Let's care for them and make room for them, taking pride in their coming and going. Where we can, let's invite in more – putting up bird boxes and bat boxes, insect homes and hedgehog houses, so that more of God's creatures can find shelter here at God's house.

A PRAYER FOR REFUGE

God our refuge and strength,

You are our place of safety, our rock and our high tower.

All: Thank you for your protection and care.

Your house has many rooms, and your door is open to all.

All: Thank you for your loving welcome.

When people have been turned away, and have nowhere to go.

All: Inspire us to be a people of welcome.

When people are displaced, and flee for safety,

All: Help us to show your love and compassion.

Your eye is on the sparrow. You see each one of your creatures.

All: Open our eyes to your creation.

When animals lose their habitats, and seek shelter.

All: Help us to make space for the wildlife around us.

In the name of your son Jesus, who made his home among us,

Amen



CHURCH ACTIVITY:

HOMES FOR BUGS AND BIRDS

We've thought about shelter and its importance to wildlife. Now let's add some to homes for wildlife to your area. There are lots of different options, but for this season we will focus on bird and bugs.

BIRD BOX

Birds nest in the spring, but autumn is a better time to put up birdboxes. The longer the box is there, the more time birds have to get used to it, investigate it, and feel comfortable enough to move in when the time comes. Some birds will also shelter in birdboxes in extreme weather, so it's worth putting them up before the worst of the winter.

- 1** First, you will want to identify good sites for birdboxes. There may be bird enthusiasts in the congregation who would love to be asked, and local RSPB Scotland volunteers may be available - contact your RSPB Scotland representative if you need a hand. They will be able to spot opportunities for different kinds of bird, depending on your buildings and grounds, and the sorts of birds present in the area.
- 2** Different birds have different boxes, so you will need to make a list of sites and boxes first. With this list, you can now source the boxes. They can be bought ready-made, but making them together could be a great community event. Perhaps a men's group or a youth group could do it, learning new skills and playing an active role in your conservation efforts. You can get designs and instructions from www.rspb.org.uk
- 3** Finally, mount the boxes in the sites you have identified, perhaps on a Saturday morning work party. Be sure to tell the wider congregation to look out for them. You may even like to walk people round to see them during or at the end of a service, so that you can pray a blessing on any future residents.

HOW TO SITE A BIRDBOX

There are a few things to consider when looking for place to put a bird box. You'll have a better chance of seeing the boxes in use with these pointers:

- Scotland's prevailing winds are from the South-West, and North winds are cold, so place birdboxes to face East where possible. That will shelter them from rain and wind.
- Think about how rain will drip and run off. Make sure that the box is upright or tipped slightly forward so that rain doesn't come through the entrance hole.
- Birds coming and going will draw the attention of cats, so keep nest boxes away from nearby branches or walls that cats could jump or climb.
- Consider flights paths to and from the nest, and avoid obstacles right in front of the entrance.
- Not all birds like neighbours, so avoid putting up more than one kind of nest box in each location. Sparrows, starlings and house martins are an exception, and they will nest in colonies.

What can you put where? Identifying good nesting sites takes a degree of experience, so we recommend using the expertise of your local RSPB Scotland contacts. But here are some general guidelines to get you thinking.

What have you got on site?	Potential residents	Where to put nestbox
Walls	Sparrows, tits, starlings	2 to 4 metres up. Fit boxes with different sized holes.
Trees	Sparrows, tits, starlings,	2 to 4 metres up
	Woodpeckers	3 to 5 metres up
	Pied wagtails	Open fronted box, 2 to 5 m
Eaves	Sparrows, starlings	Can place more than one under the eaves
	Swifts	Swift boxes and swift bricks, high up and unobstructed
	House martins	Add nest cups or boxes to encourage them. Can be messy.
Bell tower	Barn owls, some birds of prey	If there is access to a tower, owls may nest indoors.
Large hedges or shrubs	Robins, wrens	Open fronted boxes, below 2 metres, hidden in vegetation

BUG HOTEL

Bug hotels can be built any time of year, but autumn is a good time to source materials such as wood, dry grass and straw. This is also a great way to give nature a home in more difficult locations or areas where wildlife appears quite sparse. Guests at your bug hotel might include beetles and ladybirds, solitary bees and lacewings. Butterflies will find a safe spot to lie low for the winter.

There are a variety of designs and sizes you can build to suit your available space and resources. If you've got someone on the team with carpentry skills, you could make it an attractive and educational feature in a church garden or other public space (below left). Or you could use the common stacked pallet design - less attractive to humans but every bit as useful to insect residents (below right). Either way, constructing a bug hotel is a great all-age activity, and children love gathering materials and packing the spaces.

- 1** First you'll want to choose the location for your hotel. This can vary, but ideally it should be somewhere that receives plenty of sun and not too exposed, so the residents stay warm.
- 2** Get in touch with your RSPB Scotland contact to discuss the most suitable design and what you'll need. You can also get great ideas from www.buglife.org.uk with all the information about the different styles of homes, bugs you can attract, and even how to study them.
- 3** What you make is up to you, but we suggest you choose something that is manageable according to your space, the size of your team and the available materials.



FAMILY ACTIVITY: THREE EASY ANIMAL HOMES

Gardens can provide all kinds of habitats, and places for animals and birds to shelter over the winter. Here are three things you can do to make more room for wildlife in your garden or a local wild space. Involve the whole family in scouting out locations. Discuss what might like to shelter where. Look out for quiet or neglected areas of your space – often the underused or overgrown bits are the best places for wildlife.

- 1** **A log pile.** Autumn is a good time to make a log pile, as there may be scrap wood at the end of the growing season or after pruning trees. Dig a little bit of a dip, pile up your wood, and place sticks and branches over the top. You won't see much, as it's a place for wildlife to hide more than anything else, but log piles can serve as shelter and/or food for frogs, newts, mice and other small mammals, and a wide variety of insects.
- 2** **Hedgehog homes.** Hedgehogs will sleep through the winter in a sheltered log pile, but you can add a home just for them too. There are a variety of ways to make one, from durable wood homes to ones you can make out of cardboard boxes and tuck away in a secluded corner. Before starting, it's worth looking to see the distribution of hedgehogs in your area and the different home designs at www.hedgehogstreet.org.
- 3** **Bird boxes.** We've already talked about bird boxes on church grounds, but look for places in your garden too. If you have some already, be sure to clean them out in the autumn, as nests from the previous year may contain parasites. You can also carry out any repairs, relocate underused boxes or replace any that are showing their age – take old ones apart and add them to your log pile.

Extra ideas:

- Children love making little signs to welcome wildlife. Make them out of wood or paint on a stone. Use natural materials to avoid putting plastic in the garden.
- Encourage children to keep watching to see if their animal homes are used.

WILDLIFE GARDENS IN AUTUMN

As you think about hospitality and the nature that shares your home, you may want to bring some wildlife-friendly techniques to your gardening. Here are some ideas and tasks for the autumn.

- The end of the growing season is a time for clearing away the summer's growth, but avoid being too thorough. Let things die back naturally and keep seed heads in place to provide food for wildlife.
- Autumn is a good time to sow wildflower seeds for the following spring. Existing wildflower meadows should be cut to preserve their diversity.
- Now is the best time of year to prepare new flower beds or vegetable patches for next year. Dig them over and spread compost to be absorbed ready for the spring.
- Rake up leaves into a pile in a quiet corner or under a hedge. Lots of animals, from frogs to hedgehogs, will shelter in a leaf pile over winter. And once it's rotted down, you can spread it as leaf mould to fertilise the soil.

TAKING IT FURTHER

- If you enjoy getting out into nature as a family, why not join the RSPB Wild Challenge? Pick an activity that gets you out exploring, then log your activity and work your way towards the bronze, silver and gold badges. See www.rspb.org.uk/wildchallenge
- Creation Time runs from September to October every year, a time when churches around the country will be thinking about nature and creation. See www.seasonofcreation.org or download resources from Eco-Congregation Scotland: www.ecocongregationscotland.org/materials/creation-time/
- Forest Church is a network of groups meeting outdoors to experience God through creation. They have a focus on the mystical traditions of Christianity, and combine ancient practice with contemporary thought. See Bruce Stanley's book *Forest Church* for inspiration, or visit www.mysticchrist.co.uk
- National Tree Week is an annual celebration of trees, and has been organised by the Tree Council since 1975. In 2018 it will run from the 24th of November to the 2nd of December, marking the beginning of the tree planting season. To find events near you, visit www.woodlandtrust.org.uk or www.scotland.forestry.gov.uk

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