



IDEAS &
RESOURCES

SPRING PACK

FAITH
ACTION
FOR NATURE

HOME

What does home mean to you? - A reflection on nature care and hospitality.

Animal homes quiz - An ice-breaker for outdoor Sunday School or a children's talk – or for adults too.

Children's activity: wildlife walk - Take a walk and look for animal homes, and then have a go at building one.

Worship resources: Thanking God for our homes - A psalm, a blessing and a prayer.

Church habitat hunt - Exploring the wildlife on your site.

Household habitat hunt - What else lives where you live? Do a habitat hunt around your back garden.

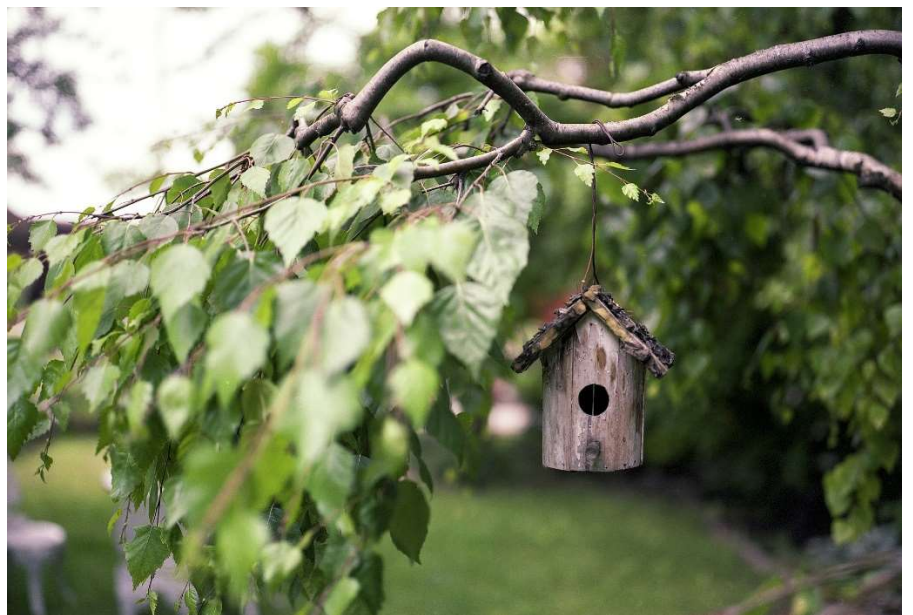
Land survey - Map the various habitats on your church grounds.

Resources written by Jeremy Williams and Paul Williams at Earthbound Ventures, in consultation with A Rocha UK and RSPB Scotland. Distributed by Eco-Congregation Scotland.

The places that we call home are also home to many other creatures. The activities for this season are all about discovering and celebrating the nature that lives alongside us. Take a habitat tour of your local reserve. Celebrate God's care for creation in the Psalms. And most important of all – get outside, as a family or as a church, and see what you can find!

The root of the word 'ecology' is the Greek word 'oikos', meaning home – so thinking about our shared home is the very essence of ecology. We are all responsible for making sure that animals and plants of all kinds can flourish, in our local areas and on our planetary home.

These resources have been prepared to inspire and inform Christians and churches in engaging with nature. They are for church leaders, church environment committees, families and individuals. They are for you. Browse through this resource pack, pick and choose what is useful to you in your context, and feel free to use and adapt as you see fit. Let us know what you like and don't like, and you will help to shape future resources – thank you!



WHAT DOES HOME MEAN TO YOU?

'Home' is one of the most evocative words in the English language. It represents security, belonging and acceptance. It's the place we can kick off our shoes and relax. It's a safe place, a refuge from the world, and the place we are most ourselves.

Churches offer people a spiritual home, and many of the same connotations are true from that spiritual perspective too. We should feel safe and supported by our church, and feel a sense of belonging and acceptance. It's why we put so much emphasis on welcome and hospitality. We make sure that visitors feel welcomed. A lot of effort goes into bringing newcomers into the life of the church and helping them to feel involved and part of the community.



This is all familiar territory for most of us – hospitality is something churches are good at. But what about your church's wilder visitors?

A variety of other creatures have their homes (or habitat, to use the proper word for the natural environment of a plant or animal) in and around your building. With a few exceptions – wasps and woodworm perhaps – we can make them feel welcome too. After all, God knows the whereabouts of every sparrow, as Jesus says in Matthew 10:29.

RSPB Scotland talks about 'giving nature a home', creating more room in our shared spaces for birds and wildlife. This season, we invite you to look around your church and its grounds, and see what else calls your church home. What lives in our gardens? How can we roll out the church's generous welcome to all God's creatures?

ANIMAL HOMES QUIZ

How much do you know about animals and where they live? For example, a bird lives in a nest. Where do these other animals live?

Badger:	sett
Spider:	web
Beaver:	lodge
Hermit crab:	shell
Ant:	anthill (nest or formicary also correct!)
Rabbit:	warren (burrow also acceptable)
Bats:	roost
Otter:	holt
Eagle:	eyrie
Squirrel:	drey

Optional tricky ones for adults:

Hornet:	byke
Tent bat:	they make a tent out of a rolled up leaf

How to use this quiz: If you're doing an outdoor Sunday School or youth group session, you begin with this as an ice-breaker. Follow it with the animal homes walk activity included in this pack, and finish with the blessing. You could also use it in a Sunday service, for a children's talk or to think about home. In that context, you could follow it with a reading of Psalm 104, and then get people to bless each other and their homes.

CHILDREN'S ACTIVITY: ANIMAL HOMES

This is an outdoor activity for children's work, or a church or family walk. You can combine this with the quiz and blessing to make a session. This may work in some urban contexts, but would be best in a park or woodland.

Explain: We share the places that we live with all kinds of creatures, and many of them build homes of one sort or another. Spring is a good time to go looking for animal homes, because it's when many animals and birds raise their young.

1. Take a walk and see what you can find. Depending on where you are, you may find birds nests, squirrel dreys, rabbit burrows, or molehills. You might see signs of wildlife but not be able to see their homes – and that's a learning point in itself. Ask the children why they have made them tricky to find. What predators might animals or birds be trying to avoid? If you find an animal home, encourage the children to observe where they are, how they are built, and what they are made from.
2. Look for a spot where you can have a go at building your own animal home. Think about the homes you have seen, and choose one to make together – a birds nest might be the most likely. Gather fallen sticks (don't break any off bushes or trees) or bunches of grass and see if you can arrange them into a nest. You could build one on a stump, in an accessible low forked branch, or in a bush or a sheltered spot. It's not as easy as it looks, and younger children might want to work in groups of two or three.

Extra ideas:

- You could bring along a soft toy bird, squirrel, or hedgehog to build a home for.
- With older children, you can stress-test their nest. It's easy enough to tangle some sticks together, but can it take any weight? Place a large potato in the nest to see if can take the weight.

WORSHIP RESOURCES:

THANKING GOD FOR HOMES

In Psalm 104, the poet sings about the animals they see around them, and how God cares and provides for them. You can use this to discuss the idea of home, or as an introduction to worship.

Read Psalm 104 in your preferred version. If it's a little long, here is an abbreviated version using the New Living Translation.

You make springs pour water into the ravines, so streams gush down from the mountains.
They provide water for all the animals, and the wild donkeys quench their thirst.
The birds nest beside the streams and sing among the branches of the trees.

...

The trees of the LORD are well cared for - the cedars of Lebanon that he planted.
There the birds make their nests, and the storks make their homes in the cypresses.
High in the mountains live the wild goats, and the rocks form a refuge for the hyraxes.
You made the moon to mark the seasons, and the sun knows when to set.
You send the darkness, and it becomes night, when all the forest animals prowl about.
Then the young lions roar for their prey, stalking the food provided by God.
At dawn they slink back into their dens to rest.
Then people go off to their work, where they labour until evening.

O LORD, what a variety of things you have made!
In wisdom you have made them all. The earth is full of your creatures.

...

May the glory of the LORD continue forever! The LORD takes pleasure in all he has made!
Psalm 104:10-14, 16-24, 27-28,31

In this passage the psalmist sings about God making the world and the things that live in it, how God gave each animal its habitat – trees for the birds, rocks for the hyrax.

The psalm describes each animal in its place, with the food they need, and the water they need. It talks about how different animals come and go – the lions come out at night and then go to bed in the day. The people come out in the morning and go to work.

The psalm suggests that God takes pleasure in all that he has made: watching the world, seeing the squirrels being squirrels and the trees being trees. And people being people.

Extra ideas:

- Ask children what kind of home they have – a house, a bungalow, a flat?
- For an environmental angle, discuss the things that we do to look after our homes. Where does 'home' stop? At the front door? How can we look after our home towns? And our home planet?
- The psalm says that God made everything 'in wisdom'. What do you think that means? How does nature show God's wisdom? Pray and ask for some of God's wisdom to help us look after his world better.

A BLESSING

In the book of 1 Samuel, David sends out his servants to meet someone, and he instructs them to give them this blessing:

“Peace to you, peace to your house, and peace to all that you have.”

1 Samuel 25:6

Jesus also told his disciples to say ‘peace to this house’ when they arrived in a new place. So let’s say that to each other. Let’s use it to bless the wildlife around us. And let’s say it as we visit each other this week.

Ideas:

- Use this to bless each other in a Sunday Service, saying it to those around us.
- If using this outdoors, why not say it out loud together to the wildlife and the birds, as a blessing to the wildlife we encounter.

A PRAYER

God our provider,

Thank you for all that you have made.

We praise you for your care for all your creation,

Your attention to the needs of each and every one of your creatures.

You delight in all of them, in all their diversity,

You know them and all their ways.

Thank you that you delight in us,

For we too are precious to you.

Help us to cherish your creation,

To see it as you see it,

And love it as you love it,

And care for it as you care for it,

For your glory,

Amen



CHURCH HABITAT HUNT

Ecologists carry out habitat surveys to find out what lives in an area. This is a mini version of the same thing, suitable for all ages. Have a look around your grounds to see what kinds of habitats you have. It'll give you an idea of the sorts of wildlife that already shares your space, and what you might expect to find. Don't worry if there's not much to find right now! Later in the year we'll look at how we can enhance these habitats and add new ones. For now this is all about opening our eyes to the wildlife around us, the many creatures that have their home among us.

Habitat	Characteristics	Could be home to	Y	N
Stone walls	A stone wall in the sun can be a warm and sheltered place.	Climbing plants, lichens and mosses. Mason bees		
Eaves	Out of the rain and wind, the eaves of a building are perfect nesting sites.	Bats, birds, bees and wasps		
Hedges	Hedgerows are often rich in biodiversity, and even a common garden hedge is a habitat of its own.	Small birds such as sparrows. Hedgehogs, mice. Wide range of wildflowers and plants.		
Mature trees	Well established trees provide food, shelter, for birds.	Many different kinds of birds and insects, and small mammals.		
Long grass	An area of long grass can be home to a variety of plants and insects.	Wildflowers, grasses, and the insects that visit them. Butterflies.		
Short grass or lawn	Depending on how often it is mown, a lawn can be home to a range of smaller flowers, fungi	Smaller flowers, fungi, pollinating insects		
Meadow or Heath	grassy, often boggy ground, often with rushes	Small insects, spiders, wild flowers, ground nesting birds		
Aquatic	Waterlogged ground, ponds and large puddles, also larger water courses.	water insects and amphibians, fish		

When you've done a walk around your church grounds, encourage your congregation to do a similar exercise in their own gardens. Use the Household Habitat Hunt as a handout.

For a more substantial survey, use the churchyard survey.

HOUSEHOLD HABITAT HUNT

The first step to loving your wildlife neighbours is to get to know them. Survey the different habitats around your home, and what might live in them. The more you look, the more you'll find...

Habitat	Characteristics	Could be home to	Y	N
Hedges	A common garden hedge is a habitat of its own.	Small birds such as sparrows. Hedgehogs, mice.		
Trees or bushes	Trees and bushes provide shelter and food and a place to hide.	Birds, insects, fungi, bees, spiders. Look out for ladybirds and other beetles.		
Short grass or lawn	Depending on how often it is mown, a lawn can be home to a range of smaller flowers, and fungi.	Smaller flowers, fungi. If you don't use chemicals on it you'll get bees and other pollinators.		
Rockery	Gaps between stones make safe little homes for wildlife	Insects, frogs if there's water nearby, maybe even lizards if you're lucky.		
Compost heap	Compost heaps are full of nutrients for insects and invertebrates.	Worms and woodlice, slugs and snails.		
Wood pile	decaying wood or household log pile	Woodlice, spiders, solitary bees, frogs and small mammals.		
Flower bed	A normal flowerbed is often carefully managed, but it will still have wild visitors.	Look out for butterflies and bees. See if you can find ants under stones and around the edges.		
Vegetable patch	If it's been weeded or turned over, this will suit birds that eat seeds and bugs from the soil.	Worms, and the birds that eat them. Also slugs and snails.		
South facing Wall	Walls that face south get plenty of sun and make a warm home - especially stone walls with gaps.	Solitary bees, bumble bees, spiders and small pollinators		

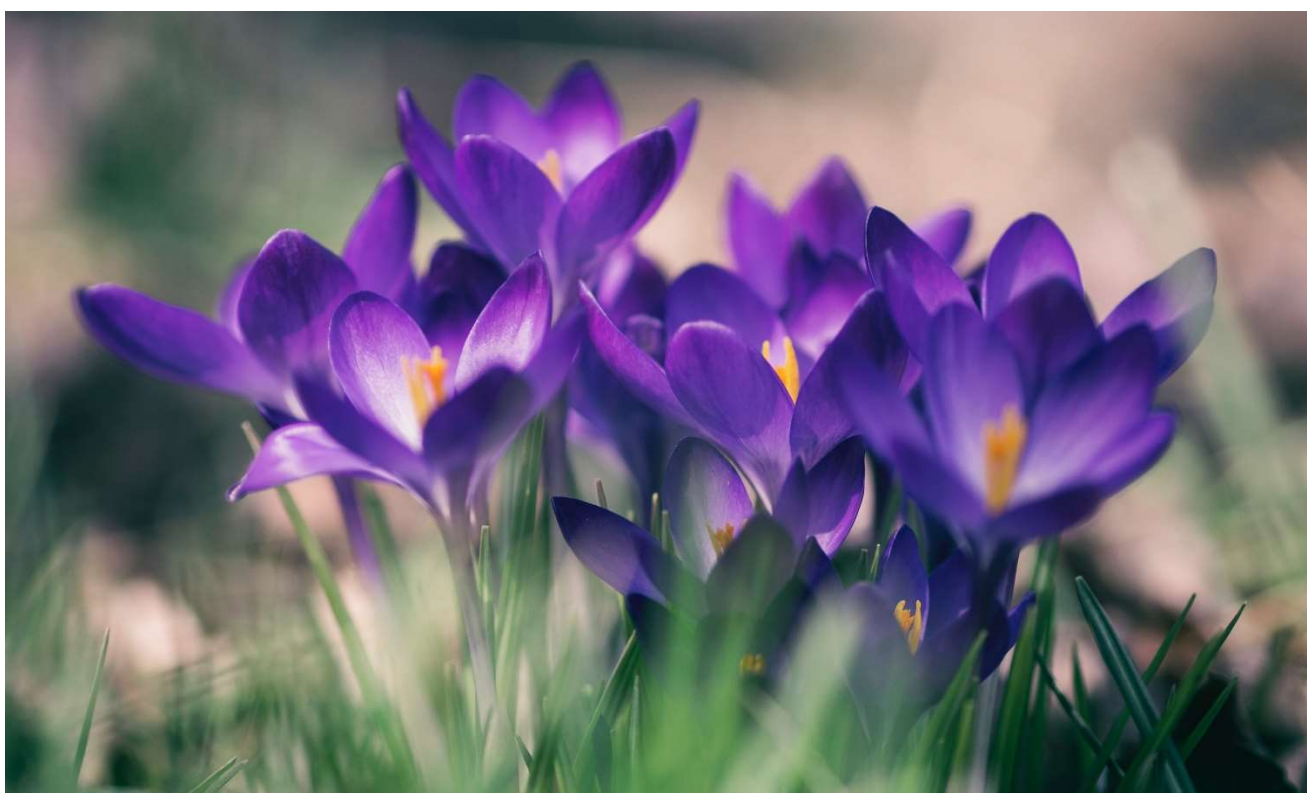
Extra ideas:

- How many different creatures can you spot in your garden or around where you live? Keep a journal for a week and note down what you see.
- When you visit a nature reserve there is often a blackboard where people can write down any notable sightings and let other visitors know what to look out for. Could you do the same? Put a little 'notable sightings' board up in the hall, or on the fridge, and leave notes to the other members of your household to tell them what you've seen.

WILDLIFE GARDENS IN SPRING

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 spring season.

- Early spring is a good time to put up bird boxes, before nesting season begins. There are different types of boxes for different birds. You might want to make your own, or there is a wide selection available to buy from www.rspb.org.uk
- Keep bird feeders topped up. Birds have come through the winter, but food may be getting scarce and the last few weeks before the warmer weather arrives can be a risky time for wildlife.
- Plant summer flowering bulbs to add colour to your garden, and to attract butterflies, bees and other pollinating insects.
- The early spring months are a good time to plan activities for later in the year. Think about areas of your garden that you might want to enhance for wildlife – perhaps adding a wildflower patch, a compost heap, a pond, or a rock or log pile.



LAND SURVEY

If you've already visited a local reserve and had a tour, you may already be familiar with some of the ideas in this activity.

While the Habitat Hunt activities are designed to help your congregation to get outside and look for wildlife, this activity is for those who want to get to grips with their church plot. Based on scientific conservation practice, this activity can be done alone, in groups, or with a church eco team. If you're doing it with children, it can be done alongside the Habitat Hunt.

When deciding the best course of action for a plot of land, conservationists first carry out a thorough survey of the area to work out what exists there already. This survey has stripped down the technical ecology and is tailor-made to help you do this yourself!

Don't worry if at first it looks like you've not got very much to identify. That just means you have more opportunities!

Categorising your land types

Find out what habitats exist on your plot and categorise areas accordingly. This will be really helpful in working out what lives and grows in your area. If you want, you can use the DAFOR method to help you categorise how often habitats are found:

- Dominant - found in approximately 50-100% of the area
- Abundant - found in approximately 30-50% of the area
- Frequent - found in approximately 15-30% of the area
- Occasional - found in approximately 5-15% of the area
- Rare - found in approximately 0-5% of the area

You can use the survey sheet to help you, or you can come up with categories of your own.

TIP:

- Why not invite a local RSPB Scotland volunteer or staff member to walk you through it?

HABITAT TYPE	CATEGORY*	NOTES
Broadleaved trees (dense)		
Broadleaves trees (scattered)		
Coniferous trees (dense)		
Coniferous trees (scattered)		
Scrub (dense)		
Scrub (scattered)		
Mixed (dense)		
Mixed (scattered)		
Grassland (species rich)		
Grassland (species poor)		
Marshy ground		
Heath		
Bracken		
Still water		
Running water		
Coastal		
Waste land (ruins, rubble, etc)		
Hedge (species rich)		
Hedge (species poor)		
Wall		
Buildings		
Paths, roads, pavement		
Bare ground		
Other		

* Mark D,A,F,O,R for Dominant, Abundant, Frequent, Occasional or Rare.

Map your grounds

Now that you have surveyed the grounds, it helps to plot these land types on a map. It might be helpful to note the existing uses of specific areas (ie compost heap) and areas where you identify opportunity. It doesn't need to be precise or accurate and you can draw this yourself.

If you know of someone in the congregation who is good at drawing, ask them to join you. Alternatively, get some artistic children to help you out. Display the results so that everyone in the congregation can see what you're up to and take pride in your conservation efforts.

Once you've put all this together you'll have a thorough understanding of your church grounds. You're well equipped to start thinking about what projects you want to see take shape.

Extra Ideas:

- Go around the site again and make a note of any birds you see. Some of these might be making nests or foraging in your area. If you've got experienced bird watchers in the church, encourage them to come along. You never know what you might find!
- Do you have any protected species living in your area? Maybe you have bats? Make a note of these or consult with your RSPB ranger about what special species you might be hosting.

TAKING IT FURTHER

- If you enjoy getting out into nature as a family, why not join the Wild Challenge from RSPB Scotland? 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
- For more church resources on the themes of wildlife and conservation, visit www.arocha.org.uk
- To explore the common ground between the church and science, you might like to read *The Creation: An Appeal to Save Life on Earth*, by the biologist E O Wilson.
- There's always something happening at your local reserve, whether you want to get your hands dirty with some volunteering, or whether you prefer the safe distance of your binoculars. Visit www.rspb.org.uk or www.scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk to find places to visit and details of events.

Photos by Benjamin Balazs, Sue Rickhuss, Ivor Bond/Pixabay; Aaron Burden/Unsplash.