



A time for celebration and care



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## Biodiversity FAQs

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### What is biodiversity?

This is a technical term for the variety of life on Earth. It refers not just to the diversity of species of plants, animals, fungi, bacteria etc, but also to the variety within any one species and to the various ways species live together in ecosystems.

### Why does biodiversity matter?

Many people feel delight in the diversity itself and want to preserve it for its own sake and for its aesthetic and inspirational value. There is also a sense of preserving genetic diversity so that future generations can draw on it as a resource, e.g. for new drugs in medicine or resistance to pests in crop plants. Organisations as diverse as the United Nations, the British Government and the Royal Society for the Protection of birds believe it is far more important even than this, and that biodiversity:

- is crucial for sources of food, fuel and energy,
- is needed to regulate the Earth's atmosphere,
- is essential for pollination, waste-disposal, pollution control, agriculture and clean water.

### Why is it important to Christians?

The accounts of the Creation in the early chapters of Genesis emphasise the delight God takes in his Creation. More specifically in Genesis 2.15 Adam is instructed to 'till and care for' the earth and many modern interpreters take this in a strong sense that we are accountable to God for the care we take over our fellow creatures and our shared world.

### Why the 2010 focus on Biodiversity?

2010 has been declared the International Year of Biodiversity (IYB) by the United Nations. Find out more about the Year at Biodiversity is Life ([www.biodiversityislife.net](http://www.biodiversityislife.net)) the website of IYB-UK, the UK partnership supporting IYB.

### Is human activity destroying biodiversity?

Currently, human activities are destroying biodiversity at alarming rates and these losses are irreversible. The Convention on Biological Diversity set 2010 as a way-point in our journey of protecting biodiversity and sustainability generally. We were to have slowed the rate of extinctions and loss of biodiversity by now. Sadly the evidence collated for the Global Biodiversity Assessment this year (<http://gbo3.cbd.int>) indicates that we are damaging the natural world quite as fast, if not faster, than ever. However, that is all the more reason for church initiatives such as the Church of England's *Shrinking the Footprint* to highlight our responsibility.



### Is church land important?

The Church of England has 12,000 churchyards where biodiversity may flourish. Habitats that are particularly important in churchyards are the grassland, the monuments and the old trees as well as the church buildings themselves.

**Grassland:** Although there is a lot of grass about, most of it lacks diversity of both plant and animal species. This is because it either has been 'improved' for farming by fertilising, weed-killing and re-seeding so that all the wild flowers have been lost, or been treated as amenity grassland where the regular mowing that leaves the cuttings in place fertilises the soil and prevents the plants flowering and seeding. Churchyards can be islands of relatively untouched grassland among fields or towns. Ideally they should be mown and have the cuttings removed and at appropriate times the mowing should be left off so that the plants can flower.

**Monuments:** Particularly in the south of England there are few naturally exposed rocks. Churchyards contain many graves with headstones, slabs and walls of stones of many different types. Each of these can provide an ideal surface for mosses and lichens to grow on. Some of these are almost restricted to churchyards. Here the best thing to do is not to clean these plants off and to prevent them being shaded by ivy or long grass.

**Veteran trees:** In addition to being wonderful creatures in their own right, old trees contain rotten wood that is the home to rare insects that feed on it. This does little harm to the tree, but the insects are increasingly scarce as old trees are felled as they die or for safety fears. Churches can treasure their trees, keeping an eye on them so that if there are any worries they can be dealt with early and the trees protected.

**Example:** Rivenhall Church, Essex, has grasshopper strips in the grass. These are both an attractive visual feature and they allow the grasshoppers to flourish as well as the wild flowers. This is just one example of many churchyards that manage the habitats with 'wildlife in mind'. This shows that there is no need for conservation to clash with 'tidyness' so long as imaginative ways are found of demonstrating to visitors to a churchyard that those who look after the site really care.



### What about church buildings?

Some church buildings can be used by animals that not everyone welcomes, but which are threatened in the wider environment - specifically bats and swifts. If there are real difficulties with living with these animals in your church, seek advice from your DAC (Diocesan Advisory Committee for the Care of Churches – for the Church of England). Hopefully, however, with imagination, ways can be found to help these creatures find a home in God's house.

### Where can my church get more advice?

Living Churchyards - Alliance of Religions and Conservation project:  
[www.arcworld.org/projects.asp?projectID=271](http://www.arcworld.org/projects.asp?projectID=271)

Caring for God's Acre - the conservation charity for churchyards and burial grounds:  
[www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk/default.aspx](http://www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk/default.aspx)

Shrinking the Footprint – the Church of England's national environmental campaign:  
[www.shrinkingthefootprint.cofe.anglican.org](http://www.shrinkingthefootprint.cofe.anglican.org)

Eco-Congregation, [www.ecocongregation.org](http://www.ecocongregation.org)

There are useful links on the Diocese of Ely's Conservation webpages at:  
[www.ely.anglican.org/church\\_in\\_community/church\\_in\\_society/diocesan\\_environment\\_committee/start\\_with/conservation.html](http://www.ely.anglican.org/church_in_community/church_in_society/diocesan_environment_committee/start_with/conservation.html)

Many county Wildlife Trusts give advice and support on churchyards.

### Where can I get more general information on biodiversity?

UN International Year of Biodiversity (IYB-UK) website: [www.biodiversityislife.net](http://www.biodiversityislife.net)

UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) website: [www.ukbap.org.uk/default.aspx](http://www.ukbap.org.uk/default.aspx)

Article on biodiversity suitable for a church magazine: [www.christian-ecology.org.uk/m1003.htm](http://www.christian-ecology.org.uk/m1003.htm)

