

Tuesday 17 January: Sage prayer meeting, 14A Osler Road, 2.00 - 3.30pm. Contact Jennifer on 01865 768436 or richardgunraj@onetel.com.

Saturday 21 January: *Walk with the Creator*, River Thames & Port Meadow. A range of birds is likely to be seen, including kingfishers, ducks and waders. Meet at the West Oxford Community Centre, Botley Road, at 2.00pm. The path may be very wet so good footwear is essential. Option of going to St Clements Church for refreshments and reflection afterwards. Please book with Caroline Steel on 01865 432600 or caroline.steel@ntlworld.com a week in advance.

Saturday 11 February: *Climate change – what can Christians do? Operation Noah in Oxford*, Wesley Memorial Church, New Inn Hall Street, Oxford, 9.30am – 4.30pm. For details, see the enclosed leaflet or www.sageoxford.org.uk/noah.htm. Book now to avoid disappointment!

Tuesday 14 February: Sage prayer meeting, 150 Leiden Road, 2.00 - 3.30pm. Contact Caroline on 01865 432600 or caroline.steel@ntlworld.com.

Friday 17 February: Nepalese evening, 7.00pm at the Hodsons' flat. Meal and slide show of 'Clare's Himalaya' following her autumn trip to Nepal (plus Sage business meeting). Contact 01865 516507 or info@sageoxford.org.uk.

Saturday 18 February: Sage work party, Boundary Brook Nature Park, 1.00 – 4.00pm. Contact Clare on 01865 242588 or can@freenet.co.uk.

Tuesday 14 March: Sage prayer meeting, 42 Morrell Avenue, 2.00 - 3.30pm. Contact Clare on 01865 242588 or can@freenet.co.uk.

Saturday 18 March: *Save Radley Lakes* walk, 2.00 – 4.00pm. Richard and Judy Riggs will lead a Sage walk around the threatened Radley Lakes, going on to the Fishponds Reserve and the River Thames, followed by tea at Richard and Judy's house. Meet at 2.00pm at 17 Cameron Avenue (off Radley Road), Abingdon. Bring suitable footwear, warm clothes etc. Please book with Richard and Judy on 01235 521931 or richard.riggs@physics.org a week in advance.

Tuesday 25 April: Sage prayer meeting, 81 Green Road, 2.00 - 3.30pm. Contact Edith on 01865 763242.

Saturday 29 April: *Walk with the Creator*, Lye Valley. A walk covering the varied countryside around Southfield Golf Course, including the Lye stream and a small area of fen vegetation which contains many locally rare plants and insects. Meet in Girdlestone Road, Headington, between the shops and The Slade, at 2.00pm. Option of going to St Clements Church for refreshments and reflection afterwards. Please book with Caroline Steel on 01865 432600 or caroline.steel@ntlworld.com a week in advance.

Sage relies on donations from supporters to fund its work.

If you would like to contribute, please send a cheque payable to **Sage** to: Karl Wallendszus, Sage Treasurer, 34 Binsey Lane, Oxford OX2 0EX

The newsletter of Sage, a Christian environmental group in Oxford
January 2006

www.sageoxford.org.uk

Oxford church achieves Eco-Congregation status

SS Mary & John church in Cowley Road was awarded Eco-Congregation status just before Christmas. Here, one of the assessors and the church's project leader explain how they did it.

I had known about Eco-Congregation

(www.ecocongregation.org) for a number of years, so I was very pleased when Jo Rathbone, Eco-Congregation Coordinator for England and Wales, e-mailed me in October 2005, and asked if I would like to help assess SS Mary and John, Cowley Road, Oxford, for an award. The church had carried out an audit in 2003, and set themselves targets to further increase their green activities.

Two years later, they wanted to apply for an award, having made substantial advances. My job, and that of my co-assessor, Dr Paul Robinson (Oxford City Council) was to see how far the church had progressed since they carried out their audit.

After a pre-meeting with Paul, and reading all the paperwork submitted by the church, we set the assessment for 14 December 2005. This involved meeting the project leader, Ruth Conway, the vicar, Adam Romanis, the churchwardens, and several others. We had



a good look around the churchyard and the church, and assessed church activity in three main areas: worship and teaching; practical things to do with buildings and land; and outreach to the local and global community (see below for examples). Paul and I were convinced that SS Mary and John had met the Eco-Congregation criteria, and justified getting an award. This is the first church in Oxford to gain an award, and I hope it will not be the last!

Martin Hodson (Assessor)

Eco-Congregation *continued*

Five years ago, soldiers semi-cleared the jungle of self-sown trees and shrubbery that had engulfed the churchyard of SS Mary & John Church. To prevent it reverting to a no-go area, we sought advice and funding to manage it as an urban wildlife space. It soon became an invaluable outreach project, drawing people in as advisers and volunteers. Being an Eco-Congregation roots the project in the life of the church, which has had special services celebrating God's creation and our responsibility to care for it. A Fair

New hedge nurtured at Boundary Brook

This autumn's Sage work party at Boundary Brook Nature Park found us attending to a young hazel hedge in the newer area of the park. To protect the hedge from any keen weeds that might think about taking over, it had been planted through a fibrous membrane, which will also allow rain through but keep moisture in the soil from evaporating, and we spent a couple of hours cutting back bramble and mulching over the top with a couple of inches of chipped wood (provided by various local sources) making sure that any growing tips on the hazels weren't smothered. We had various discussions about the cause of the few gaps in the hedge already (had the plants died or been pulled out by local muntjak deer?) and the pleasing look of earth ground into boots and new gloves, proving what hard work one had done. Tea and apple cake, brewed in the education hut, was much welcomed, then in the drizzle we did a little weed digging to renovate a path, before the rain really got the better of us.

During the afternoon we met frogs a-plenty of various sizes and had to take care when weeding and digging that they were jumping away from, rather than into, the danger zones. The autumn spiders were in evidence (they may not be everyone's

Trade stall is now a regular feature, and LOAF lunches (Locally produced, Organically grown, Animal friendly and Fairly traded) have been organised. The youth group has produced a recycling exhibition. A mini-'Trinity' labyrinth has been created, helping to increase the welcome to people on the Cowley Road. The challenge now is climate change, so new energy efficient heaters are being installed and a woodchip heating system (using renewable sources) investigated for the smaller rooms. The award affirms and encourages us.

Ruth Conway (Project leader)

favourite bit of wildlife, but their webs and body-paint have to be admired, if you can get that close!) There was also excitement as a cry of "Was that a parrot?" went up (not such a daft question as there have been sightings of the local East Oxford Parakeet) - but as we peered into the thicket after it, there flew out the green-yellow-red flash of a green woodpecker. Well spotted Elaine!

Our next work party will be 18 February - see the diary on the back page for details.

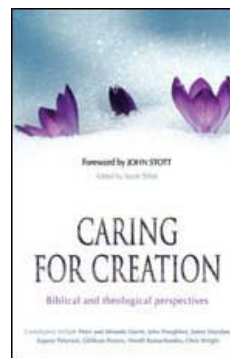
Clare Newgass

Sage welcomes link diocese visitor

Sage members Martin and Margot Hodson were pleased to welcome Magnus Wählin, environmental secretary of Växjö diocese in Sweden, to lunch in Oxford on 5 January. Magnus was accompanied by Rev. Canon Tony Dickinson, Ecumenical and European Officer for the Diocese of Oxford. The Oxford and Växjö dioceses were twinned in 2003, and Magnus wrote Sage an article in Sage Words January 2004 on environmental work in churches in Sweden. We covered a lot of ground in an hour, and very much hope that the visit will lead to closer environmental links between Växjö, Oxford and Sage.

BOOK REVIEW

Hints of glory in A Rocha's work



Caring for Creation: Biblical and theological perspectives
Edited by Sarah Tillett
Bible Reading Fellowship, £8.99

It is easy for many of us in the environmental movement to get absorbed by the immediate tasks at hand. The problems we face are large and urgent, so we want to feel we are "doing

something". In our activism, though, we must be careful to reflect on our motivations and to know why we are doing what we are doing. This is perhaps especially true for Christians, and is something A Rocha (Christians in Conservation) has thought about as its work has expanded over the last few years. This new book is one result of such thinking.

Caring for Creation is a collection of essays by a mixture of theologians, scientists and A Rocha leaders on various Biblical themes related to creation and the environment. The varied authorship gives a diversity of perspectives, but also marked differences in tone and depth. As the subtitle suggests, the emphasis is on theological issues pertaining to the place of the natural world in God's purposes and in Christian work. In some

cases, this can be rather heavy (at least for this non-theologically trained reader), whereas one or two are surprisingly lightweight. For me, the essays that work best are those in which theological insights combine with experience of running A Rocha projects, for example Peter Harris on God's covenant with Noah, Dave Bookless on the renewal of creation, and especially Miranda Harris on community living.

Each essay is followed by a short illustration from an A Rocha project. While their connection to theme of the chapter is not always obvious, they are all fascinating and inspiring glimpses of A Rocha's work, or "hints of glory" as the HARRISES put it in their final reflection. These little addenda could form the basis of an interesting book in their own right.

Even though some readers might find some of the theology in this book difficult, a number of discussion questions are provided at the end, which should prove useful in applying it to our own lives, and for a book of this sort, such application will be the mark of success.

Karl Wallendzusz

Sage cited in faith & environment report

The Sustainable Development Commission have published a major report *Sustainable Development and UK faith groups: Two sides of the same coin*, which features environmental work by faith groups across the UK. Sage has several mentions, and a whole section is devoted to us! Writing in the foreword, Jonathon Porritt, SDC Chair states, "Too much is made of the highly visible manifestations of self-interest and apparent

indifference; the less visible outpouring of acts of altruism and selflessness are rarely factored into the rather crude generalizations that today's steely-eyed fatalists tend to make about human nature." Definitely recommended reading! A free copy of the report can be ordered or downloaded from the SDC web site (http://sdc-commission.org.uk/news/sdc_uk_faith_form.php).