

Deforestation

Deforestation has been rampant for literally thousands of years, ever since the beginnings of agriculture – it took off in Bronze Age China! Britain was heavily wooded in the early Middle Ages, gradually being cleared for farming. But the rate of deforestation really began to rocket during the 20th century.

Deforestation today is mainly in tropical rain forest areas, including logging (whether for use of the wood, for oil exploration or farming) and slash and burn, as a preliminary to crop growing.

The need to clear in order to raise land values is partly a consequence of unfair trade, when growers receive too little payment for their produce and cannot increase yields to a viable level.

But there is some good news too:-

- Deforestation is slowing in South America (but speeding up in Africa).
- New forests are being planted in northern Europe, including the UK.
- In China too, there is an immense programme of reforestation – almost enough to offset the losses in other parts of SE Asia.
- On balance, there is still a net loss of forested area, but it is slowing. And it needs to!

Access to nature

In London we are blessed with thousands of canals, squares, gardens and parks – several of them among the largest urban parks in the world. Check out how many of the following you have visited recently:-

- Regents Park, Regents Canal
- Hyde Park, St James's Park
- Battersea Park
- Hampstead Heath
- Epping Forest
- Kew Gardens
- Richmond Park
- Dulwich Park.

These are just a few of the largest. There are hundreds more, spread across every borough, all good for a stroll in the evening or at the weekend – why not take a look at your Council's website?

There are huge public cemeteries too – like Highgate, Kensal Green and West Brompton – they may seem spooky, but the birds and the bees don't mind!

To find out more, contact **Brian Cuthbertson**
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Plants, animals, Creation

London has many lovely churchyards. As well as those with burials, some have large green areas – many trees, a wealth of plants, flowers, birds and butterflies, popular havens for rest and recreation.

Churchyards and gardens form beautiful settings for churches, reminding us of God the creator.

Walls and tombs support the growth of lichens and creepers – they also need to be kept in good repair. Plants, animals and building fabric should be kept in balance with each other.

The Diocesan Advisory Committee, and conservation bodies such as English Heritage and Natural England, can help with information on how best to look after these natural and physical assets.

We can enjoy and gain comfort from contact with nature – recovering our sense of orientation, even within a city like London. And let's help our children grow up with love and respect for wild nature!

Michael Bye

Chair, Shrinking the Footprint Steering Group
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Trees in churchyards

Take a look at guidance on maintaining churchyard trees, on the diocesan website. There is a download on www.london.anglican.org/DACInDepthAdvice.

Scroll down the list till you find 'Trees in Churchyards'.

Offsetting

It's often claimed that we can make up for our greenhouse gas emissions – when we fly by aeroplane for example – by paying for tree planting. That might make us feel better, but the numbers don't stack up:-

- There isn't enough space for trees to take up all the CO₂ we emit.
- Trees take decades to grow, while we're still emitting even more CO₂. The cure is too late to stop the disease from spreading!
- It's easier to get new trees planted in northern latitudes, such as in the UK – but they breathe in less CO₂ than in the tropics.
- It's claimed that offsetting companies subtract too much for admin.

OK, let's offset what's left – when we've reduced our carbon emissions as much as we possibly can – but we must still shrink our emissions by 80%, or even more!

Did you know?

- We in the UK have not always loved nature like many of us do now. From the 16th to the 19th centuries, few countries could rival the UK for systematic wildlife persecution. Churchwardens even offered bounties to exterminate birds and mammals!
- Some species wiped out in the past are now being reintroduced – like the sea eagle in Scotland, and Norfolk.
- Farmers still live in tension with wild animals and birds – whether livestock farmers or arable farmers.
- There are three times as many farm animals today as people, and three times the total body-weight too!
- Principles of plant husbandry (eg the fallow year for crops) and animal welfare go right back to biblical times – we can eat, but must not exploit, oppress or drive to the margins.
- Over-fishing is combining with climate change to deplete fish stocks to a dangerous level. The sea as well as the field must be given time and space to rest and recover. Look for the Marine Stewardship Council's label for sustainable sourcing of fish and seafood.



www.elasmo-research.org/education/classification/class_images/coelacanth.gif

Humans, nature, food

The fauna and flora in our churchyards remind us of our relationship with nature. We cannot have these islands – or the biosphere – to ourselves; we share them with the foxes, birds, bats and butterflies.

Nature interacts with human activity; trees are cut down for farm land; biofuels take land from forests and crops. The livestock to feed a growing meat-eating population adds to greenhouse gases – especially methane from cattle. Changes to the seasons due to climate change affect wildlife – eg hedgehogs are badly affected by disruption to their breeding and hibernation seasons.

The treatment of farm animals is an issue of justice and kindness – animals can feel like us! Welfare in the UK, especially for pigs, has improved – not so much for all animals or other countries. Conditions for animal transport are notorious. Let's choose food labelled as humane by British Pork, or the RSPB for poultry.

Extinctions ...?

Plants and animals can be driven to extinction by competition, poaching, over-harvesting, loss of food supply, pollution – most of all by habitat loss, eg cutting down forests.

Some extinctions happen naturally, but most are caused by us humans.