

Annual review and Chairman's report to the 11th Annual General Meeting of A Rocha South Africa, June 2016

Dear members of the Board, Board of Reference, Members of A Rocha and Friends

Thank you for being present at this 11th Annual General Meeting of A Rocha South Africa to the review of the work during 2015.

The year 2015 will always be remembered for Pope Francis's announcement of the Encyclical *Laudato Si* (Praise Be to You) on the environment. While papal documents generally address the bishops of the church the goal of *Laudato Si* is *"to enter into dialogue with all people about our common home"*.

This document addresses the deep concern the Pope has about the environment and all its challenges. The document discerns man's effect on the environment as well as the many philosophical, theological, and cultural causes that threaten the relationships of man to nature.

Laudato Si reflects on issues e.g. climate change, the impact of consumption on the poor and the importance of access to safe drinkable water for all.

The Pope then calls everyone to act as he *"encourages ways of acting which directly and significantly affect the world around us"*. Here he refers to very practical steps like avoiding the use of plastics and paper, reducing water consumption, separating refuse and recycling, using public transport, the planting of trees and turning off of unnecessary lights.

A Rocha South Africa and all Christians in our beautiful country should make an effort to take cognizance of *Laudato Si* and answer the question: *What steps are we prepared to take that will "directly and significantly affect the world around us"?*

I would now like to highlight the some activities of A Rocha South Africa during 2015.

A ROCHA LEADERS FORUM

Every second or third year ARI gathers the A Rocha family from around the world for the A Rocha Leaders Forum. In June 2015 this gathering took place in Portugal and ARZA was represented by three delegates, myself, Myles Sinclair and Dalton Gibbs.

The goal of the Forum was to: *Listen to God and consider together how our Christian faith and commitment shape us, our organizations and our work; Listen to others and share what God is doing in our bit of A Rocha; Pray for one another and Celebrate God's love in calling us into his family work.*

The gathering was fortunate to have Ruth DeBorst from Costa Rica as the Bible teacher at the Forum. She spoke on the theme –*"Send down your waters! - Sustaining creation-community in the 21st Century"*.

When asked about the highlight of their experiences Dalton Gibbs said: *"The thing that struck me most was the depth of theology it represented. The speakers presented (their talks) with a conviction backed by solid theology and a practical understanding of the environmental crises facing the earth today."* And Myles Sinclair: *"It was*

wonderful to be in the land of A Rocha's birth. I was particularly moved by a discussion about 'Lament'. And looking at the enormous climatic and environmental challenges facing our land today, I have a sense of how the Father feels and to be truthful, I weep."

Pull quote: "A Rocha works to equip, inspire and engage Christians around the world to care for creation"

During the course of 2015 the decision on Regional Action Teams was implemented. In Kwa-Zulu Natal and in Cape Town a core team regularly met to plan local action. The chairman moved to Kleinmond and initiated a few events on behalf of A Rocha.

CONSERVATION SCIENCE

Bird ringing: The ringing group met on every the second Saturday on the month under the leadership of Dalton Gibbs. They rung a total of 120 birds from 21 species during the year. Each session was attended by small groups of regulars and even a few nature conservation students.

Marine Project Areas: During the latter part of the year Nikki Chapman, a volunteer, met with A Rocha in Kwa-Zulu Natal to consider various project possibilities. She introduced a research project on Marine Protected Areas off the KZN coast. A Rocha originally offered to be the supporting NPO in a funding application for the research, but later withdrew from the process as we felt it to be too big and we did believe our Christian distinctiveness would be apparent.

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

Youth camp, Free State: ARZA sponsored 36 Anglican Youth in the Free State to attend an environmental camp at Golden Gate. The youth participated in hiking, abseiling and canoeing and Sanparks staff gave talks on the environment and on how to care for nature. The youth undertook a guided hike on the theme "connecting with nature" and as a sign of repentance they walked 3Km in complete silence to the cathedral cave. During the evening prayers they looked into how and what they should do to show their concern for nature.

Youth outing, KZN: The Tabitha Hope Centre (an orphanage in Pietermaritzburg) met with John Roff (A Rocha Volunteer and Environmental Educator) about introducing the Tabitha kids to Christian conservation as well as using the opportunity to minister to the kids.

Elderly, Kleinmond: Some 30 members of the Fynbos Elderly Club in Kleinmond visited the Harold Porter Botanical Garden in Bettie's Bay where they had an opportunity to wander through the gardens and shared information on the medicinal value of some fynbos plants.

ENGAGEMENT CHURCH AND COMMUNITY

Bible Study material: Since the Forum meeting in Portugal we have felt that locally and internationally all would benefit from a basic theological conservation course which outlined what the bible teaches and why Christians should respond to environmental challenges. An outline for such a course based on Dave Bookless's book Planetwise has been developed.

Congregational groups: At least two churches in the Cape Town area have A Rocha groups. They plan outings and worship services with an environment focus and remind the congregations of national and international environmental days that should be celebrated. The sustainable supper has become an annual highlight on their calendar.

Outreach to congregations and church leaders: In KZN various meetings and discussions took place between A Rocha and interested congregations and church leaders.

Earth Keeper's Forum

Two Forum meetings were held in Cape Town.

The first event was addressed by two Anglican "Eco-Bishops" ministering with indigenous people in Alaska and Argentina. Bishop Mark Macdonald from Canada shared the challenges faced by a million Indigenous Christians as they are at the epicenter of the struggle between development and conservation. Bishop Nick Drayson from Argentina shared how the lives of Indigenous Christians are at risk due to huge multinationals that are clearing the forests to make way for vast fields of soya. The Church has partnered with other groups in their support of halting deforestation.

The second event was a Citizen's Science Day held at Intaka Island. The speakers encouraged those present to contribute to science by participating in the various bird, reptile, butterfly and other atlases. The event underlined the important role Christians can play as citizen scientists while enjoying nature and all of creation.

Distribution of ARZA resources

A DVD of A Rocha resource material was distributed to 450 delegates to the synod of the Dutch Reformed Church (Western and Southern Cape). Each delegate also received a young Spek-boom (elephant tree) or Portulacaria Afra as a gift. The outstanding feature is this tree is its ability to withdraw poisonous Carbon Dioxide (CO²) from the air while giving Oxygen back.

COMMUNITY BASED PROJECTS

Groot-Marico: The work funded by UNDP grant in Groot Marico was rounded off during 2015. The funding was raised to establish an Ecology Field Education Centre, an indigenous nursery and permaculture garden, to extend existing Beading and Sewing, a Bee-keeping group and build environmentally sustainable ecotourism "slack packing" hiking routes. Final narrative and financial reports were submitted to the funder as required.

Clean-up events

- **Restoration of the Kuils River:** Four clean-up events were held during the year that involved 40+ adults and children. The restoration process has steadily progressed. A strategy document has been designed and is being implemented. Various churches along the river have been invited to participate and take responsibility for a section close to their church.
- **Pietermaritzburg conservancy:** A group of ARZA volunteers cleaned-up a local conservancy in Pietermaritzburg. Despite the poor weather the group cleared quite a lot of rubbish, especially out of the stream.
- **Kleinmond Coastal clean-up:** Two churches participated in the International Coastal Clean-up in Kleinmond. All the statistics on what were collected was passed on to the international database. The 42 youth and adults collected some 140Kg of waste.

African Enterprise: Further discussions have taken place between ARZA and AE on strengthening our relationship. Areas of cooperation include: developing training material that focuses on creation care; use of volunteers and assistance with an environmental impact study on the AE property.

Funding and Statistics

A Rocha is very grateful to our loyal donors for their support. In conjunction with the Green Anglican ARZA applied for grant funding to implement a WATER FOR LIFE project to assist Churches to respond to the climate change

crisis in the Northern Cape. Unfortunately, the application was not successful. An application was drafted for the marine research on Marine Protected Areas. A Rocha withdrew its support before the application was finalized.

ARZA did not employ staff in 2015, but for work of the 12 dedicated volunteers we are very grateful. During the course of the year 17 persons (25 in 2014) were regular donors to ARZA. There were 584 individuals on the database and we had 246 followers on the Facebook.

Closing

I close with poetic restatement of the first few verses of Ps. 19:

*Wherever I am, wherever I go
I can sense something of the power of God.
The grandeur of the mountains,
the vastness of the oceans,
the breathtaking wonder of the interstellar space;
all this proclaims the glory and majesty of God.
Even amid the clutter of our cities,
built and abused by our hands,
there are reflections of divine splendor.
God's voice can be heard.
He makes His presence known throughout the world.*

May A Rocha SA and Christians in South Africa everyday “sense something of the power of God” in His creation.

Carl Swart

A Rocha South Africa, 11 June 2016