

CREATURES



RADICAL ECOLOGICAL CONVERSION AFTER LAUDATO SI'
Discovering the intrinsic Value of all Creatures, Human & Non-human

Radical Ecological Conversion for the Urban Community

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A very brief summary:

The topic for my talk was "Radical Ecological Conversion for the Urban Community". In this, I highlighted how urbanisation has created disconnection between people and nature, and how A Rocha's urban regeneration project in West London has played an important role in addressing the issues. Also, I highlighted briefly my personal experience of environmental degradation in North East India (one of the most neglected rainforest areas) - the way natural resources are depleted at an alarming rate within the last 20 years. Many forest areas are cleared for roads and housing and some green spaces are used for waste dumping. Interestingly, these things are not uncommon in the London area too.

Southall and Hayes in West London are very multicultural and vibrant places but sadly they have suffered from a lack of community engagement and environmental understanding. Many green spaces have been neglected, abused and left to become overgrown.

A Rocha's workshop was based on how transformation of some of these sites have benefited and help reconnect the local people with nature. Since 2001, A Rocha UK has been instrumental in transforming the Minet site (90 acres in Hayes, Hillingdon) from a derelict and degraded area into a beautiful country park - providing an oasis for wildlife and a valuable green space in this heavily built-up area. In addition, an overgrown allotment site in Southall was turned into a community garden in 2010, which has also been well received by the local community and continues to be busily cultivated.

The most recent A Rocha project called "Wolf Fields" is a three-acre site in Southall, West London. At one time it was used as a brick works. The site then fell into disrepair and became a neglected wasteland used only for rubbish dumping, drug taking and substance abuse. Nearby residents would avoid the site. A Rocha have taken up the site and it is now under active transformation. An organic food-growing plot, sensory garden, wildlife pond, orchard, beehives, bird cam and a story-telling area have all been installed. This has significantly reduced antisocial behaviour, the local community were pleased to see the developments at the site and have helped maintain the site, learn about local wildlife, grow food and share it. Since Pope Francis' Encyclical on the Environment, the project started to witness a great response from the local Catholic Church (St. Anselm's, Southall). A group of youth from the

church have regularly assisted in general upkeep of the site. In addition, the project started to witness interfaith groups, care institutes and Ealing Borough Blind Association using the site. Also, many local primary schools have started to use the site for outdoor learning. It is becoming a place where people seek mental peace and healing. Furthermore, although the site is small it provides food sources and shelter for wildlife.

As Pope Francis' Encyclical urges, "the ecological conversion needed to bring about lasting change is also a community conversion" (Para 219, p 63). It is quite true! Let us move to doing something before it's too late. We just need to be active with curiosity and take courage to make the journey – we can create resilience and a living future for ourselves and for others. Let us remind ourselves, "The Earth is the Lord's, and everything in it" (Psalm 24:1).