

Hundreds of churches have signed up to a week-long 'nature count' beginning this weekend which will encourage people to visit churchyards and record what they see.



Churches Count on Nature, to run between 5-13 June 2021, is a citizen-science event covering churchyards across the England and Wales.

The project will see communities and visitors making a note of the animals, birds, insects, or fungi in their local churchyard.

Their data will then be collated on the National Biodiversity Network.

One church getting involved is St Pol de Léon's Church, Paul, in Cornwall.

As part of their nature count the church will be marking Environment Sunday and be holding their morning service outside in their "Celtic Quiet Garden."

Their garden overlooks nearby Mounts Bay, which was the site of Paul Aurelian, a Welsh Saint, coming to warn his sister Sitoffola, about rising sea level in the 400s.

As Revd Andrew Yates said: "Rising sea levels is part of our DNA and will be thinking about that too as climate change affects people across the world."

During the service, the G7 conference will be prayed for – a few weeks before the leaders of the seventh richest nations meet in Cornwall.

Revd Andrew Yates explained: "Elements of the service will include asking everyone to face in a north east direction to look at Carbis Bay where G7 will be taking place and to direct prayers for the forthcoming G7 and the leaders soon to be gathering there."

A man is using a magnifying glass to look at nature for the Churches Count on Nature

David Smart

For inner-city churches, the nature count provides unique opportunities.

The Revd Grace Thomas, curate at Moss Side, St James with St Clement, and Whalley Range, St Edmund, in Manchester Diocese explained her church's approach.

She said: "Our church, St Edmunds Whalley Range, is in a built-up area and only has a small amount of greenery at the front.

"However, we decided to take part to encourage local people to spend time in the church grounds, which they are all welcome to do, and to celebrate the green spaces we have even in an urban context."

The church will be hosting a week-long event to allow people to come and go at their leisure and has already attracted interest.

"People in the area are really interested in creating and maintaining good green spaces," she said.

The community already has strong environmental groups locally, and the various lockdowns have increased appreciation for parks and other open spaces.

Revd Grace Thomas added: "I also got a message from someone at Manchester Health and Wellbeing service, who saw the post on a local Facebook site and wanted to connect to see how we could support each other."

Flowers are shown next to graves in a church yard

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More rural churches, like the Northumbrian benefice of Allendale (which brings together the parishes St Mark's in Ninebanks, Holy Trinity in Whitfield and St Cuthbert's in Allendale) are also getting involved.

There, churchyards are being partially rewilded in a bid to increase biodiversity.

The Churches Count on Nature has also stoked interest from local wildlife groups who are helping to bring the wider community along for the project.

Hundreds of churches are expected to join in the week-long nature count which begins this coming Saturday.

More information:

- Churches Count on Nature is being jointly run by the conservation charities Caring for God's Acre, A Rocha UK, the Church of England, and the Church in Wales.

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