



ment to a rare flock of sheep, who roam freely in its churchyard.

For the past 30 years St Mary's in Ticehurst, East Sussex, has invited the small flock - made up of six ewes and their lambs - into the churchyard for part of the year to increase biodiversity.

Penny Evans, a licensed lay reader at the parish, explained: "We now have Wiltshire Horns in the churchyard, which works very well with our churchyard conservation project.

"Wiltshire Horns do not need shearing, and so there is plenty of wool available for the birds' nests.

"Birds even fill their boxes with cosy sheep wool. They also do an excellent job of looking after the grass in the churchyard."

In fact, the sheep helped the church gain a Gold Eco Award from the environment charity [A Rocha UK](#). It is only the 24th church to achieve the award.

Increasing biodiversity in the churchyard is part of this work and a summer meadow has been created by St Mary's.

Wiltshire Horns were once very common, before experiencing a decline in numbers during the 19th and 20th centuries. The flock return to its farm between January and March before returning to the parish with their lambs.

"Sheep bring great pleasure to people of all ages," Penny said. "People love visiting to watch the lambs playing.

"It's a favourite place in the village for families, and people spend time sitting on the benches and taking in the peaceful atmosphere."

Helen Stephens, from the environment charity A Rocha UK, said: "We are delighted to celebrate St Mary's, Ticehurst Gold Eco Church.

"It reflects that caring for God's creation is integral to the church community's mission and ministry and recognises the practical steps they are taking, including the 40 per cent of land used as pasture for a small flock of rare breed sheep.

"St Mary's is clearly committed to taking action at every level. We hope this award will prompt other churches to engage in caring for God's world, to be part of a growing community of churches and other organisations, working together to restore and protect this precious planet."

The Church of England is [currently consulting on its "routemap" to net zero carbon](#). It has pledged to reach net zero carbon by 2030, [following a call from General Synod](#) in 2020.

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