

Churches and cathedrals across the country are preparing for the annual Churches Count on Nature event.

Two people look at grass types amid knee-length grass in a churchyard with the grave stones covered in different mosses

David Smart

The "citizen science" event - set to run between 4-12th June - will welcome people to churchyards and encourage them to record what animals and plants they see. That data will then be collated on the biological records hub, the National Biodiversity Network.

Last year more than 540 activities and events were organised by churches across the country. People submitted 17,232 recorded pieces of data on wildlife they saw, with more than 1,500 species recorded.

This year's event will take place during the same week as Love Your Burial Ground Week (4-12th June).

Graham Usher, the Bishop of Norwich and lead Church of England bishop for the environment, encouraged churches to start preparing.

He said: "I'm encouraging every parish to get involved with this year's Churches Count on Nature."

"Churchyards and gardens are an incredible home of biodiversity, making up thousands of acres of green oases in every community of the country. Last year, hundreds of parishes got their local community searching for insects and plants in their open spaces.

"Here at Bishop's House Garden in Norwich we've partnered with Norfolk Wildlife Trust to carry out an audit of the wildlife currently present, improve habitats and increase our biodiversity."

"We had a "bioblitz" day with loads of enthusiastic children noticing and wondering about the different species of plants and creatures. Jesus noticed nature and so must we. The Gospels are full of stories of the growth of seeds, the choking of thistles, the beauty of lilies and the fruitfulness of trees. We have the privilege and responsibility to care for the earth and to tread gently on it.

"This is a great outreach programme, and it also helps those working on the environment better understand our natural world. The Church is committed to increasing biodiversity and is currently working to reduce our carbon footprint to net zero by 2030."

"The Churches Count on Nature is a great opportunity to help people understand their local environment and that biodiversity is essential for the processes that support all life on earth, including humans."

Last year, many parishes used Churches Count on Nature as an opportunity to reach out to its local community.

St Laurence's Stretton, for example, encouraged both usual congregants and passers-by to "brush up their plant ID skills."

Isabel Carter, of the parish, explained: "A week later there was a Messy Church Outdoors session after school. We had over 20 children and adults using an ID sheet produced by Churches Count on Nature."

The youngsters were very enthusiastic in seeking and identifying flowers.â

Churches Count on Nature is jointly run by the conservation charities A Rocha UK, Caring for Godâs Acre together with the Church of England and the Church in Wales.

Andy Lester, from A Rocha UK, said âChurches Count on Nature is a unique opportunity for those who love their churchyards and church spaces to take part in the largest ever nature count. â

âWith nature still in decline nationwide this count will provide valuable data on what is happening to wildlife. â

âIn turn that will help us to collectively work to take targeted action for natureâs recovery.â

Harriet Carty, Director of Caring for Godâs Acre, said: âWe are excited to be part of organising Churches Count on Nature again.â

âLast year an amazing 540 groups organised events during Love Your Burial Ground Week resulting in over 1700 new wildlife records. More than 4,000 people got involved.â

âThrough initiatives such as this we are gaining more insight into the importance of churchyards and other burial grounds as refuges for nature. With over 20,000 across England and Wales these special places have never been such crucial havens for wildlife.â

The Bishop of St Davids, Joanna Penberthy, said: âAs the Church in Wales works towards its net zero target, Churches Count on Nature is an easy and fun activity for people of all ages to take part in. â

âItâs a chance to learn about and appreciate the precious world literally on our doorstep and realise our responsibility to nurture and protect it. â

âI hope all our churches with burial grounds will register and take part this year and record what treasures of the natural world they observe.

âSpot the amazing, discover the rare and enjoy recording all the plants and animals that you find.â

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