

A Rocha

Christians in Conservation in the USA



Stories of community-based conservation projects, research and education from around the USA.

Annual Review 2011-12

about A Rocha

our name

A Rocha {uh RAW sha} is Portuguese for “the rock.” It’s where we began in 1983-Portugal. And it’s where we still stand today—on Jesus, the rock.

who we are

A Rocha is a 501c3 nonprofit conservation organization inspired by God’s love for all that He made—people and planet.

what we do

In 19 countries around the world, A Rocha works to restore God’s creation through scientific research; hands-on conservation projects; and educational programs done at the community level with the people who live there. In the USA, A Rocha is working to mobilize a network of efforts in communities across the nation—protecting wetlands and streams, helping endangered birds and fish, growing food for those in need, educating people about creation and Creator and more.



from the director

Describing the work of A Rocha is not easy. We are a Christian organization...that does environmental conservation work. We care about salmon and endangered Golden-cheeked warblers...as well as people who don’t have enough to eat. We teach kids about God’s creation...and we help strengthen local economies. We proclaim Jesus’ Lordship...while partnering with secular organizations. We’re building a nationwide movement...and at the same time helping to support sister organizations around the world. Is there a common denominator in all that? There is: It’s all about relationships.

A Rocha is an intentionally relational ministry, because God is relational and created us to be so. And because it’s the only way to bring significant, lasting healing to the creation—both people and planet. Environmental degradation and the resulting human suffering stem from human choices. Those choices—more often than not—reflect humanity’s brokenness. Thus, restoring relationships to God, each other and the wider creation are prerequisite.

In this report, you’ll see relationships—with God, with people, and with nature. And you’ll see what a difference they make and what a great year they’ve made it for A Rocha.

In closing, I invite you to join or deepen your relationship with A Rocha by praying for the work, volunteering at a project nearby or abroad, starting a project in your own community and/or providing financial support. I know you will find it a blessing...and so will we.

Many thanks!

Tom Rowley, Executive Director
A Rocha USA

CHRISTIAN – Underlying all we do is our biblical faith in the living God, who made the world, loves it and entrusts it to the care of human society.

CONSERVATION – We carry out research for the conservation and restoration of the natural world and run environmental programs for people of all ages.

COMMUNITY – Through our commitment to God, each other and the wider creation, we aim to develop good relationships both within the A Rocha family and in our local communities.

CROSS-CULTURAL – We draw on the insights and skills of people from diverse cultures, both locally and around the world.

COOPERATION – We work in partnership with a wide variety of organizations and individuals who share our concerns for a sustainable world.

community-based conservation

While many Christian environmental organizations advocate for lifestyle and legislative changes, A Rocha is unique in our focus on actual conservation work. Our staff, interns and volunteers roll up our sleeves and get our hands dirty. The type of dirt, if you will, varies across community, context and need—ranging from stream repair in Northwest Washington to brush clearing in the Texas Hill Country and more.

Northwest Washington

The Pacific salmon that return each year to the Bertrand and Fishtrap Creeks in Whatcom County, Washington, rely on cold, clean water to spawn. Unfortunately, decades of poor land management have polluted the streams and degraded their habitat. Fortunately, A Rocha's Northwest Washington project continued this past year to improve water quality and habitat through a variety of projects.



International Watershed Restoration, Bertrand Creek - Lynden, WA

As but one example, A Rocha's Northwest Washington Director Dave Timmer, former Board Member Karen Steensma and a crew of 15 Trinity Western University students planted some 400 native trees and shrubs along a 200-foot stretch of the Bertrand Creek formerly overrun by invasive blackberry plants. The native plants—Western red cedar, Douglas fir, Red alder, Sitka willow and more--will help shade the creek (reducing the temperature and increasing the oxygen level of the water), stabilize the banks, filter sediment and pollutants, and add organic matter to the stream—important for insects and the salmon who feed on them.

“With proper maintenance,” said Timmer, “the property will soon be valuable riparian habitat.”

What's more, other property owners nearby are now interested in repairing the stream on their lands—showing the importance of leading by example and the power of even small beginnings.

Native planting along Bertrand creek - Lynden, WA



Texas Hill Country

Deep in the heart of Texas sits the Edwards Plateau, a region noted for its great biodiversity as well as the development pressures it faces. There, on the Big Springs Ranch for Children, A Rocha began this past year the Texas-sized task of helping restore and protect the 7,000-acre ranch and jewel of creation. After months of surveying and inventorying the ranch's species with scientists from The Nature Conservancy and others, we began the hard work of removing Ashe juniper, known locally as "cedar"—a native run amok that dries the land and chokes out other important vegetation. With the help of an intern, some generous grants and heavy equipment, Project Director and Board Member Carson Dickie has cleared many acres—with many more to go.



Common snapping turtle (*Chelydra serpentina*) - TX Hill Country

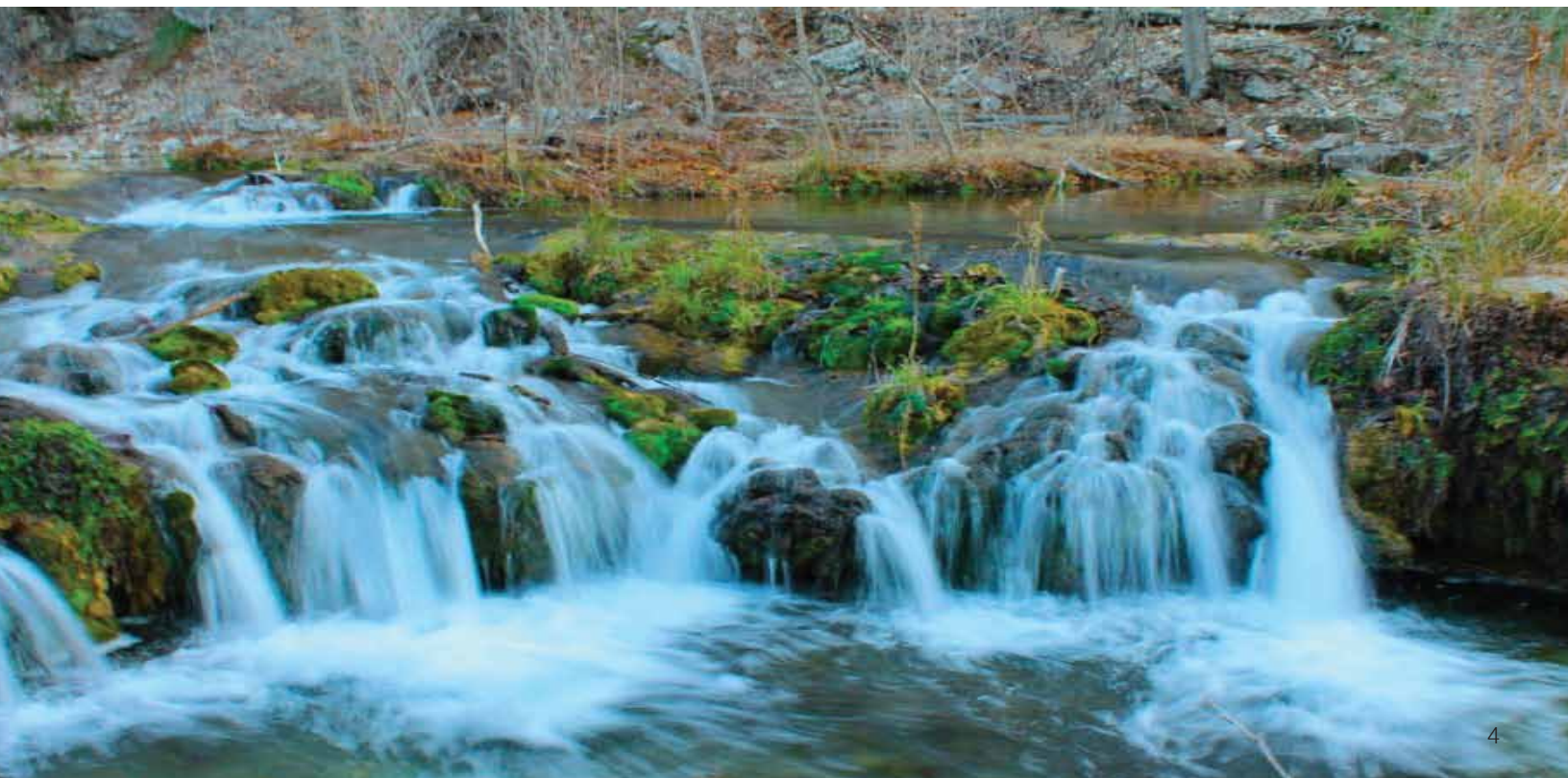
A Rocha also facilitated the placement of critically important aquifer level and stream flow gauges that the U.S. Geological Survey will use to help monitor and plan for future water use from the Edwards Aquifer below the ranch that provides water to the city of San Antonio. Carson, with the help of volunteers and, most importantly his wife Ann, also refurbished a hunter's cabin on the property to host interns, volunteers and visitors that come for a night, a week or a semester to help out, learn and take the lessons back to their own communities.

Central Oregon

Finally, A Rocha staff and volunteers began working alongside Trout Unlimited and the U.S. Forest Service in central Oregon to enhance habitat for Redband trout (*Onchryncus Mykiss Iridus*) on the Metolius River and tributaries of the Crooked River. We hope these humble efforts (along with presentations to churches and meetings with environmental organizations and other potential partners) will lead ultimately to a full-fledged project in the region.

For more information about A Rocha USA's conservation work, including how to start a project in your own community, see www.arocha-usa.org/project-locations.

Frio River - TX Hill Country



environmental education

Nature Care Camp - Nashville, TN

In his book, *For the Beauty of the Earth, A Christian Vision for Creation Care*, Steven Bouma-Prediger noted wisely that we care for only what we love, love only what we know, and truly know only what we experience. A Rocha is committed to helping people of all ages and backgrounds—but particularly the next generation—experience, know, love and care for God's creation. We do that by developing curricula, organizing volunteer experiences, leading nature hikes and more. A Rocha's "Nature Care Camp" is a prime example.



Started in 2008 at our Santa Barbara project by Marty and Megan Robertson, the camp has grown. By the summer of 2011, the camp in Santa Barbara had expanded to three one-week sessions with total attendance of 60+ kids.

And the camp has spread. In 2010, Ashlee Grishaber built upon the Robertson's work and opened up camp in San Luis Obispo, California, for 17 children, ages 6-11. In 2012, the camp hosted 30 kids and involved five other local organizations as partners.

Also in 2012, A Rocha's newest group hosted Nature Care Camp in Nashville, TN, where 25 kids came, learned and had a blast. There, the camp ran four days in June, each with its own theme: Birds, Trees, Bugs and Water. Supplementing the biblical lessons about God's love for His creation, were several local conservation experts who brought their own expertise. They also brought some interesting surprises. Walden's Puddle Wildlife Rehabilitation and Education Center brought an American kestrel (*Falco sparverius*), an Eastern Screech owl (*Megascops asio*) and a Red-tailed hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*)—all rescued animals—to help teach about local wildlife and how to care for it. Other experts demonstrated how waterways can become polluted by runoff from our lawns and streets and led a daily creek walk to identify insects at various life stages, crayfish and salamanders.

Nashville's Camp Coordinator Grace Spriggs summed up the effort this way, "Our camp was planned to be simple and fun. We wanted children to be surrounded by God's creation to learn to appreciate and care for it... Seeing kids sing, play, and talk about God's creation IN God's creation was amazing and inspiring."

Did the teaching make a difference? You be the judge.

One of the parent-volunteers had this to say, "My kids still talk about the lady from Walden's Puddle who told them animals were hurt by people throwing their food and trash on the side of the road. When we went to the beach this summer they were talking about the different birds' beaks and how that told you about their diet. I think the teaching really took root in them and I pray it helped open their eyes and hearts to God's creation."

But the ultimate stamp of approval came from a five-year-old participant: "This is the best ever! I mean we don't even have to make things out of paper!"

To see A Rocha USA's growing library of educational resources, visit www.arocha-usa.org/resources.



financial review

We are grateful to report that A Rocha USA's income grew 75 percent last year—from \$309,000 to \$540,000. The lion's share of that growth (\$206,000) came, however, from the launch of our Texas Hill Country project and the generosity of three major donors supporting it, plus a new grant to our existing work in Lynden. Across the rest of the organization, we saw steady but relatively slow growth—not bad in a difficult economy.

As for numbers of donors, we remained steady at just under 200. And while we are deeply grateful to each and every one (as well as to our all-important volunteers and prayer supporters), we hope to increase their number significantly in order to further expand the ministry's reach and to weather the inevitable economic storms that can reduce even the staunchest supporters' capacity to give. Furthermore, we hope to increase the number of people giving on a monthly basis—as this helps us to better plan for and meet ongoing expenses.

Lastly, A Rocha USA is now able to receive legacy giving. If you or someone you know might be interested in giving to A Rocha through their will, an endowment, or trust, please see www.arocha-usa.org and click on the donate button, email us at usa@arocha.org or call (830) 522-5319.

A Rocha USA is accredited by the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability.



Community Garden - Lynden, WA



meet our (diverse) team

A Rocha is about relationships. Relationships with God and His creation certainly, but also with people--people from all walks of life. Two of our team members illustrate that diversity beautifully.

Carson Dickie is a self-described conservative Texan who loves both God and nature--a combination that baffles some of his friends. Adding to their consternation is his statement that he thinks he may even be an... "environmentalist." Shocking as that revelation may be to some of his fellow conservatives, his environmental concern is not grounded in science or politics. It is grounded, as he puts it, "in a simple layman's theology."

That theology, Carson says, rests on three tenets. First, Jesus' command to love God with all our heart, mind and soul means we must love the things He loves. Second, loving our neighbor as ourselves means working to improve the lot of those who suffer so from the degradation of the environment. And third, our disconnect from God's creation leads to a disconnect from God himself—"cutting us off from seeing his eternal power and divine nature visible in the things He has made."

All of which, says Carson, is why he's pleased to have found and become a part of A Rocha. "It helps put me in right relationship with God, my fellow man and nature."



Carson Dickie,
A Rocha USA Board Member and
Texas Hill Country Project Director

Ashlee Grishaber is, in many ways, the polar opposite to Carson. A California girl who majored in political science in college and even worked as a congressional aide in Washington, DC, Ashlee saw environmental issues through a completely political lens. And to her, people like Carson were in the opposing camp.

Working on Capitol Hill, however, Ashlee became disenchanted with the "us versus them" culture that dominates politics. It conflicted with her faith and with her desire for right relations with her fellow man. Plus, she saw how little the political arguing did to actually improve the environment. It wasn't until she found A Rocha shortly after graduating college that she had a new lens through which to look, and the broken pieces started coming together.

"A Rocha's biblical foundation and relational approach give me a whole new, and very hopeful, perspective on caring for the environment," says Ashlee. "In A Rocha, I found people who love God and who as a result care for all His creation--human and non-human. I now have tremendous hope and I see tremendous love between the most unlikely friends."



Ashlee Grishaber,
A Rocha USA
Communications Director



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