



DROUGHT

The most frequently quoted word of the past summer. Drought has created many problems for farmers and for our gardens. Were it not for frequent watering nothing would have grown. Water levels in reservoirs, lakes and ponds have fallen dramatically. "Hunger stones," historically marked drought boulders, have emerged from rivers and many small streams have run dry. Groundwater level has also sunk deep and tree roots cannot send water to trunks, branches, leaves and needles. Many trees wither and die because of lack of water. All nature suffers from drought. Experts have been warning about such problems for many years and hopefully the authorities pay attention to their voice and implement new ways of water management. The process is extremely complicated and complex. Who can understand all the unknown interactions and make sense of all the surprising new findings!

The government is creating new strategies, changing laws, even the constitution may be amended for water's sake. That is very good news. And it is also very good news that these top-down actions are often joined by bottom-up efforts of ordinary people and citizens who, at their own scale, on their own property, collect rainwater and allow it absorb naturally instead of going down the drain.

A Rocha – Christians in Conservation also focuses on the problem of drought and lack of water in its programs and projects. Our education programs for children, youth and adults explain the importance of a right water management, including the care for all green areas, hedgerows and forests in each drainage basin, and the necessity to change "modern" methods of large scale farming with their chemical destruction of fields.



What we teach is physically manifested at our environmental center. Our ponds let everyone see what water retention is in reality. The ponds are teeming with life: they are home to many plants and animals and a source of food and water.

As Christians we pray for wisdom for a right water management and for far-seeing solutions. We pray for water to refresh nature, and we pray for water which would refresh our lives and our arid social and political environment. The Bible speaks many times about water as such but very often Scripture also uses water as an image of something vitally important. Images of water, spring, well, river or flood represent the source of life, available not just to some but to all who thirst for righteousness, for a new beginning and a second chance.

A Rocha is an international conservation organization showing God's love for all creation and our human responsibility.



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Churches, congregations and parishes are such wells where people can draw living water, water for life. But you and I are also such wells. Each of us is. Each well needs care and protection from pollution, from dirt and poison that would make its water bad. A well must also be cleaned from time to time, or even disinfected. Yes, we are sinful people and sometimes we let our lives be polluted with the dirt of sin. The source of living water gets blocked and water cannot flow. It can even disappear. Then we cease to be a well of refreshment and help. And a well without water is useless and deteriorates. It is my hope that we learn our lesson from this drought and at least in some ways help reduce the wasting of water and help water absorb naturally instead of running off. Let us also remember those who thirst. Let's help them. Let's seek the source of living water. How much we need it in our society, in our families, in our lives! Water and living water are our hope. Thanks God for them!

Pavel Štifter

Exemplary Natural Garden

From the very beginning of the renovation of our center we have tried to transform the surrounding lands into a place of life and diversity. The long years of our work (and joy) were rewarded in July when we received a certificate of "Exemplary Natural Garden" and thereby became part of a network of Czech ecological gardens which fulfill a given set of rules and criteria.

Brought to life by Wolfgang Sobotka, deputy governor of Lower Austria, Natural Gardens are a network run by the organization "Natur im Garten" and other partners. The project entered the Czech Republic in 2001 and has grown ever since. Currently there are over 200 certified "natural gardens" and over 80 "exemplary natural gardens."

What is a natural garden? It is a very valuable space for life. It is a rich and biologically diverse ecosystem of plants and animals and it also provides rest, harvest and interesting experiences to people as they discover the many manifestations of life. Because the garden



lives by natural cooperation all thrive and prosper: the hedgehog, the dragonfly, flowers, fruit trees and vegetables. That is the main idea of the project: "Let's work together with nature. She will work together with us." Such gardens have to do without peat, which is linked to the exploitation of nature, and without artificial fertilizers and pesticides, which do damage to the environment. There are 15 other criteria related to the creation of and care for the garden, at least 10 of which have to be fulfilled (for example biodiversity in grass, fruit garden, vegetables and herbs, rainwater use,

compost, hedgerows of wild shrubs, mulch, shelters for animals, a part of wild nature garden, and other).

The two ladies who came to inspect our garden for the certificate were quite enthusiastic and promised to spread the word about the work of A Rocha. And they did: the following day I got a phone call from a lady in Dvůr Králové who read about our garden on the internet and wanted to come visit us with her family.



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We are convinced that a natural approach to gardening will become more and more important in a sustainable attitude to nature and a healthy life style. Many gardens are surrounded by depleted farm land or concrete and are indeed islands of life. The garden can be a peaceful world in itself where people, animals and plants support and help each other symbiotically. If you care for your garden in an ecological way, don't be afraid to enter the certification process. The garden label will be a visible sign of your sustainable care and ecological management. Hopefully our exemplary natural garden will serve its purpose too and inspire visitors and the general public. You are welcome to visit!
On behalf of A Rocha, Filip Laštovic

Singers for nature

On a sunny Sunday afternoon in June almost 300 people met in the meadow over our center to enjoy the beauty of God's creation and the songs of two musicians. God's love and wisdom resonated in the songs of Pavel Helan and Jakub Kopřiva, and there was also humor and laughter. We enjoyed a great performance and we hope to have a similar opportunity again in the future.



A Rocha summer camp

The main character of this year's camp was an Indian boy named "Small Tree." When he was 5 he started to learn to be independent, strong and courageous. Like him, our campers also faced many challenges which made them strong. They worked together in groups. They did not compete; everyone fulfilled the tasks according to their abilities and at their own pace. There were games and sports. A favorite activity was the building of dams in the Golden Stream using sticks and rocks. Such small obstacles in the stream slow down the current and serve as a shelter for water animals. The cycle of nature is completed when the rare black stork comes and wades in the stream as if it were its lord and master, feeding on the animals. Children also worked in our natural garden. That was one the character tests they had to take. They freed bushes from high grass, watered them, they built small lagoons, cleared the stream from trash and rooted out invasive species like reynoutria or impatiens glandulifera. Most children did not want to stay behind and they worked with great enthusiasm and vigor.

In that short week we also managed to enjoy a day trip, a night game or a biological research in the garden. Children built nest boxes with their own hands, sang by the camp fire and worked. Every day they listened to the Word of God and could think about its meaning.





In Arnoštov with British friend Gerry Rawcliffe

It is the end of August 2019. I am sitting by the Pucherský Stream in Arnoštov and thinking back of the days we spent here in June with a part of our team and our faithful British friend Gerry Rawcliffe. Afterwards Gerry sent us lots of pictures, especially butterflies, and wrote: "Thank you so much for a fantastic week. Great fellowship, great birds and butterflies (and beavers!), and great food, wine and beer. So thank you once again and I hope to come again next year." And it really was a fantastic time. The weather was a gift from God, with just a few short showers to refresh the rich nature of that part of Šumava by the Boletice military area. We weighed, measured and banded around 100 birds, 27 species. Gerry was especially excited to catch corncrakes at night. They are rare in the UK, there are but a few



couples in Scotland. By Spálenec where we were we could hear the mysterious night call of several corncrakes. Gerry also introduced me and Jana Leděčová (who is preparing to get a banding license) to some deeper secrets of molting and identifying the age and sex of song birds. The Swedish Svensson and the French Demongin were daily in our hands as Gerry was able to mine the minutest details out of both identification guides and we really learned a lot. When we had no birds Gerry would rush to the meadows and chase and photograph butterflies. He was absolutely excited. One night we went to the reservoir by Záhvozdí to see beavers and we were lucky to watch them go down the slide and plunge into water. Not far from there we met an audacious group of wild boars, headed by a huge male who did not even bother to run away. Going back we also watched the ural owl fly; we know from our ornithologist friends that

they successfully breed in the area and nest in boxes. The black grouse too did well in the Šumava this year, at least when the lekking season started. Ornithologists and zoologists counted around 30 lekking males in early spring. But who knows how many females survived and how many chicks were bred? Two years ago we found a black grouse nest predated by the wild boar; it was at a nearby site near Farářství. That does not give us a reason to be optimistic. The numbers of wild boar and fox are quite high in this area. During an evening ride we counted six foxes hunting, and we did not go more than two miles. Time flew by during that beautiful week in June. Like Gerry, we already look forward to next year. Pavel Světlík

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