

You are the God who sees me... *Gen. 16:13*

Dear friends,

at the turn of two years, I want to greet you with this affectionate exclamation of Hagar, the biblical refugee. It is the verse of the Unity of the Brethren Motto for the whole of the next year, 2023.

On a journey in the steppe, casted out by jealous Sarah and resigned Abram, Hagar wanders in the wilderness. And here she finds a spring of water. Though still full of sadness, doubts and burning questions, she discovers - here at the spring - a shining ray of light in her heart. This is in the certainty that the living God accompanies her. He looks at her with a kindly gaze. With eyes of love. She exclaims in surprise... **"I have now seen the One who sees me"**.

We may be in a similar position. Doubts, fears and uncertainties. Questions about what and how things will be next are an unpleasant dessert. It is constantly in the background ...I wake up in the morning praying for Ukraine, the unhealthy political scene in my own country, the struggles of the environment, the pain in churches, families and the shadows in my own soul. But into it all, the question of God's messenger wants to invade me and you: **"Where have you come from, and where are you going?"** And a little further on, the messenger of God exhorts her: **"Go back home."**

Instead of fleeing into the unknown, she should return. Yes, home, to her old circumstances, to her old ways, but with a changed heart. With deeper trust, stronger confidence. I am, and we are, under God's warm gaze. In Christ crucified and risen this is true in a new, fresh way.

Let's hold it. Let's believe it. Let the all-seeing God, who sees us, continue to guide us all.

Your Pavel Světlík

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





Ecological Contest

The regional round of the 28th Ecological Contest for the Hradec Králové Region took place at the A Rocha Eco-centre in Dobré on the 2nd and 3rd of November 2022. This year's theme was Species Conservation and 12 three-member teams from 7 high schools competed to secure a place in the national round.

However, the whole competition had already started about 14 days earlier with a homework assignment. The teams had to discover a valuable area in their surroundings where a specially protected species of animal or plant could be found and to draw up a simplified management plan, on the basis of which a new small-scale SPA could be proposed. The participants were thus faced with trips filled with searching for valuable natural areas, consultations with experts and hard work creating a presentation. Some of the teams took advantage of the autumn holidays, but for some of them this time off rather complicated their work.

The first task, unrelated to the contest itself, was to make it to the Keith Morris Eco-centre. The main challenge was only 4 minutes for changing buses in Dobruška. Fortunately, despite a slight delay of the bus from Hradec Králové, the kind driver of the connecting bus waited and all participants arrived on time.

After registration, the competition started with a one-hour test. The teams had to answer 40 questions, for half of them they could choose the right answer from 3 options, for the rest they had to state examples according to the assignment, explain concepts from the field of ecology and species protection, or come up with reasons for certain phenomena in nature.

After a hearty lunch it was time to present the home assignments. The jury was surprised and pleased by the professionalism of the students' performance, the visual side of the presentations and, of course, by their high quality factual aspect. It is no exaggeration to say that there were no bad teams and the jury had no easy task with evaluation.

The competition then continued with the species identification contest. Each team had to write down the generic and specific name for 20 specimens. To identify them, the students sometimes had available "only" a nest or an egg. It is therefore not surprising that this task was rated as clearly the most difficult, both by the participants and the teaching supervisors. This was also reflected in the results, with the most successful team scoring 14 points and the least successful one scoring 1 point.





After the end of the first competition day, a surprise awaited the students and their entourage in the form of an evening candlelight vigil at St. Matthew's Church in Deštné. After a busy day, everyone had the opportunity to quiet down and reflect on God's creation and the importance of our care for it. In the almost sacred atmosphere, by candlelight and with the soft chanting of Taize songs, the texts of Christian greats were read and the faces of all present reflected the gravity of the moment.



On the second day of the competition, the teams faced a field task – to build one of the 4 specific structures. The teams randomly chose either a reptile house, a beetle house, a bird house or an insect hotel, which they had to build according to a given sketch at a suitable site. The teams were given 2 hours to prepare the materials and build the structures, after this time they presented their buildings to the jury and other participants and answered questions about the suitability of their location, the creatures that would use the structure or the materials used. It was wonderful to see how the different teams managed to organize their work, divide the tasks and work together. The resulting constructions were beautiful, creatively built and purposeful at the same time.



After lunch, at the time when the jury made the final evaluation, counted points and prepared the certificates, the participants had a guided tour through the model nature garden.

Afterwards, the results and rankings were announced. Some participants were slightly disappointed, others were excited about their results. In any case, it was a valuable experience for everyone, including the jury and the organizers. The whole competition, according to the words of the teachers, was distinguished by a friendly atmosphere, everything was very well organized, the desserts were delicious and the students enjoyed the event, most of all the field task. Only the species identification contest...that should be easier next time.





Volunteer Week 2022

From 13th of August to 20th of August 2022, the Volunteer Week took place at the A Rocha eco-centre in Dobré near Dobruška. More than 35 lovers of God's creation from six countries including

families with young children and a group of older children led by Jana from the A Rocha team, took turns at Krupárna during this time, completing a tremendous amount of work together. In the future common room, a channel for the heating pipes was dug in the wall and the window sills were installed, including subsequent cleaning (the dusty workers could testify about the intensity of the cleaning).

Three beautiful wooden information boards were assembled and placed in the ground, and the breached river bank by the weir was repaired. In our living garden, the participants cleared all the ponds of unwanted weeds – this was especially enjoyable for the older children because of the hot weather.

Together we laid a new footbridge by the snake hide, cut down several dry trees that threatened to fall on the path and cut the tall grass around all the bushes. Volunteers also prepared much



needed firewood for the winter, several dozen frames for the bees, and cleared the stones from the soil heaps, which can now be used for additional garden beds.

It was wonderful to see the cooperation between the different groups and individuals; the younger participants had the opportunity to learn different skills from the more experienced ones – for example, in hammering together the frames for our bees, making information boards or preparing concrete for filling the windowsills.

Also, we cannot forget to appreciate the hard work done in the kitchen under the guidance of Milena, an experienced professional cook, who prepared delicious and healthy meals every day with generous help of our volunteers.

However, the whole stay was not only beneficial for the garden and the Krupárna ("the Mill") building, it also enriched all our participants. It brought together people from four generations who not only worked together, but also had the opportunity to get to know and learn from one other, share their life story, establish and build friendships, and rejoice together in God's creation.





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Christians in conservation

Morning and evening time was dedicated to joint prayer and worship, followed by spiritual reflection and Scripture reading. Together we reflected on Psalm 23, the fragrance of the Holy Spirit in our lives, the uniqueness of living each day in the present, strengthening one another with faith and God's gifts, or the significance of churches and temples in Old Testament times. We have been encouraged by the experience of A Rocha in France and Canada, and the work of the Christian Motorcycles Association, a mission organisation that talks about the Gospel with motorcyclists in the UK.



There was also an opportunity for a traditional Czech campfire with roasting sausages, sharing and prayers; adventurous activities in the form of washing in the river or a chance to improve our English while working and sharing with our brothers and sisters from abroad.



Every afternoon, the volunteers had an active rest filled with exploring the Eagle Mountains. We visited the Rescue Station in Jaroměř, we enjoyed a guided tour in Josefov meadows where we observed snipes or dippers, but also wild horses and aurochs (ancient breed of cattle). We also released a healed seagull into the wild.

We had the opportunity to learn how our ancestors lived and farmed in the period of the 13th-14th centuries thanks to a tour of the nature archaeological museum Villa Nova in Uhřínov, which helps to understand the medieval village using experimental archaeology. We attended an informative lecture on agroforestry and extensive fruit farming by the students of the Farmers' School and their colleagues from Germany, and together with residents from near and far we watched Drahomíra Vihanová's short documentary about Franz Eimann, Daily I Come Before Your Face, about the power of faith and the strong relationship to one's home. Each morning we were able to participate in the ringing of birds living around the Keith Morris Center.

The ringing was always accompanied by a short introduction of the species – we learned a lot of useful information not only about great tits, but also about the dipper, Eurasian wren, goldcrest and especially the beautiful kingfisher, which is called the Flying Jewel for its beautiful colouring. We believe that next year we will be able to repeat this successful event, during which we had the opportunity to “taste” the community way of life, and we will welcome you to it as well. -ACK-





A DISTINGUISHED VISIT

On Friday, November 4, 2022, the A Rocha centre lecture hall was filled with more than a hundred guests. Just before five o'clock, a distinguished guest, general Pavel - one of the hot candidates for the presidency of the Czech Republic - arrived in a small VW Golf. Pavel Světlík outlined the reasons for our invitation at the beginning of his welcoming speech. The candidate's courage and ability to see clearly and name the geopolitical position and relations in Europe and in the world. His non-partisanship and search for consensual solutions to various situations. That is to say, not taking conflicting and nation dividing positions, as has, unfortunately, been the case up to now. And also a clear, strong tone and emphasis on the struggle for the environment. In this context, the fact that the two former presidents sadly understood and labelled these



environmental groups by using a summary term "eco-terrorists" was also recalled. The lively discussion was then led by Pavel Světlík junior. With his factual, calm and balanced opinions, the general convinced us that many who stand behind him are really on the right side and on the right track of real politics. The most powerful part of the discussion was the response to a question about the dangerous military operation in Bosnia where

his unit intricately liberated fifty-five surrounded members of the French UNPROFOR contingent. This subsequently quickened our country's admission to NATO. Only those who criticize the general for his tolerant approach towards gender issues were leaving the debate concerned. However, the debate was excellent and some of those who were yet undecided began to consider him more seriously. Mr. Pavel especially won many of us over with his courage, modesty, honesty and transparency.

At the end of the evening, the director of A Rocha read, as a wish for the general, the story from the Scripture of the Roman officer who had taken a courageous trust in Christ by asking Him through his servants to heal his servant from a distance - by a mere word, as a military command. And we know that the servant was healed in the end. There was also encouragement in the wish to the general to look back on the spiritual foundations of his thinking, following his frank confession elsewhere of having been baptized as a Christian in childhood.

And then, together with our distinguished guest, we were reminded of the Apostle's call for us Christians from 1 Timothy to pray for those who are in authority. This was then brought to a close with a thoughtful and heartfelt prayer



by the preacher Bronislav Kaleta. General Pavel left to great applause with a bouquet for his wife Eva and a bottle of excellent red wine for himself. However, walking out of the crowd was not easy for him. Journalists' questions, selfies and many handshakes prevented him from going. But he dealt with it all kindly and patiently. If the nation chooses him and, most importantly, if the Lord God Himself looks upon him graciously, we believe we will have a great president. And in A Rocha, we will have a fond memory of a wonderfully open, warm and factual debate. General Pavel is really handsome not only in his character, but especially in his sincere and wise heart.

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Being like children...

Our family sits around the table and discusses the day's events. The children break the news that their friends have opened a stall on the neighbouring street by their fence. They have stretched a tarpaulin over the sidewalk and are offering handmade Advent wreaths to passers-by. David, the youngest, is thinking of trying it out as well.

He shares how much his friends have already earned and his own plans for what he will do with the money. Then his older brother, Joel, jumps up in his chair, wraps himself in the window curtain in a flash, and says in a deep voice... "Ho, ho, ho, David! I am the ghost of Grandpa Pavel who can hear you. You'd better think about putting the money you will make into rebuilding the Krupárna. If you don't, it's going to end badly for you..." The parents almost fell off their chairs.

We were all very amused and it warmed our hearts. Teenager Joel has a way of thinking about the needs of others. He loves Krupárna and the whole valley surrounding it. And so he's going through this concern of ours with us - the struggle to rebuild the centre. It was he who once offered his grandfather he would take it over from him. He likes the woods, tramping and he is thinking globally, almost like Greta. Children think about God's specific work. They can share the concerns of us adults. Jesus says, "theirs is the kingdom of heaven." We wish for you and for ourselves that we could all think in childlike terms. For we will one day pass on to them this beautiful but also rather painful world. And it matters that they can be involved in its preservation and protection already today.



Pavel and Radka Světlík



Events planned for 2023

- 27 January - lecture by Šarka Vávrová "Medicinal bee products", Dobré
- February - Sauerkraut / pickles / bread-making competition, Dobré
- 21 April - lecture by A. Vondrka "Evolution of bird populations in Šumava forest", Prachatice
- 22 April - Welcome of birdsong, Prachatice
- 29 April - Welcome of birdsong, Dobruška region
- 6 to 9 June - Monitoring event in the Orlické Záhoří region
- 12 to 19 - August Week of volunteers and friends of the Czech A Rocha, Dobré
- 7 - 10 - September Exhibition Mushrooms of the Orlické Mountains, Dobré
- 20 - 23 - September Exhibition Mushrooms of Prachatice
- 30 Sep - Autumn Bird Festival, Dobruška region



Prayer themes

- Ending the war in Ukraine
 - Continuation of the reconstruction of the ecocentre, applications for grants
- Election of the president
 - Search for an administrative assistant
- Staffing for volunteer week (kitchen management)



QR donation

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Thank you for all your donations and even small, regular support!

