

NEWS from the Church of England

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Church bells ring to highlight toll of biodiversity

Church bells across the country will ring in tune with the United Nations next month to mark crucial international talks on biodiversity.

As the bells toll at the UN headquarters in both New York and Nairobi, bell ringers from small parish churches to large cathedrals and ministers are being encouraged to ring on September 22. 2010 is the UN's International Year of Biodiversity (IYB) and the Church of England is one of the official partners in the UK.

The UN General Assembly will discuss for the first time ever the crisis affecting the world's biodiversity on September 22, underlining the importance of how plants, animals and life as we know it are all linked and the loss of one species through human actions can affect many others.

With a Christian presence in every community, around 6,000 of the CofE's 16,000 churches have a peal of bells (not including those with a single bell). IYB is encouraging bell ringing in all churches from 12-2pm to mark the start of the talks

The UN declared 2010 as IYB in recognition of the fact that, despite the formation of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) following the Rio Earth Summit, targets set to stop the global loss of biodiversity by 2010 have not been met.

In October 2010, following the UN meeting, the 193 heads of state who are signatories to the Convention will meet in Nagoya in Japan to make binding agreements. The Secretariat of the Convention is encouraging the ringing of bells all over the world as an urgent 'memo' ahead of this meeting to rouse the world to take action to stop the loss of species.

David Shreeve the Church of England's national environment adviser said: "As Christians we believe it is important to care for God's creation and our natural world is suffering because of our own actions. Many of our estimated 10,000 churchyards are full with often rare biodiversity and others in towns and cities support fewer, but equally important wildlife. The church is providing protected havens right on our own doorstep."

Dr Jill Hopkinson, the Church of England's National Rural Officer, said: "Ringling the church bells is a great way for the wider community to be reminded and to celebrate the beauty of creation. Rural churches are at the heart of village life and their churchyards are part of the collective history and memory of that community. Celebrating the biodiversity of countryside and churchyard will bring a community together and ringling the bells is a very prominent way of doing it."

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Notes to editors

The initiative to ring bells across the world is inspired by the UK based MEMO Project and supported by IYB-UK and the Church of England. MEMO is a collaboration of scientists, sculptors and stonemasons dedicated to communicating the reality of the current extinction crisis by creating a perpetual memorial. The aim is to erect a stone sculpture featuring the carved images of the species being made extinct, which also supports a huge bell. The bell and sculpture will be built on the cliffs of the Isle of Portland. This is part of the Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site whose 95 miles of fossil rich cliffs already record 185 million continuous years of the history of life. The great bell will be tolled whenever a species is declared extinct.

<http://www.memoproject.org/>

More information on the importance of biodiversity: <http://www.biodiversityislife.net/>
www.naturalengland.org.uk

**How Wild is your Churchyard?* <http://www.cofe.anglican.org/news/pr0110.html>

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www.shrinkingthefootprint.org – **the Church of England's Environmental Campaign**

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