

LIVING IN PEACE WITH NATURE



“...KEEP THEM ALIVE WITH THEE”

Genesis 6:19

SHRINKING BIODIVERSITY: A Serious Concern for Action

Nature provides us various kinds of gifts - the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the food we eat, nature enhances our well-being and freely supplies the essentials for our survival. New research from the United Nations has found that life on this planet, in all its wide diversity, is disappearing more quickly now than it has at any time in human history, and some 1 million species of plants and animals face extinction. Our pattern of production and consumption of food and energy, and the blatant disregard for the environment entrenched in our current economic model, has pushed the natural world to its limits. COVID-19 is a clear manifestation of our broken relationship with nature. The pandemic has highlighted the deep interconnection between nature, human health and well-being, and how unprecedented biodiversity loss threatens the health of people and the planet. Driven by human industrialisation and consumption, the earth is currently going through its sixth mass extinction in history according to the Living Planet report, released on September 10, 2020 by the World Wildlife Fund.¹

One of the main reasons for the decline in biodiversity is human activity which has increasingly destroyed and degraded forests, grasslands, wetlands and other important ecosystems, threatening human well-being since the industrial revolution. The Living Planet reported that human activities have significantly altered 75% of the Earth's ice-free land surface wherein most of the oceans are polluted and more than 85% of the areas of wetlands have been lost. Since the last 50 years, our world has been transformed by an explosion in global trade, consumption and human population growth, as well as an enormous move towards urbanisation. Until 1970, humanity's ecological footprint was smaller than the earth's rate of regeneration. To feed and fuel our 21st century lifestyles, we are overusing the Earth's bio capacity by at least 56%.²

Nature has sent us a wakeup call and it is time we respond to the call. Ignoring this call will not only threaten the life of plants and animals but it will also put our health, well-being and prosperity, indeed the future, of nearly 8 billion people at stake. We should realise that plants, trees, birds and all the amazing diversity of life have the right to coexist.

This year's Eco Sunday observation calls for urgent action to protect biodiversity and protect the integrity of ecosystems. Individual actions may seem to barely make any difference to global environmental problems such as biodiversity loss. However, large changes happen and are constituted by the small choices and individual actions made by each one of us. Therefore the choices that we make today as an individual, a church or an organisation matter as these small actions makes us part of the solution and gives meaning to our lives.

Biodiversity in India at a glance:

1. India is a highly biodiverse country, holding over 45,000 species of plants (7% of the world's total) in only 2.4% of the world's land area. It is also home to 8% of the world's biodiversity.³
2. India is one of the 17 megadiverse countries in the world. Out of the 35 biodiversity hotspots in the world, India has 4 biodiversity hotspots.
3. Among plants, 33% of the world's species are endemic to India, and are found nowhere else in the world.
4. There are 91,000 animal species or 6.5% of the world's fauna. 60,000 of these are insect species, 2,456 fish species, 372 mammals, 500 mollusks, over 440 reptiles, and 200 amphibians of which most of them are in the Western Ghats.⁴
5. Among the food grains, there are 50,000 varieties of rice found in the country, making it the biggest reservoir of rice on earth.⁵

¹ https://www.wwfindia.org/news_facts/wwf_publications/living_planet_report_2020/

² https://www.researchgate.net/publication/344187626_WWF_Living_Planet_Report_2020

³ [https://www.iucn.org/asia/countries/india\(1-3\)](https://www.iucn.org/asia/countries/india(1-3))

⁴ <https://www.jagranjosh.com/general-knowledge/summary-on-the-biodiversity-in-india-1521716572-1>

⁵ <http://indiasendangered.com/facts-you-did-not-know-about-biodiversity-of-india/>



Biodiversity Loss Factsheet - India:

1. In India, 3% of bird species face extinction, with the number increasing every year. As many as 19% of amphibians are threatened or critically endangered. Bee colonies are also collapsing drastically across the country.⁶
2. India has lost nearly a third of its wetlands to urbanization, agricultural expansion and pollution over the last four decades, as per the Living Planet report, released on 10 September 2020, by the World Wildlife Fund together with the Zoological Society of London.
3. 929 species of animals in India are threatened today.
4. Indian coastline is 7516 km long. Only 1% of India's vast coastline is protected. The rest is vanishing, mainly due to unplanned development work, fishery and major development projects like power plants and ports.

Biodiversity Loss Factsheet - Global:

Nearly 21,000 monitored populations of mammals, fish, birds, reptiles and amphibians, encompassing almost 4,400 species around the world, have declined at an average of 68% between 1970 and 2016.⁷

1. About 75% of the earth's ice-free land surface has already been significantly altered, most of the oceans are polluted, and more than 85% of the area of wetlands has been lost.
2. Freshwater biodiversity is declining much faster than that in oceans or forests, with an alarming 84% decline in freshwater species, which is equivalent to 4% per year since 1970.
3. Since 2000, 1.9 million square km of previously wild and undeveloped land – an area the size of Mexico – has been lost through conversion, mostly in tropical and subtropical grasslands, savanna and shrubland ecosystems, and Southeast Asian rainforests.
4. Currently, the world is experiencing the 6th mass extinction event. More than 1 million animal and plant species are threatened with extinction.
5. The current rate of global species extinction is hundred times higher than the average over the last 10 million years, and the rate is still accelerating.
6. At least 680 vertebrate species had been driven to extinction by human actions since the 16th century.
7. More than 9% (around 560) of all domesticated breeds of mammals used for food and agriculture had become extinct by 2016, with at least 1,000 more breeds threatened.
8. Around 10% of insect species are now threatened with extinction.
9. Since 1900, average abundance of native species in most major terrestrial biomes has declined by at least 20%.
10. More than 3.5% of domesticated breed of birds were extinct by 2016.
11. The distribution of almost half (47%) of terrestrial flightless mammals and almost a quarter (23%) of threatened birds have been negatively impacted by climate change.
12. Overall, around 40% of all known animal species are facing extinction, including beetles, flies, moths, butterflies and bees.

⁶ [https://india.mongabay.com/2020/09/nature-in-peril-as-biodiversity-losses-mount-alarmingly-states-the-living-planet-report/\(6-11\)](https://india.mongabay.com/2020/09/nature-in-peril-as-biodiversity-losses-mount-alarmingly-states-the-living-planet-report/(6-11))

⁷ <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/endangered-species-animal-population-decline-world-wildlife-fund-new-report/>



Order of Worship

1. Prelude/Call to Worship: Genesis 1:22 (NIV)

God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth."

Hymn: "How Great Thou Art" or any other relevant hymn.

2. Invocation Prayer:

God our Creator, we thank you for this beautiful world with its amazing variety of animals and plants. As we celebrate your wonderful creation, help us to revere and respect the rights of all species and integrity of all the elements. O Lord, help us to be instruments of healing and redeem the harm we have done to the planet. Heavenly Father, inspire our thoughts and actions so we can become true stewards of Creation. We pray for leaders and representatives from around the world as they seek to find ways of preserving your world – ways of preventing the destruction of habitats and soil and of saving species from extinction. Guide them and give them wisdom in their decision-making. May God who established the dance of creation, who marvelled at the lilies of the field, who transforms chaos to order, lead us to transform our lives and the Church to reflect God's glory in creation. Amen!

3. Responsive reading (Adapted from Psalm 104)

L – Leader

A – All

L: Praise the Lord, my soul. Lord my God, you are very great; you are clothed with splendour and majesty.

A: The Lord wraps himself in light as with a garment; He stretches out the heavens like a tent and lays the beams of His upper chambers on their waters.

L: He makes the clouds his chariot and rides on the wings of the wind. He makes winds his messengers, flames of fire his servants. He set the earth on its foundations; it can never be moved.

A: You covered it with the watery depths as with a garment; the waters stood above the mountains.

L: They give water to all the beasts of the field; the wild donkeys quench their thirst.

A: The birds of the sky nest by the waters; they sing among the branches.

L: He waters the mountains from his upper chambers; the land is satisfied by the fruit of his work.

A: He makes grass grow for the cattle, and plants for people to cultivate—bringing forth food from the earth:

L: He made the moon to mark the seasons, and the sun knows when to go down.

A: You bring darkness, it becomes night, and all the beasts of the forest prowl.

L: The lions roar for their prey and seek their food from God.

A: The sun rises, and they steal away; they return and lie down in their dens. Then people go out to their work, to their labour until evening.

L: How many are your works, Lord! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.

A: When you open your hand, they are satisfied with good things. When you hide your face, they are terrified; when you take away their breath, they die and return to the dust.

L: When you send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the ground.

A: May the glory of the Lord endure forever; may the Lord rejoice in his works.

ALL: Praise the Lord, my soul.

4. Song: Special Song/presentation.



5. Prayer of confession;

God of creation, we thank you for the gift of creation, its richness and variety. From the smallest micro-organisms to elephants and blue whales—and all the creatures in between! Your creation has nourished, healed and brought delight and wonder. Despite all these, we have abused and destroyed them for our own greed and exploited their habitats. We have abused the soil and the earth through reckless extraction and greed. Gracious God, forgive us for the ways in which we contribute to the disfigurement and destruction of your Creation. Transform our hearts and minds, that we may place the welfare of your earth and your people before our fleeting desires. Help us to find ways to lead lives that respect and revere your creation. We ask all of this through Christ our Lord, **Amen**

6. Reading from the Old Testament:

Genesis 6:18-21: But I will establish my covenant with you, and you will enter the ark—you and your sons and your wife and your sons' wives with you. You are to bring into the ark two of all living creatures, male and female, to keep them alive with you. Two of every kind of bird, of every kind of animal and of every kind of creature that moves along the ground will come to you to be kept alive. You are to take every kind of food that is to be eaten and store it away as food for you and for them.

7. Readings from the New Testament

Colossians 1:15 - 20: "The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

8. Offertory Hymn: "Count your Blessings" or any other relevant song.

9. Offertory Prayer:

Father of all creation, Origin of all life and Sustainer, may this offering be an expression of our willingness to be vessels that fulfil your desire concerning the people around us and the creation you have fashioned. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

10. Sermon:

11. Closing Hymn: "Make me a blessing" or any other relevant hymn

12. Benediction: Dear God, we thank you for allowing us to benefit from the beauty and the varieties of all that your hand has created. We thank you for reminding us about your wonderful creation. Your word has inspired us not to defile the land that you have given us but guard against wasting the natural resources. Lord, help us so that we may adopt better and teach our children so that we can bless the earth for future generations. Help us to keep the Lord's commandments to preserve the earth and care for all that is in it. Teach us to regularly do our part to respect and protect all living creatures as an act of love and gratitude to our Heavenly Father. As we listen from your Word, help us to take up the responsibility to ensure that all life is respected. We thank you for this day and ask for your blessing on this journey. **Amen.**



ACTIVITIES FOR CHILDREN ON THE THEME: LIVING IN PEACE WITH NATURE

Purpose: This activity will encourage children about the need to appreciate nature and the importance of living in harmony with nature.

Time: 30 minutes - 1 hour.

Materials required:

1. A computer/tablet/mobile phone with access to internet.
2. Pencils, erasers, colouring pencils/crayons/sketch pens/markers, scissors, glue.
3. Colour paints and brushes.
4. A4/A3 paper.

The second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic has posed grave challenges. This activity has been developed keeping in mind the social context of times such as this; it can be done online and does not require any outdoor activity.

Organise a Zoom meeting for children. A Facilitator should be the overall in charge of managing the activities in the meeting. He/she should divide the children into 2 different age groups –

1. For children aged 5-12 years: To draw a picture of animal.

For this group of children, show them a video about different kinds of animals and explain how the animals lived in harmony with nature and how important it is to protect the wild life. This is the link to the video – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bLJw9yPusak>

After showing this video, ask children to draw and then paint or colour any one picture of an animal which they see in the video on an A4 paper such as lions, tigers, leopards, elephants, sloths, etc. On top of the page, ask children to write the theme verse - Genesis 6:19 (NIV): "You are to bring into the ark two of all living creatures, male and female, to keep them alive with you."

2. For children aged 13-18 years: Collage making on the theme of Living in Peace with Nature

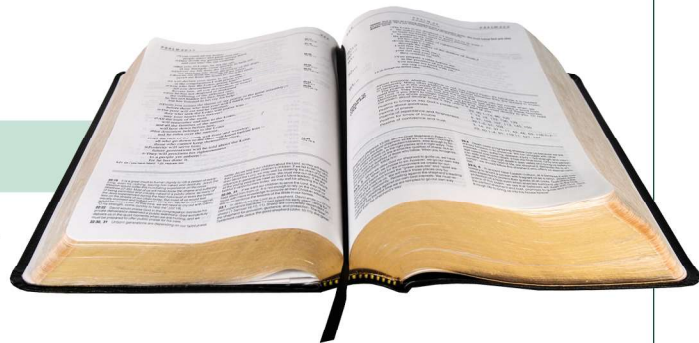
Facilitator will show a short video about the need to make peace with nature and how everyone can play a role in this. This is the link to the video – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SqHnmN2A5Yw>

After showing the video, ask children to collect images/pictures of nature – animals, forests, birds, sceneries, ocean, river, etc from old magazines, books or newspapers. The images can be cut out and make a collage on an A3 Paper, preferably in a landscape mode. Or, children can draw, paint or colour the pictures of nature, cut it out and make a collage on an A3 Paper. The images could also be downloaded, printed and the collage can be made on an A3 Paper. The theme verse can be written on top of the page.



BIBLE STUDY ON GOD'S BIODIVERSITY - Psalm 104⁸

*Nowhere is biodiversity celebrated more than in Psalm 104.
Let's look at what we can learn from this Psalm.*



Read Verses 1-9

The Psalm begins with a recitation of the original creative acts of God – stretching out the heavens, forming the earth, setting the boundaries for the sea (vv. 2-9). God's sovereignty above all things is affirmed through the description of the great forces of nature, including the wind and water, which are subject to God.

Discuss the following questions:

- What is the primary focus of this passage? Humanity? Nature? God?
- What is the possible significance of the Psalmist begin by recounting God's original act of creation?
- What attributes of God stand out to you from these first 9 verses?
- What are the implications of God's role as Creator?
- Is there any part of the earth that is not under God's sovereignty?

Read verses 10-23

These verses describe an ordered world in which the needs of creatures are provided for and patterns of life are set out. The word for "use" in v14 can also mean cultivate. Humans are meant to care for and tend to the land. It is important to note that they play one of many roles in the order of creation. A majority of the verses in this Psalm are not focused on humanity, but other animals and plants. Throughout these verses, it is God who provides for God's creation in abundance so that all the earth is satisfied.

Discuss the following questions:

- According to the Psalm, is creation a onetime event for God or something God continues to participate in?
- What does it mean for us that God continues to be involved in creation?
- How does the Psalmist depict humans and their role?
- Does this Psalm suggest any kind of dependency between living beings? Does this depiction of creation suggest there are boundaries to creation? Are these boundaries appropriate? Inappropriate? Beneficial? Harmful?
- Does this Psalm suggest that God views any part of creation as unimportant or without value?
- In an era where biodiversity is under great threat, what hope does this Psalm give us? Where should our trust lie?

Read Verses 24-35

In the following verses, the Psalmist praises God for the wonder of creation. God is shown to be the one who sustains the world by providing all of God's creatures with food and good things, each in their own season. Verse 35 is not only a condemnation of sinners, but expresses the idea that the presence of sin could prevent God from continuing to bestow the good gifts of creation (see Jer. 5:23-26).

Discuss the following questions:

- How often do we view the earth as a glorious gift from God? Does this gift come with any responsibilities?
- What does the concept of stewardship imply?
- What does this exclamation mean "May the glory of the Lord endure forever" (v31)? How do we prevent God from being able to enjoy his creation? How can we enable creation to be something God rejoices in?
- Does creation depict the glory of the Lord? Do our current policies and practices show proper appreciation to God for creation?

⁸ this is taken out from EFICOR creation care training module



Action Plan:

With few simple habitual changes and pro-active action, we can reduce adverse impacts on the environment and encourage local biodiversity.

What can we do?

As an individual

1. Begin by hugging a tree. It's that easy. This is the quickest way to appreciate the important part it plays in your life.
2. Include the theme of care for God's creation in family worship and in the church.
3. If you have a yard, consider restoring its habitat and turning it into a mini-wildlife sanctuary.
4. Reduce your consumption. The more we reduce our demand for new resources, the fewer habitats will be destroyed to get those resources or the energy to make those products which therefore means less waste going into the landfill.
5. Compost your waste. This reduces the amount of waste going into landfills and the space needed to hold that waste. Look into ways in which you can compost or recycle those purchases which are intended for single-use. Keep up with what is recyclable in your area.
6. Reduce your energy demand. Burning fossil fuels is the number one driver of climate change which is exponentially quickening biodiversity loss by presenting unparalleled challenges to the world's plants and animals. Start by conserving energy in your home.
7. Advocate for biodiversity conservation. Educate yourself about the importance of biodiversity and equip yourself to be able to answer questions like, "Why does it matter so much?" and "Why should we make sacrifices to protect it?" Share your message. Talk to your friends in person. Use social media. Start a blog. Speak at local events.

As a community

1. Organise a 'Tree-bute' - which simply means planting of trees on important occasions like birthdays, anniversaries, births, deaths, baptisms etc. in your church or organisations. this is one way to combat the decrease of biodiversity.
2. Preserving species and its habitat in the community is one way to ensure an increase in biodiversity.
3. Encourage farmers in the community to practice multi cropping. This will help in restoring biodiversity.
4. Get the youth and children to spend at least one morning a month to clean the church compound and reflect on the different species of flora and fauna found in the campus.
5. Organise a campaign against massive deforestation that is taking place in your locality or nearby and stop ecological destruction.
6. Begin a broader conversation on the potential contribution of the Church on environmental concerns.
7. Plan and observe World Environment Day on 5th June.
8. While printing, print on both sides. You can also make a notepad by stapling used printer papers, blank side up, to a piece of cardboard.
9. Store office files digitally.
10. Conduct Bible studies on issues related to biodiversity. Psalm 104 is considered to be the oldest text on biodiversity.
11. Encourage everyone in the office to edit on computers before printing. This move will help reduce the number of draft copies of documents to be printed. If you still think printing drafts is necessary, print them on the unused side of paper sheets that would otherwise be discarded.



EFICOR



Working towards a just,
responsible & compassionate society

EFICOR is a national Christian relief and development organisation. It began in 1967 as a unit of Evangelical Fellowship of India (EFI), a national alliance of churches, church based institutions and individuals, to provide relief to the drought-hit state of Bihar. EFICOR became an independent organisation in 1980. Since then, EFICOR has been working with the needy and disadvantaged communities in the poorest districts in India.

EFICOR is registered under the Karnataka Societies Registration Act, 1960 (Karnataka Act No. 17 of 1960) on 30th of April, 1980. The Registration number is 70/80-81. EFICOR is also registered under the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act, 1976 and the registration number is 231650411.

The Evangelical Fellowship of India Commission on Relief (EFICOR)
308, Mahatta Tower, B 54, Community Centre,
Janakpuri,
New Delhi 110058
Tele/Fax: +91-11-25516383/4/5
Email: hq@eficor.org
Website: www.eficor.org

