

Green Pilgrimage Network newsletter no.7 July 2013



Despite the fact that this year's summer solstice was a rather blustery, cold affair in the UK, the onset of summer is a good reminder to us of the natural rhythms of the world. It was also a reminder to all of us at ARC that that our next Green Pilgrimage Network meeting in Trondheim in Norway is almost upon us.

This latest newsletter talks about the GPN journey to Trondheim, the amazing journeys of swifts, the first Jerusalem Symposium on Green and Accessible Pilgrimage, news from India and the return of the Maukib pilgrimage in Kano, Nigeria.

So many stories to be heard in Trondheim



We now have a fully booked event, with around 75 delegates attending a packed programme from July 26 to 28, with most staying to take part in the opening of the St Olav's pilgrimage festival which commemorates the death (on July 29, 1030) of the patron saint of Norway, who is buried in Nidaros Cathedral.

The meeting will be an opportunity to discuss the future of the Network, (with many religious attendees, as well as secular speakers ranging from the Secretary General of the Council of Europe to representatives of UNEP's Green Passport initiative) as well as to welcome more than a dozen new members from around the world. We will hear many inspiring stories of what our founding members have achieved since Assisi in late 2011.

We look forward to sharing all this with you in our next newsletter. Anyone on Facebook or twitter can also tune in to updates. Which is a reminder: please do follow us <https://twitter.com/ARCworld> and <http://tinyurl.com/3x7vvr8>

And the swifts will return again



Swifts (*apus apus*) are extraordinary birds, often staying airborne for up to two years before they nest and breed.

Every year, swifts undertake an unbelievable annual "pilgrimage" between their summer nesting sites in the north and their winter-feeding territories in the skies above Africa. They can fly at least 560 miles a day. The fact that swifts are mostly urban, that they are global travellers with great loyalty to their nesting sites, and that they frequently colonise historic temples, churches, synagogues,

cathedrals and mosques, and that their numbers are threatened because of development and pollution, makes them ideal natural symbols for our Green Pilgrimage Network. They are also wonderful examples of the everyday

miracles of travel and journeys. And powerful reminders of our connection with (and responsibility for) nature, creation and each other.

We hope to launch a new initiative around swifts at our meeting in Trondheim, led by the well-known urban environmentalist, Professor Chris Baines, who spoke at Assisi, and who will share his expertise in Trondheim. But why talk about swifts in a green pilgrimage network?

Their numbers are dropping every year (by [40 percent in Britain](#) since 1994) and swifts urgently need a programme of positive conservation. One way forward is to provide sanctuary for them to nest on places like the roofs and walls of places of worship. They nest already in St Peter's Square in Rome, [in the Western Wall in Jerusalem](#), in the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, the Great Mosque in Amman, the Cathedral at St Albans and in many other ancient sacred places in Europe and the Middle East.

All these diverse places of pilgrimage can potentially be linked together through the theme of swifts. They can positively publicise the importance of installing nesting boxes and speak about our responsibility to care for nature.

Many swifts "winter" in Tanzania, Zimbabwe and Southern Africa (which of course are then having their own summers) and we would like to link our faith partners in Africa with this initiative, raising issues of sustainable farming practice and pesticide use.

(Just found that in North America there is a similar, though unrelated, bird called the chimney swift, *chaetura pelagica*, which winters in South America and the Caribbean and whose numbers [are also dropping](#) because of the disappearance of old brick and stone chimneys.)

Do you have any swifts in your places of pilgrimage? We would love to hear from you.

Jerusalem Symposium



A ceremony to welcome swifts on their annual return to Jerusalem has been held for the last few years at the Western Wall. And this year, the ceremony was attended by delegates at the [first International Jerusalem Symposium](#) on Green and Accessible Pilgrimage from April 21 to 26.

Around 200 people, including ARC's Alison Hilliard, were at to Jerusalem's International YMCA to discuss subjects including disabled access in the Old City, and many vital issues of green pilgrimage, from biodiversity in the city to sewage projects in the Kidron Valley. There's a [short video here](#) on Jerusalem's "Kidron Basin Sewage Woes" which might interest other GPN members. You can also see a charming short film of the Symposium [here](#).

Earth Hour – started of course by WWF in Sydney in 2007 and now celebrated around the world – was marked symbolically with the electric lights on the city walls being turned off. Instead a film was screened on the walls using solar power, making it probably the first ever solar-powered eco cinema.

The Custodian of the Holy Land, the Greek Orthodox Patriarch, Rabbi David Rosen and the Mayor of Jerusalem joined many others to welcome the idea of

'green pilgrimage'. And the [Jerusalem Framework of Principles for Green and Accessible Pilgrimage](#) was drawn up during the meeting, around the theme "Love O.U.R. City" (ie Openness, Understanding and Respect.)

Our thoughts are with thousands of pilgrims in India this season...

Hundreds of thousands of Hindu pilgrims make the Char Dham Yatra to four temple towns in Uttarakhand each year before the onset of the monsoon rains. This year, the rains came early and are said to be the most severe in 80 years, triggering landslides and floods.

Chantal Elkin, GPN's India Project Manager, was in Rishikesh meeting new Indian members at the Parmarth Niketan ashram during the floods.



'There were thousands of pilgrims in Rishikesh and many thousands more stranded in the Himalayas visiting Uttarakhand's most precious pilgrimage sites. The River Ganges was swollen and wild and threatening to inundate the riverbanks. It consumed trees, debris and even the famous massive statue of Lord Shiva in front of Rishikesh's largest ashram, Parmarth Niketan

[shown in one photo as it normally is, and the other as it was in the flooding]. The rain was relentless and bridges and roads were being closed, as people, many of them wandering pilgrims or homeless sadhus, looked for shelter."

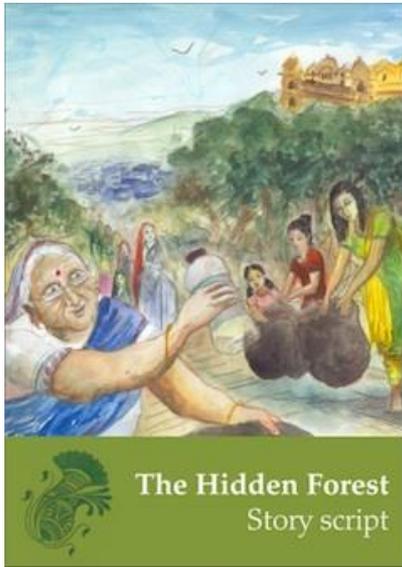


Swami Chidanand Saraswati, spiritual head of Parmarth Niketan, is coordinating a relief effort to provide supplies by lorry to people stranded in the mountains, and the ashram is being used as an emergency shelter.

Our thoughts are with the thousands of people who have been stranded, injured or bereaved. Last week Christian Aid launched [this emergency appeal](#).

A wonderful and funny script about Hindu girls and women on pilgrimage in India

You can see on our website [a wonderful new play](#) about women on pilgrimage in Braj called *Walking the Hidden Forest*, by young British Hindu writer Jahnvi Harrison. The script, which will soon be available in Hindi, highlights the role women in India can play to protect the environment. It is also very funny and lively. It is available to download as a pdf and would be particularly suitable for performance by secondary school children, with many great roles for girls. It's obviously completely free of copyright. [Take a look](#), even if you are not Hindu – it could be used in Europe and America as a play that explains Hindu principles to children in multi-ethnic schools, while not really feeling like a lesson. There's a storybook too, which will be launched later.



And other news from India...

We were delighted to share in the success of the [third Sikh Environment Day](#) in March this year when over 1,500 Sikh Gurdwaras, schools, businesses and communities participated through the huge energies of our partner [EcoSikh](#). The spiritual seats of authority in Sikhism officially adopted March 14 as Sikh Environment Day at a special meeting earlier that month. Read the full report [here](#). We look forward to having the Sikh holy city of Nanded join us at Trondheim as a new member.

The Maukib pilgrimage again, at last

Pilgrims in Kano, Nigeria were eventually able to hold their annual Maukib pilgrimage in March. The pilgrimage was delayed by sectarian violence which left 25 people dead. However, the pilgrimage itself passed off peacefully and the Qadiriyyah Movement was able to launch the 'Green Guide for Hajj' in Hausa. This was adapted and translated for use by Nigerian Hajj pilgrims as well as for pilgrims to the Maukib. "Green Vanguard" have been appointed to spread environmental awareness among those going on pilgrimage this year. One and a half million people from West Africa attend the Maukib to visit the tombs of the local Qadiriyyah saints.

In the next newsletter, we'll have news from Trondheim (and of course will be able to reveal the names and locations of the new members joining the GPN). We'll tell you about exciting initiatives in Kosovo, and we'll also be able to tell you about a new international Confucian Ecological Alliance in China, which is taking green pilgrimage to its heart ...

All best wishes,

Alison Hilliard, GPN Programme Manager, ARC

Victoria Finlay, Communications director, ARC

PS this is a completely manually managed newsletter. You're on it, we hope, because you are part of it, or because you asked to be included. If you'd like to be removed from the list, please let us know, and if you have friends and colleagues who'd like to be included, please ask us to add their email addresses.

PPS You can find out more details of the GPN [here](#).