



NJPN Comment

The value of trees

Barbara Butler



Trees are essential to life. They stabilise the soil, generate oxygen, store carbon, provide a home for wildlife, raw materials and shelter. In addition they provide food, timber, medicines and fertility for the soil, help the water cycle by holding rain on slopes and increase the water stored in the soil.

Trees cover roughly 30 per cent of the global land surface and the world's forests are home to more than 300 million people, including roughly 60 million indigenous people. More than 1.6 billion people depend directly on forests: 1.2 billion people in the developing world rely on agroforestry for their livelihoods. They shield food and other crops from wind and heat, while leguminous trees transfer nitrogen from the air into the soil.

Forests are also magical places, inspiring meditation, poetry and stories. They are wonderful places to walk and relax in.

Yan Martell went to the Andes in 2009. He joined a trek starting from depleted glaciers near Cuzco in Peru, walking past shrinking glaciers, cloud forests, lower forests, deforested areas and the Amazon River basin. He wrote about his wonder and enthusiasm for the variety of trees and wildlife he saw. He was told that one tree could be home to 100 different species of termites.

Deforestation is a very serious problem in today's world. In Ethiopia, for example, 45,000 people are being turned off their land and large areas of forest are being felled. However, reforestation is being tackled in many parts of the world. This will make a contribution to soil and water protection and to biodiversity.

The Kenya Greenbelt Movement was a pioneer in tree planting. It was started in 1977 by Wangari Maathai and the National Council of Women. It took the needs of communities into its work and encouraged the planting of nutritious food crops and the introduction of water harvesting schemes and training programmes. Today, in Kenya, people across the country see the need to plant trees and work hard to do so.

The UK Government recognises the value of trees in the fight against climate change. Many more woodlands must be planted if we are to reach the goal of net zero carbon emissions by 2050.

The government is committed to planting one million trees by 2022. We can all help.

Christians Aware has a collection of new summer cards which are made from a renewable forest source. Contact eliam.christians-aware@outlook.com

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