

Environment Report for 2024

Global Perspective

- 2024 will go down in history as the first year in which the [global average temperature](#) exceeded the 1.5C threshold established in the Paris Climate Agreement in 2015.
- The record temperatures were accompanied by [multiple extreme weather events](#) in every part of the world with millions suffering the impact of climate disasters/ breakdown:
 - **Europe** - In September firefighters in Portugal tackled 100 wildfires sparked by the hot and dry conditions. Storm Boris brought widespread flooding to central Europe. Catastrophic flooding in eastern Spain with a year's worth of rain in just eight hours with extensive damage in Valencia & more than 200 fatalities;
 - **North America** – a record-breaking hurricane season including Helene (Florida Coast) and Milton (Gulf of Mexico) brought much destruction;
 - **South America** - heavy rain brought severe flooding and mudslides to Rio Grande do Sul in southern Brazil. The country also endured its worst drought since records began, affecting almost 60% of the country;
 - **Asia** - A heatwave affected many parts of Asia in April and May. In India, red alert temperatures of 47C (116F) coincided with the general election. Typhoon Yagi combined with seasonal monsoon rains in September to trigger catastrophic floods and landslides as it ploughed a path across south-east Asia, leaving more than 500 people dead. But it was the Philippines that bore the brunt of typhoon activity in the Pacific in 2024. They included Tropical Storm Trami and Typhoon Kong-Rey, which brought deadly flooding and landslides to Luzon in late October;
 - **Africa** - a deadly heatwave took hold across west Africa and the Sahel region of the continent, which scientists said would have been "impossible" without human-induced climate change. Namibia declared a state of emergency in May as the country grappled with its worst drought in a century. Seasonal rains across Africa were displaced much further north bringing flooding to the Sahara for the first time in half a century.
- Nature really is sending us a warning!
- One might have expected all this would have led to global action to transition away from fossil fuels and reduce emissions. The opposite has happened – with Trump now back in the White House with his climate wrecking policies, along with climate sceptical Governments in Argentina, Italy, the rise of Reform in the UK and the far right in Germany & France.
- Emissions of GHG continue to rise although a cut of around 42% is needed by 2030 if there is to be any chance of keeping within the limits set by the Paris Agreement. This is in spite of record growth in renewable energy offset by increasing energy demands due to AI.

Two reports in the Autumn illustrated how far we are from addressing the climate and nature crises:

1. [Emissions Gap Report 2024](#) by the UN Environment Programme:
 - **Insufficient Climate Pledges:** Current climate pledges known as Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) are insufficient to meet the Paris Agreement targets. If fully implemented, they would only limit global warming to **2.6-2.8°C** by 2100.
 - **Need for Increased Ambition:** To limit warming to 1.5°C, global greenhouse gas emissions must be cut by **42% by 2030, 57% by 2035** compared to 2019 levels.
 - **Technological Potential:** There is significant potential for emissions reductions via investments in solar/ wind energy, forestry, building reforms, transport, and industry.

- **Role of G20 Nations:** The largest-emitting G20 countries must lead in cutting emissions.
 - **Rapid Action Required:** Nations must rapidly increase their climate pledges and implement them to avoid **catastrophic warming**. Every fraction of a degree matters in terms of lives saved, economies protected, and biodiversity conserved.
2. The [Living Planet Report 2024](#) highlights alarming findings about global wildlife populations:
- **73% Decline in Wildlife Populations:** Since 1970, there has been an average decline of 73% in global wildlife populations highlighting a severe loss of biodiversity and the impact of human activities on ecosystems.
 - **Critical Threats to Biodiversity:** Habitat loss, climate change, overexploitation, and pollution are the primary threats to biodiversity.
 - **Urgent Need for Action:** to prevent ecological tipping points and halt the decline in wildlife populations.
 - **Economic and Food Systems Transformation:** current economic and food systems need to be reformed.
 - **Approaching Tipping Points:** The Earth is approaching dangerous tipping points that pose grave threats to humanity and nature.
 - The report underscores the importance of meeting global goals on nature, climate, and sustainable development by 2030 to address these critical issues.

Unfortunately, two key international conferences held in the Autumn 2024: COP16 & COP29 made only limited progress in addressing these critical issues.

[Key outcomes from COP16](#), the Global Biodiversity Conference held in Cali, Colombia (Oct 21-31)

- **Indigenous Peoples** were recognized as key drivers in conserving nature.
- **The Cali Fund:** Countries agreed a new benefit-sharing mechanism for the use of digital sequence information, which involves contributions from pharmaceutical and biotech companies. This has potential to generate significant funds for nature restoration.
- **Slow Progress on Global Targets:** Only 44 of 192 countries submitted official plans on how they will achieve biodiversity targets set at [COP15 of protecting 30% of land/seas by 2030](#).
- **Implementation Challenges:**
 1. A lack of agreement on finance to support implementation of biodiversity plans.
 2. A framework for monitoring progress on tackling biodiversity loss was not agreed.
- Overall, some progress, but much to do restore nature and achieve biodiversity targets.
- UK still to issue its biodiversity plan indicating how it will reach the 30% target by 2030.
- One positive action announced at COP16 is the [purchase of the Rothbury Estate](#) by the Wildlife Trusts – this will become a major nature restoration project in the UK.
- **Currently only around 7% of land in the UK is classed as nature positive!**

[Key outcomes from COP29](#), The UN Climate Conference held in Baku (Nov 2024)

- Developed nations agreed to channel \$300 billion annually by 2035 to support climate efforts in developing countries. However, many developing nations and climate experts argue this amount is insufficient, with estimates suggesting a min \$1 trillion is needed annually.
- There was an extension of programs focused on gender and climate change, as well as support for the least developed countries to carry out national adaptation plans.
- Countries failed to agree on how to progress the outcomes of last year's global stocktake, including emission reduction pledges.
- Much more ambitious actions are needed to address the urgent climate crisis.

- The COP process itself attracted much criticism and attempts may be made to streamline the process, reduce lobbyists and prevent blocking by countries opposed to meaningful action.
- **UK issued a revised climate plan (NDC)** – [committing to an 81% reduction](#) in emissions by 2035 (from 1990 levels) which stands out against the rest.

Hopes for significant progress now rest with [COP30](#) in Belem, Brazil in November 2025 which will focus on new finance, climate plans, nature restoration (inc. the Amazon) and food systems.

Progress within the Diocese

- **Bishop Stephen** launched a number of initiatives including the Diocesan Vision at Pentecost (Commitment 4 specifically refers to caring for our Common Home & Social Justice), the Pastoral Letter for the Season of Creation, the Pastoral Letter for Advent focusing on Hope and The Year of Jubilee;
- **Energy Consumption & IFM** – we continued to analyse Parish energy data (for 2023) and estimate the Diocesan energy consumption and carbon footprint. This included for the first time St Mary's Cathedral. We will continue to monitor energy consumption in future years as well as developing a de-carbonization programme to reach net zero in the not-too-distant future (2035?). There has been a welcome, significant uptake in Parishes signing up to the IFM renewable energy contract managed via Church Marketplace.
- **Pilot Building Projects** – Zeco Energy consultants engaged to scope 9 projects around the Diocese linked to energy efficiency and carbon reduction. This includes St Mary's Cathedral and I hope to see solar panels installed there soon (already installed at [York Minister!](#));
- **Laudato Si' Week May 2024** – a celebration Mass held at St Mary's Cathedral led by Fr Chris Hughes was well attended. Laudato Si' week was also celebrated in many Schools/ Parishes.
- **Screenings of the film "The Letter"** based on LS took place in a number of Schools/ Parishes;
- Many Schools and some Parishes have now signed up to [CAFOD's Live Simply Award](#);
- **Carbon Literacy Training** – 10 people from across the Diocese received Carbon Literacy Training delivered by the [Centre for Alternative Technology](#) (CAT). The training involves raising awareness of the climate crisis and delivering carbon reduction projects;
- **St Benet Biscop Partnership** held a conference "Caring for our Common Home" in September. We examined the scientific and theological grounds for taking action to care for the environment and invited people across the Partnership to make pledges to live more sustainably which were offered during a special celebration Mass at St Wilfrid's, Blyth;
- **Esh Green Team** – continued their excellent work to restore their 3 Parish Grounds for the benefit of nature and people. Their work was recognised by Durham Council with an award for community environmental action. They also attracted a grant extension which has enabled the group to continue to receive support from Durham Wildlife Trust;
- **Season of Creation (SoC)** – the theme for 2024 SoC was To Hope and Act with Creation. SoC was marked by events, actions and prayers in our Schools and Parishes including with Churches Together Groups;
- **Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty (FFNPT)** – Bishop Stephen has been approached with a request for the Diocese to endorse the [Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty](#);
- **Climate & Nature Bill (CAN)** – we ran a campaign with the J&P network to ask people to engage with their MP around the CAN. The Bill had its second reading on Jan 24 2025 & was adjourned until the 11th July after the Government indicated it would consider legislating for some of the proposals. Campaign to be continued.

Looking Ahead to 2025

- Vision - “A world free of poverty on a liveable planet.”
- Pilgrims of Hope – during this [Year of Jubilee](#) we are all called to act and be Pilgrims of Hope? Can we engage with our MPs around climate action and debt cancellation?
- The Diocesan Environment Group are holding a Webinar on Zoom – March 8th 11am-12.30pm “Seeds of Hope”. Please email me for the Zoom link if you would like to attend.
- 10-year anniversary of Laudato Si’ – Mass at the Cathedral will be celebrated by Bishop Stephen at 10am on May 24th. Everyone is invited.
- Decarbonization Projects – to come to fruition.
- More Parishes and Schools to register for the Live Simply Award;
- More Parishes to switch to IFM, the renewable energy contract with [Engie](#);
- Potential project at the Youth Village to establish a Laudato Si’ Centre;
- Season of Creation Event to be held at the Youth Village in September.

Final Word

- I invite everyone reading this report to assess their own carbon footprint and identify some steps to reduce it (think energy, diet, consumption, travel).
- Visit [Climate Stewards](#) or [WWF footprint calculators](#) for more information.
- Make your garden nature friendly and support [Northumberland](#) or [Durham Wildlife Trusts](#).
- Engage with your MP – they need to hear from you.
- Let’s make 2025 a year of real action – for people and planet.
- Thanks for reading – especially if you made it to the end. Comments always welcome.

Chris Myers (email: chrisj.myers57@gmail.com)

