



A PROGRAMME BEING DEVELOPED BY RGBI ESRAG

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Welcome to ESRAG's 'Heart 4Trees' programme. This is not a single project, but rather a cluster of many projects with the unifying theme of trees. Some projects are small with work being done by a few individuals; others are large with hundreds of participants from more than one country. Some projects aim to bring beauty and greater biodiversity to a small corner of the community, while others are more concerned with improving environmental conditions on small-scale farms in order to alleviate global poverty and hunger. All project partners are aware of the multiple benefits of trees, and most view trees as having a critical role to play in the climate change crisis which humanity must now face. Many have responded to climate change and other environmental problems, such as desertification, flooding, soil erosion, loss of biodiversity etc by tree-planting, but other projects have emphasised the value of forest restoration and rewilding. Here there are a host of different projects but they all see great value in trees, more trees for a better future.

Perhaps, before looking at specific tree projects it is worth considering the general benefits of trees and the reasons given by rotarians for engaging in tree activities. One common club activity is to beautify a part of the local community [e.g. school grounds, sportsfields, a local park or nature reserve] by tree-planting, sometimes accompanied by attractive flowers & shrubs. Many rotarians see this type of project as an excellent opportunity to connect with the local community, particularly young people, while enjoying the physical exertions of tree-planting. Particularly where such planting is done on low-quality farmland or in a local nature reserve, there may be more emphasis on maintaining local biodiversity and preserving small fragments of old woodland.



Local tree-planting events are an excellent way for Rotary to connect with the local community. Here *[see top left]* Kirkcudbright Rotary Club have organised the planting of 75 trees, supplied by the Border Forest Trust.

The success of such projects can depend upon finding sufficient volunteers, but a more frequently mentioned problem is finding a suitable space where young trees are secure from damage. The supply of young saplings is not usually the main difficulty, as the Woodland Trust *[details found at <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk>]* will supply free bundles of saplings, provided they are planted on land accessible to the public.

Local tree-planting is an opportunity for rotarians to engage with younger generations. Some of our youth groups *[e.g. Scouts, school eco-clubs]* include tree-planting as one of their activities. Here *[see left below]* local school children assist during a Harrogate Rotary tree-planting day.

For a Rotary club entirely new to environmental activities, such projects are probably the easiest to organise. Ask the ESRAG team for further details and advice about such projects.



The above local schemes are often single day events, organised through a single Rotary club, with 500 saplings or less being planted. However, some tree-planting schemes are much larger than this with thousands of trees planted over a period of at least several years. Within England an outstanding example of this would be Harrogate Rotary's project to plant 25,000 trees in Nidderdale. By early 2021 about 20,000 trees had been planted, so the club still needs funding & volunteers to help plant a further 5,000 trees in this Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty next to the Yorkshire Dales National Park. If you or your Rotary club would like to support this project in any way, please contact sgginfo16@gmail.com.

In Scotland there are a series of major initiatives managed by non-Rotary NGOs who appeal to the general public for volunteering as well as funding support. Here are some excellent opportunities for Rotary clubs and individual rotarians wishing to engage in environmental action. One example of this is the Borders Forest Trust *[<https://bordersforesttrust.org>]*, who provide saplings & grants to groups such as Kirkcudbright Rotary to promote the planting of broad-leaved woodland in Southern Scotland. They are major stakeholders in the Carrifran Wildwood project *[<https://www.carrifran.org.uk>]*, where 453,000 trees have been planted on a 740 hectare site over a period of 20 years. For those who have tramped the desolate moors of Northern Britain Carrifran can be both a revelation and inspiration. Read about the Rotten Bottom Bow section of the Carrifran website, which will establish that many areas of what are now treeless moors were once extensive forests.

Within the Scottish Highlands there are other major schemes with plans to restore the former forest cover. By 1950 only 1% of the original Caledonian Forest survived in fragmented patches but for the last 30 years the charity Trees for Life [for details see <https://treesforlife.org.uk>] has done pioneering forest restoration & rewilding work, particularly in Glen Affric and Glen Morriston. Here policy is concerned not just with tree-planting and forest growth, but also with biodiversity, preserving the habitat for threatened species [e.g. the capercaillie]. Another important NGO for this region is the John Muir Trust [see <https://johnmuirtrust.org>], who are active in management of some of the UK's wildest places [e.g. Knoydart, the Cuillins, but also Glenridding Common in the Lake District]. Their focus is on rewilding and management of wilderness rather than simple tree-planting

These large-scale schemes are too distant for many RGBI rotarians to get involved, but it is good to know that such tree & biodiversity schemes are changing our northern landscapes and that even an occasional holiday visit is significant support. Perhaps the relevance for most rotarians is that these northern environmental projects can inspire us to take smaller actions in our own communities and even back gardens. Every town in the British Isles has room for a Miyawaki micro-forest [see details at <https://urban-forests.com>].

There is yet another set of reasons related to tree-planting and forest restoration within Rotary projects. With Rotary's great tradition of humanitarian service, many clubs are engaged in overseas projects – with Africa South of the Sahara being the location favoured for many such RGBI projects. Within such locations trees can be very valuable, not just as protection against soil erosion, excessive drying of the soil, flooding and intense sun [all environmental benefits] but also as a source of additional farm income, better nutrition, readily available medicine, improved pest control, soil fertility improvement etc. In fact, the establishment of agroforestry, the planting of trees within cultivated fields, is one of the most effective strategies for increasing production on African small-scale farms and alleviation of poverty & hunger. It is not surprising, therefore, that in 2017 when RI President Ian Riseley asked every rotarian to plant a tree 44 Rotary clubs opted to invest in the SGG-Rotary tree-planting project which recorded the planting of 41,475 trees in East Africa [for details see www.sustainableglobalgardens.org.uk/projects]. Currently the UK-based development charity Sustainable Global Gardens is implementing a similar project, with a planting target of 100,000 trees, and with details given in the 'examples' section.

Another approach to African tree-planting has been taken by Rotary clubs who have a well-established overseas programme with a focus on 'humanitarian benefit' but who include tree-planting as one component in the overall programme. An example of this would be the rotarian-led 'UK to UK' group bringing community development to Ukerewe island in Tanzania but who reported the planting of 1,100 seedlings earlier this year. Similarly a Rotary project in Mubende, Uganda is a community development project but it includes the establishment of two tree nurseries with an anticipated output of 4,000 seedlings.

For much of the last decade tree projects in the British Isles were based largely on environmental improvements, whereas tropical planting was more focussed on humanitarian, poverty & hunger alleviation. In the last two years another reason for tree-planting has emerged within the Rotary family. That reason is tree-planting for carbon capture.



Here are two photos of Kibo summit on Kilimanjaro, Tanzania. The photo on the left was taken in April 1973 and shows glacial ice covering most of the upper cone. The photo on the right was taken in 2012 and shows the same upper slopes beyond the trees in the foreground. By 2012 the two glaciers flowing from the summit has almost entirely disappeared, and it was estimated that more than 90% of the ice originally surveyed 100 years earlier had melted. It is now anticipated that Kilimanjaro's iconic cap of ice will have vanished by 2030 because of a combination of global warming & regional drying. There are now concerted efforts to maintain atmospheric moisture in this area by reforestation, and all the Rotary clubs around Kilimanjaro have regular tree-planting projects in the hope of limiting disastrous climate change.

There are several issues concerning trees, carbon capture and climate mitigation. For example, what are the best species to plant? This depends very much on site conditions, but there is general agreement that single species 'monocultural' plantations of exotic species [eg. spruce] are not such good carbon sinks as mature broad-leaved woods of native species. This matter is complicated by the fact that exotic conifers usually grow much faster than our native species. Furthermore, in northern locations deep peat can store more carbon than trees growing on such peat. A consequence of this is that some recent schemes [eg. the Langholm Initiative, for details see <https://langholminitiative.org.uk>] include peatland restoration as well as tree-planting and natural regeneration of native woodland in their programme.

Perhaps the most important aspect to remember about tree-planting for carbon capture is that, even if tree-planting is the cheapest and most effective method of removing carbon from the atmosphere, such efforts will be in vain if humanity continues to emit unsustainable quantities of greenhouse gases. Our first actions in face of climate change should be to reduce our individual and collective carbon footprint. Nevertheless, we invite all rotarians to continue to plant trees and let the ESRAG team know of your work as we prepare for the COP26 summit in Glasgow this November.

Paul Keeley

ESRAG RGBI CHAPTER

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