

Panel session at the World Conservation Congress 2025 in Abu Dhabi



Daily updates from the Congress



In today's world, protecting nature can sometimes feel like an uphill battle. Yet, as a community shaped by hope and faith, we are committed to pressing on. Attending the IUCN Congress is both a chance to **contribute our perspective** and to be **inspired by others**, renewing our commitment to A Rocha's mission and vision.

Daily updates from our Conservation Practice Lead, Nicholas Warren, who is attending this event, will be posted here and on A Rocha International's Instagram stories.

+ 09 October 2025

+ 10 October 2025

— 11 October 2025

Day 3 – The Missing piece in conservation? Engaging world faiths & worldviews at the grassroots



Organising an event always comes with a flutter of nerves. You can have the best plan in place, but until it unfolds on the day, there's always that quiet question: will it all come together? Today, I can honestly say—it did. Our speakers brought great depth and breadth of knowledge, and I would like to begin by introducing and thanking them. A heartfelt thank you to an excellent panel: Bas Verschuuren (Wageningen University and Co-Chair of the IUCN Specialist Group on Cultural and Spiritual Values of Protected Areas), Chantal Elkin (Head of WWF's Beliefs & Values Programme), Dr. Dave Bookless

(Head of Theology at A Rocha International), Lutfi Radwan (Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences – IFEES), Marc Foggin (founder of Plateau Perspectives, working on community-based stewardship and Indigenous worldviews in Central Asia), and Alison Ormsby (researcher on sacred natural sites in Africa and India). And a special thank you to Judith Ochieng from A Rocha Kenya for hosting the event so gracefully.

The discussion unfolded in four parts: Why Faiths & Worldviews Matter, Stories from Practice, Challenges & Opportunities, and Looking Ahead. It opened with reflections on how engaging faiths and worldviews at the local level is essential, as these shape the values of more than three-quarters of the world's population and remain an underused force in protecting nature. Faith influences what people love and, ultimately, what they protect. It was noted that many conservation organisations work in deeply religious contexts and that ignoring faith perspectives would be a missed opportunity, given the significant conservation successes already achieved through partnerships with faith leaders.

The conversation also touched on how faith can offer a counterpoint to market forces driven by greed, reminding us of the importance of respect for life. Examples from the field illustrated this vividly: Tibetan nomads who see the land as part of their identity and wildlife as precious, Muslims fishers along the east African coast, Christian communities in the UK and India whose faith-inspired initiatives have led to large-scale conservation action. Together, these stories revealed that the deepest conservation work happens when ecological knowledge is joined with moral and spiritual understanding.

There was also an acknowledgment that many major faiths have been slow to engage with environmental issues, but the historic divide between science and spirituality is beginning to erode. Speakers emphasised that people—and the worldviews that guide them—are central to effective conservation. The session closed with a shared call for a new kind of collaboration, one that treats faith communities as equal partners and recognises that caring for nature is both a scientific and a moral responsibility. The discussion left participants with a sense of openness and invitation: a call to unite with those doing good work and to extend the table of conservation to include every worldview committed to the flourishing of our shared planet.

The audience feedback was overwhelmingly positive:

“Thank you all for this session! It was truly very informative and, on occasion, eye-opening.”

“Thank you very much for this enriching dialogue!”

“I hope to get hold of the recording soon and share it on our platform — this is a conversation that deserves to continue.”

Source: <https://arocha.org/en/the-iucn-world-conservation-congress/>

Accessed 23 November 2025