As a practical manifestation of this very real commitment, in October 2011 the Coptic Orthodox Church, through the model of the ancient Monastery of Saint Pishoy, became a founder member of the new global network of Green Pilgrim Sites and pilgrimage routes formed by the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC), a United Kingdom-based international organisation founded by His Royal Highness The Duke of Edinburgh in 1995.

For more information
www.CopticCentre.com
Since its establishment in the first Century, the Coptic Orthodox Church has existed in Egypt and has as one of its principal pillars a movement and way of life that commenced in her deserts and wildernesses and, from there, spread to the whole world. This phenomenon is, of course, the monastic movement that started in the deserts of Egypt in the third Century and still thrives across the country until today.

Being central to the lives of many Christians in Egypt and abroad, the monasteries are frequently by pilgrims throughout the year, who reach their thousands on special feast days in the Coptic Calendar. The monasteries have always been essential for spiritual retreat, and in the current climate, have become a visitors’ haven of reflection, contemplation and refuge in the midst of a bustling society embattled by historic political reform and the accompanying security and economic pressures.

It is here, nestled in the wilderness of the Natroun valley, that the desert fathers have enjoyed and experienced the preciousness of God’s creation, and through their example, the monastery spreads the spirit of sustainability to the thousands who visit her annually from around Egypt and the world.

The monastery is a model and a beacon through its programme of self-sufficiency and environmental sustainability, a living and working example for similar desert communities all over the world to follow. It is one of the principal monasteries of Wadi-El-Natroun and has five Churches within its boundaries.

Saint Pishoy, the founder of the monastery in the fourth Century, was an energetic worker who ate from the work of his own hands. He once said to his disciples ‘I did not eat food provided by any person; ...my children, work with your hands to sustain yourselves and to make enough to give to charity as well.’

As a former hermit, His Holiness Pope Shenouda III, Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the See of Saint Mark, has devoted great effort to rebuilding the ancient monasteries in the Egyptian deserts, especially Saint Pishoy in which His Holiness retreats to his papal residence on a regular weekly basis.

Under the care, guidance and leadership of HG Bishop Sarabamoun the Abbott of the monastery, there has been an increase in the number of monks from twelve in 1960 to over two hundred and sixty today.

In recent years, four hundred acres of desert land have been acquired for the monastery by His Grace, who has worked energetically to oversee a programme of reclamation and cultivation, evidenced in the planting of thousands of trees in the once-arid desert.

Every monk’s personal effort, stewardship and responsibility is important, but the relationship of the monastic community with its natural environment is predominantly about their love for God and their appreciation of His gifts to the world.

The monastery has a full working programme of sustainability, both in its way of life and its practices, including:

- Solar energy produced through the use of solar panels, gaining a large proportion of its daily energy needs by this clean method and harnessing the ever-present desert sun.
- As part of her wider efforts, the monks have reclaimed hundreds of acres of desert wilderness over the years for planting trees that act as wind breakers and stop soil erosion.
- Self sufficiency in water requirements using both salt-water irrigation wells and sweet-water drinking wells.
- The cultivation of acres of land that have been reclaimed and are now organically farmed leading to a high level of self sufficiency for feeding the monks and labourers, and the monastery’s many thousands of visitors.
- Organic fish farming.
- A continuous process of refuse sorting and recycling.