



REWILDING BRITAIN

Vision for the mass restoration of ecosystems in Britain, on land and at sea

A Vision For Rewilding

Imagine a Britain where you can find yourself in wild places once more.

Imagine walking through a rich mosaic of forest, glade and wild pasture that is allowed to shift and change. Imagine knowing that, somewhere in the shade, lynx might be stalking, or beavers might be felling a tree. Imagine snorkelling over a seabed untouched by trawlers, watching great lobsters trundle across reefs of oysters and coldwater corals, and shoals of giant cod cruising past.

We know nature can do this - here in Britain - if we give it a chance.

We plan to create a positive environmental movement that excites and inspires people and gives nature a chance to regenerate and recover. Rewilding - the large-scale restoration of ecosystems - is an idea whose time has come.

We want natural ecological processes and key species to return to at least one million hectares (4.5%) of Britain's land¹ and 30% of our territorial waters over the next 100 years. We want at least one large rewilded area to connect both land and sea - descending from the mountaintops to our coastal waters.

We want to reignite people's passion for the natural world, and allow local communities to thrive by providing new sources of income and employment that work both economically and ecologically.

We envisage large core areas of land regenerating to become a mix of closed and open forest where beavers, boar and lynx are allowed to return. Pine martens, red squirrels, wildcat, capercaillie, cranes, goshawks

and eagles will be able to spread once more. And, in time, we could even see moose and wolves in the remotest places.

Wide buffer zones around the rivers will help to stop floods and connect wildlife habitats to our cities. A reconnected, wildlife-permeable landscape will allow animals to move freely and migrate.

Large marine reserves will permit wild creatures to breed and proliferate without disturbance. As ecosystems recover, humpback whales could migrate once more up the Irish Sea. Bluefin tuna, sperm whales and fin whales could once again harry the herring of the North Sea.



¹ To put this in perspective in England alone there are already 380,000 ha of golf courses (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-24378868>)

Why Rewilding In Britain?

Britain's land is almost all managed. Even in most conservation areas, natural processes are arrested. We have lost more of our large mammals than almost any other European country. While the average forest cover in the rest of Europe is 37%, the UK has only 12%.

Our national parks are dominated by sheep farms and grouse or deer estates, leaving almost all our hills bare. Over 99% of our seabed is scoured or ploughed by commercial fishing. There are no large areas of land or sea in which nature is allowed to find its own way. In this respect Britain is highly unusual: unlike almost any other country, there is nowhere, beyond tiny patches, in which we may escape obvious human impacts.

We recognise the contribution conservation has made in preventing the complete destruction of living systems in this country. We are also aware that the dominant form of conservation here - active management to favour a particular (often arbitrary) collection of species - tends to protect a narrow range of living creatures and habitats. It is also likely to have low resilience to climate change.

We recognise, too, the role farming plays in feeding us and sustaining culture, tradition and language. However, by removing almost all trees from the uplands, even in places of very low value for agriculture, it has contributed to flooding, soil erosion and a great loss of wildlife. In the lowlands these problems are worsened by ploughing and grazing right up to the riverbanks.

The primary purposes of rewilding are to restore in parts of the British Isles the wonder and enchantment of wild nature; to allow magnificent lost creatures to live here once more; and to provide people with some of the rich and raw experiences of which we have been deprived.

Rewilding also offers more tangible benefits. The restoration of trees and other deep vegetation to the hills holds back the rain that falls on them. This slows down the flow of water to the lowlands, flattening out the cycle of flood and drought that currently afflicts us. It helps to keep the soil on the land and carbon in the soil. Wide buffer zones around the rivers also hold back the floodwaters that might otherwise swamp communities downstream, and filter out much of the fertiliser and other contaminants which now enter the water.

The resurgent wildlife that rewilding will bring, both on land and at sea, has a great potential to attract people and to generate a fair living from the wild. In all the areas of major interest to us - on land and at sea - traditional forms of employment are sparse and often in steep decline. Communities are losing their economic base. Schools, shops, churches and pubs are closing.

By stimulating a vibrant eco-tourism sector we hope to help reverse this loss, bringing income and opportunities that will help young people stay in their communities to raise their families and sustain the area's vitality. In Scotland alone over 1 million trips are made for the primary purpose of viewing wildlife, and nature-based tourism is estimated to be worth £1.4 billion, with 39,000 associated jobs².

We don't want to rewild everywhere. We do want to see a break from the monotonous uses of land and sea that have caused so much damage and loss - to people as well as nature.

We are sympathetic towards the anxieties some people may feel about rewilding and the need to resolve them. We will work with local communities and a wide range of interest groups to develop and deliver a shared vision.

² Deinet et al. 2013



Building Rewilding Partnerships

Wild nature is returning across much of Europe and in a few parts of the British Isles. Visionary projects such as Trees for Life, Wild Ennerdale, Alladale, Carrifran Wildwood and the work on the Knepp Estate provide a glimpse of how rewilded landscapes could look and have inspired further work elsewhere. Large conservation organisations such as the National Trust, the RSPB, the Forestry Commission, the Wildlife Trusts and Natural England have begun to move towards rewilding on some of their land.

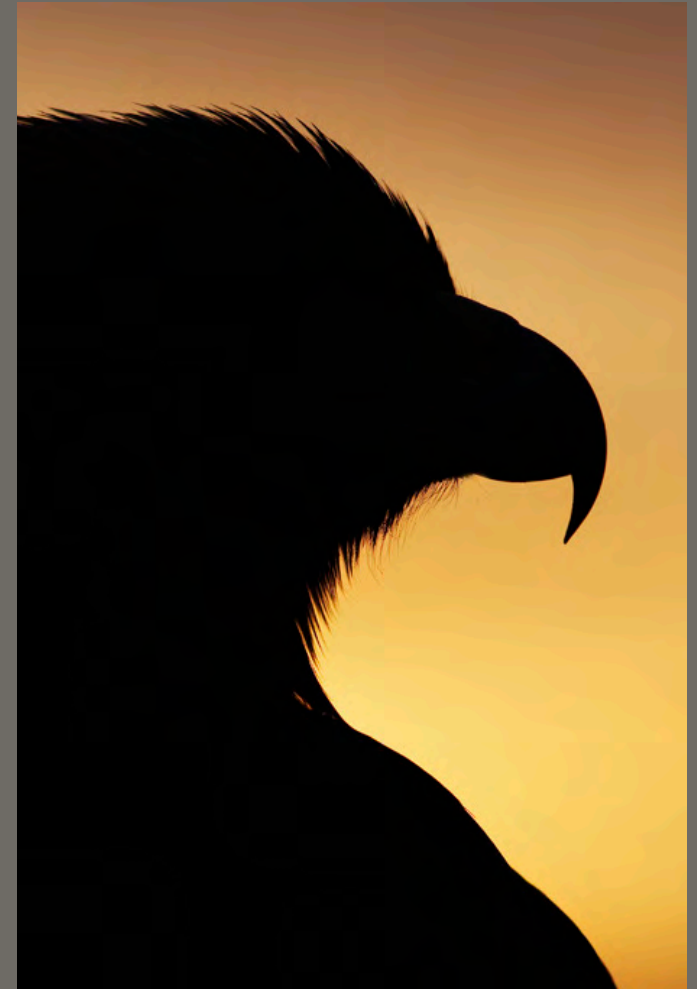
All these projects represent a significant step in a wilder direction. However, their efforts are generally disjointed, isolated and fairly small in scale. There are no areas yet that are large enough to sustain robust living systems or viable populations of large carnivores (essential for functioning food webs). At sea, we have protected only 0.01% of our territorial waters from commercial fishing and other destructive activities: 5 square kilometres out of the 48,000.

To learn from these experiences, build relationships and test our initial strategy we consulted a wide range of people and organisations. In essence their response was:

"We are at a new moment in history when people are realising that what we are doing is not working - we have been making do with the least functional way of doing things."

"The time is right for this. Be bold; be independent; say the things we can't say, push the debate and us further; make the case politically and nationally for rewilding; act as an informed funder and tackle the barriers that hold us back."

Building on this response, a new charitable organisation - Rewilding Britain - will harness existing energy and expertise and build wider public support for the large-scale restoration of ecosystems in Britain. A broad range of organisations, land owners and specialists have already engaged in Rewilding Britain and have indicated a desire to work with us to deliver a common vision and strategy.





A Strategy For Rewilding In Britain

Our vision for rewilding is a long-term one. It's vital that we are ambitious on a large scale and across many decades if we are to make a real difference. It is also important that we focus our practical efforts on what we can achieve in the short and medium term to raise the profile of rewilding and capture people's imagination.

Within our long-term vision, by 2030 Rewilding Britain's Goal is:

300,000 hectares of core land areas and three marine areas established where nature is starting to take care of itself and key species are starting to be re-established. These areas will be: i) ecologically connected into a more wildlife-permeable landscape; ii) supported by an engaged, enthused and educated public.

In support of this primary goal, two clear objectives have emerged which create a coherent and mutually-reinforcing framework for change. These objectives are:

Objective 1: Rewilding Landscapes - catalysing ecosystem restoration in practice

Objective 2: Engaging People - educating people and growing public support

In support of these objectives we will also work towards changes to agricultural policies and conservation designations which support rewilding.



Objective 1: Rewilding Landscapes

By 2020: Three core areas identified and local partnerships established with collectively-developed and locally-appropriate rewilding proposals. In addition a network of at least 30 smaller, more local projects is identified closer to population centres which create a more connected, wildlife-permeable landscape.

Rewilding Britain supports rewilding along the entire “wildness scale” from city centres, via rural areas to some of the wildest areas of the country, including land, freshwater and sea. Our primary focus will be to facilitate a process of establishing core areas of land and sea which have sufficient scale (either large contiguous areas or smaller areas linked with corridors) to support fully-functioning ecosystems.

We will also encourage a network of smaller-scale initiatives throughout urban and rural Britain which increase wildlife permeability and bring the experience of wildness within people’s reach. To achieve this we will focus on inspiring a common vision at a national and local level and help develop and build strong community ownership. Over the next two years we will:

Action 1: *Bring together stakeholders to develop a common vision and facilitate joined-up thinking at a national and landscape scale*

Action 2: *Together with a wide range of engaged organisations, map the potential and research the opportunities for rewilding in Britain*

Action 3: *Support innovative approaches to smaller scale rewilding*

Action 4: *Facilitate Local Rewilding Partnerships which can design and deliver change in core areas drawing on community engagement and participation practices widely used in other countries*



Objective 2: Engaging People

By 2020: Increase the constituency of people who are aware and supportive of rewilding and are actively engaged in rewilding activities, such as campaigns and volunteering.

Public support for rewilding, both in principle and in practice, will be critical to its success. The interest in rewilding seems to be growing in Britain. However, public concern for the environment is at a 20-year low³ and many now believe that if 'we want people to care about the natural world and act to protect it we must promote the values that motivate them to do so'⁴. We want to emphasise the inherent joy and value of wildness.

Most people feel that a 'normal' or 'natural' ecological state is that of their childhood or the recent past. One of the difficulties of rewilding is that it is hard to visualise. We will use creative approaches to show what rewilding could look like in Britain. We will effectively communicate and educate about its advantages: how nature, people, community and local economies can all mutually benefit. We will show that there is a strong business case for the benefits of wild nature. We will also listen and respond to people's fears and objections. There are already a number of initiatives focused on encouraging people's understanding of and engagement in wild nature. Rewilding Britain will work with those initiatives to communicate a vision for rewilding. Over the next 2 years we will:

Action 1: *Develop a creative digital communication strategy and website*

Action 2: *Research key messages and understand current opinion*

Action 3: *Develop and implement a public engagement strategy*

Action 4: *Increase positive coverage of rewilding and its benefits in the media*



³ Globescan (2013). Environmental Concern 2013.

⁴ Common Cause for Nature: A Practical Guide to values and frames in conservation.

Working Towards Supportive Policies

We will also facilitate rewilding through influencing the public debate and proposing changes to policies and legislation which support the restoration of ecosystems.

Currently the incentives and rules we have for land management in Britain seem to conspire against nature, even those designed to protect it. Farm subsidies through the Common Agricultural Policy create a powerful incentive to prevent ecological restoration: wherever land ceases to be in 'agricultural condition' it is disqualified from payments. Conservation designations often insist that ecosystems are kept in a state of arrested development through low-intensity farming, and attempts to allow trees or missing animal species to return are usually deemed unlawful. Regulations around wild animals, livestock movement and species reintroduction can also be major impediments.

We will identify where changes in policy or law would support rewilding and help create those changes. We recognise this is a long-term process that is beyond the ability of one organisation to deliver in isolation. We therefore aim to influence the debate from a rewilding perspective and work with coalitions of interested groups to lobby for change.



Rewilding Britain: A New Organisation To Promote Rewilding

To deliver the change needed, a new charitable organisation - Rewilding Britain - will be established to champion rewilding across Britain. Rewilding Britain believes that inspiring practical change on the scale proposed can happen only through an inclusive and collaborative approach. Working together, the rewilding message is louder, clearer and more effective.

Rewilding Britain will provide a platform to convene and inform increasingly broad and diverse communities of interest from land owners, businesses and local communities as well as NGOs and government agencies.

The values that Rewilding Britain will deliver are to be:

- **Collaborative:** to bring together diverse rewilding interest groups to facilitate a shared vision and a collective response
- **Visionary:** to articulate a vision for rewilding that raises its profile and inspires people
- **Pioneering:** to provide thought leadership as the only national organisation calling for the rewilding of large core areas of land and sea
- **Independent:** to raise challenging issues, question vested interests and to speak uncomfortable truths where necessary
- **Collective:** to work with existing organisations to draw on their diverse skills and experiences and develop in-house capacities only where skills gaps exist
- **Participatory:** to encourage local communities, schools and groups to engage in designing rewilding initiatives

During the first two years we will focus on establishing Rewilding Britain as a charitable organisation, with a high-quality board of trustees, a director and support staff. We will draw on wide-ranging advice and expertise through an Advisory Group. Together they will coordinate the implementation of the rewilding strategy and develop a longer-term business plan.

People Behind This Initiative

The following people have been involved in early meetings of this initiative (primarily in a personal capacity):

George Monbiot (environmentalist, journalist and campaigner)
Ben Goldsmith (green investment, fundraising)
Jonathan Spencer (Forestry Commission)
Ellie Robinson (National Trust)
Craig Bennett (Friends of the Earth)
David Hetherington (Cairngorms National Park, Trees for Life)
Zac Goldsmith (MP)
Mike Townsend (Woodland Trust)
Tony King (The Aspinall Foundation)
Gerardo Fragoso and Lisbet Rausing (Arcadia)
Tamsin Cooper (Green Alliance)
Miles King (independent)
Toby Aykroyd (Wild Europe)
Frans Schepers (Rewilding Europe)

Jo Roberts (Wilderness Foundation UK)
Simon Ayres (Cambrian Wildwood)
Chris Sandom (Wild Business)
Sarah Robinson (Royal Zoological Society of Scotland)
Stuart Brooks and Sheila Wren (John Muir Trust)
Steve Carver, Mark Fisher and Alison Parfitt (Wildland Research Institute)
Guillaume Chapron (Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences)
Charlie Burrell (The Knepp Estate)
Jon Cracknell (The Ecology Trust)
Ritchie Tassell (independent)
Peter Cairns (independent)
Hannah Scrase (independent)
Rebecca Wrigley (independent)

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