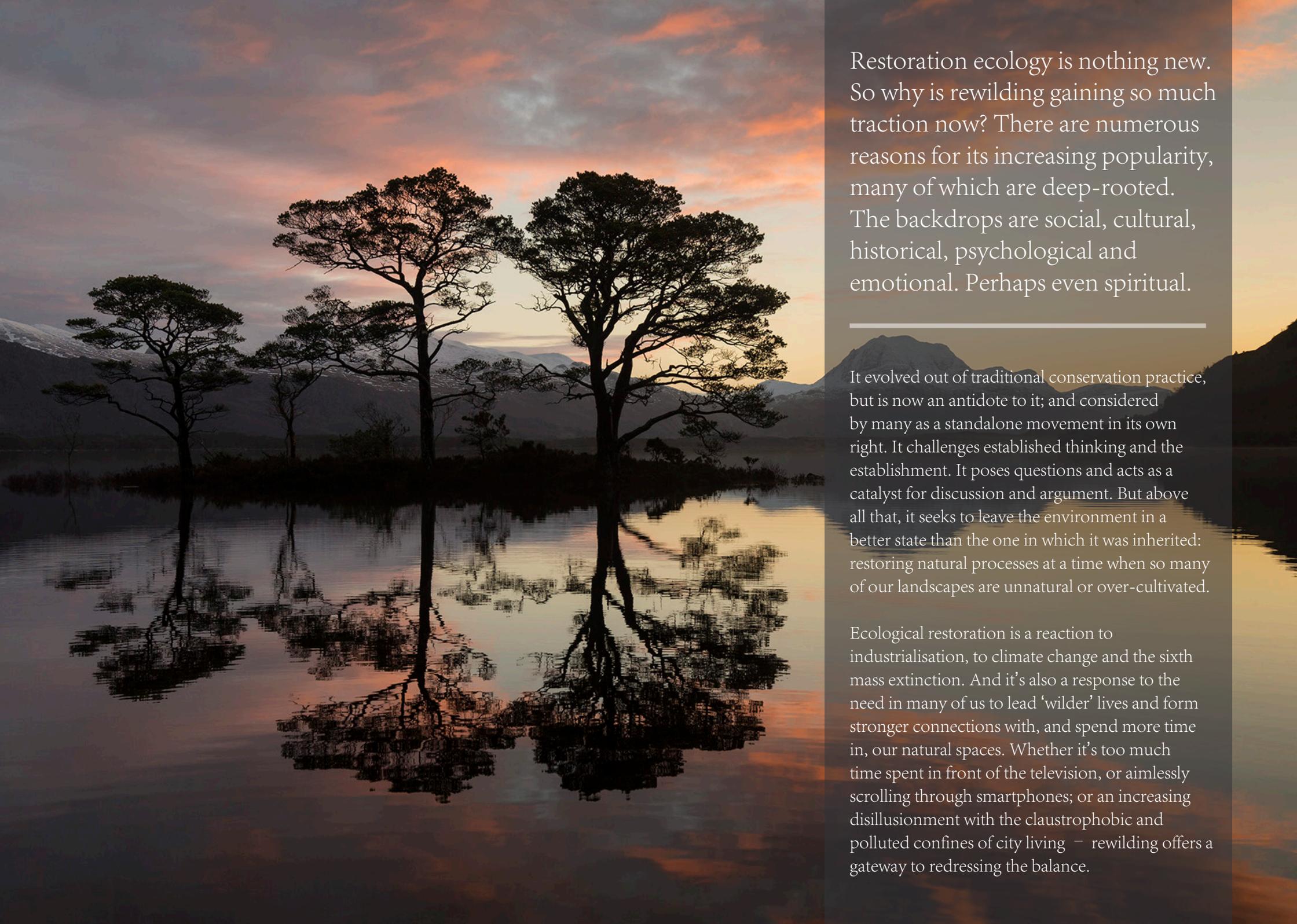


A silhouette of a hiker with a backpack and a walking stick stands on a rocky mountain peak. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright glow behind the hiker and casting long shadows. The sky is filled with soft, wispy clouds, transitioning from a pale blue at the top to a warm orange and yellow near the horizon. The overall mood is serene and adventurous.

REWILDING WHY NOW?

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Restoration ecology is nothing new. So why is rewilding gaining so much traction now? There are numerous reasons for its increasing popularity, many of which are deep-rooted. The backdrops are social, cultural, historical, psychological and emotional. Perhaps even spiritual.

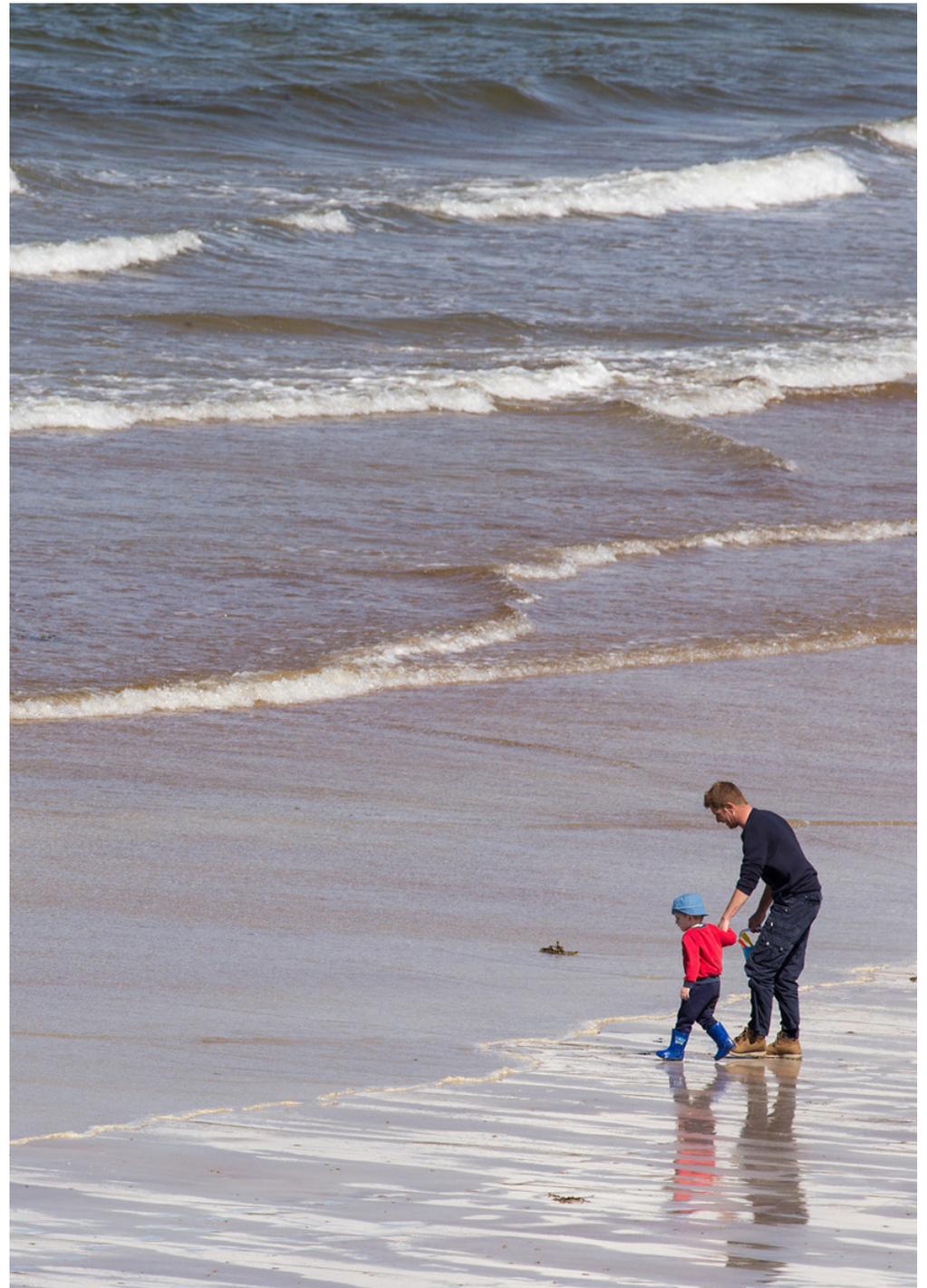
It evolved out of traditional conservation practice, but is now an antidote to it; and considered by many as a standalone movement in its own right. It challenges established thinking and the establishment. It poses questions and acts as a catalyst for discussion and argument. But above all that, it seeks to leave the environment in a better state than the one in which it was inherited: restoring natural processes at a time when so many of our landscapes are unnatural or over-cultivated.

Ecological restoration is a reaction to industrialisation, to climate change and the sixth mass extinction. And it's also a response to the need in many of us to lead 'wilder' lives and form stronger connections with, and spend more time in, our natural spaces. Whether it's too much time spent in front of the television, or aimlessly scrolling through smartphones; or an increasing disillusionment with the claustrophobic and polluted confines of city living – rewilding offers a gateway to redressing the balance.

“ Going outside to play is an alien notion for so many children.”

Less of the indoors and more of the outdoors. More fresh air. More exercise. Improved physical fitness. Improved mental well-being. A better quality of life. Sounds grandiose doesn't it? But rewilding has the capacity to deliver it. At a time when going outside to play is an alien notion for so many children and the restorative power of nature to improve mental health has more weight and value than ever before, its timing is as invaluable as it is fortuitous.

What may have started as an idealistic idea has now morphed into an environmental policy of real substance. It's just that this policy was not settled upon in a boardroom. It developed organically, much like the core principles of the movement it represents.



“ Doing your bit for nature has never been more accessible and rewarding. ”

It is a movement with strong ethical and moral underpinnings, formed from an increasing body of evidence that highlights the damage we have done, and are doing, to the planet. Ethical, because it has added more momentum to a paradigm shift in thinking that views ‘us’ as being part of nature, instead of having dominion over it. Moral, as a means of ecological redemption through which we bring back habitats and species removed by human intervention.

Rewilding is also a sign of the times from a technological point of view. Advances in ecological science and computer modelling has enabled scientists to prove what up until a decade or so ago was merely a conceptual belief: that biodiversity is inextricably linked with – and dependent upon – ecosystem interactions. This has coincided with a time when society is increasingly wishing to remove the shackles of its 9-5 existence and have a more immersive experience with nature.

Intertwined with this is a growing realisation that conventional – some would say institutionalised – conservation methods are not effective enough. Gone are the days where we can just focus on individual species to ‘conserve’. The current state of the planet calls for bigger, more joined-up thinking. Whole habitat restoration that can engage entire communities. Rewilding offers that. It promotes change in an age of conservation stagnation and ecological deterioration and gives the concept of green infrastructure more meaning and impetus. And with citizen science now more popular than ever, empowering the public to take more of an interest in their local wildlife, doing ‘your bit’ for nature has never been more accessible and rewarding.



It's no coincidence that these two movements have taken similar trajectories and often merged with professional conservation, biology and ecology to create a heady blend of academic rigour, fieldwork expertise and a passionate and dedicated

knowledge base that can add some empirical meat to the theoretical bones. At their heart, they share a common purpose: to enable people to make small-scale changes or discoveries which can rapidly add up to large-scale reform.

Restoration ecology also makes a strong socio-economic case for repurposing land that has either become abandoned or is nearing redundancy, regenerating it both ecologically and financially. Through the creation of more resilient habitats comes more resilient sources of

income, at a time when the increasing intensification of agriculture means more food being produced in fewer – more fertile – areas; freeing up more space for the land to be returned to nature, for the enjoyment of the masses, not the select few.



With wildlife tourism more popular than ever, rewilding can capitalise on, complement and amplify this, presenting new opportunities for more sustainable businesses to flourish. Self-sustaining ecosystems which create self-sustaining local economies, without a reliance on subsidies, for example. It offers hope in many forms.



“ Increase the access to nature early in life and you increase the chance of that child becoming emotionally attached to it throughout their life. ”



Having this inherently positive outlook at its core will help to inspire children – the future custodians of the planet – to be passionate about, and protect, nature. It opens doors to more positive experiences with nature, which transform into healthy attitudes that can lead to a deep sense of care for wildlife and the natural world later in life. Increase the access to nature early in life and you increase the chance of that child becoming emotionally attached to it throughout their life.

Rewilding is, quite simply, a new optimistic vision for optimising biodiversity in the 21st century that we can all benefit from. And it's most definitely here to stay.

SCOTLAND
THE BIG PICTURE

Amplifying the case for a wilder Scotland.