

THE REWILDING COLLECTIVE

FACT SHEET 2



JANUARY 2025

Rewilding

What is rewilding

Why it matters

Our Approach

What is rewilding?

Rewilding is the act of healing a degraded ecosystem by supporting the return of the natural processes so that the ecosystem can take care of itself and be self directed. It is different from nature conservation, which focuses on keeping an ecosystem in a fixed state to protect a small number of species. Rewilding is about reintroducing the missing species and processes that allow it to function properly and flourish, without a fixed end state in mind.

Why does rewilding matter?

Humanity has become profoundly disconnected from the rest of the web of life, and our industry, agriculture and leisure activities have deeply degrading effects on our ecosystems. This has resulted in a reduction in biodiversity of 73% in just two generations, and deep disruptions to the weather system that has led to storms, floods, droughts and wildfires that are devastating nature and human communities.

Rewilding is a powerful solution that causes huge increases in biodiversity. At the Wild Ken Hill rewilding project in Norfolk, the number of plant species present roughly doubled between 2019 to 2022 - just three years. It has also proven to be incredibly effective at drawing down carbon and increasing soil porosity, thus improving water infiltration; refilling our aquifers and restoring the natural water cycle; reducing the prevalence of droughts and floods. This then leads to greater food and water security, increases jobs and has the potential to improve human wellbeing as well as the fundamental restoration of biodiversity.

The Rewilding Collective approach

HOW WE'RE DIFFERENT

There are many inspiring examples of rewilding projects out there, that are bringing nature back, providing jobs and providing hope and happiness to many. However, the way that people are able to support these projects is minimal. Maybe we can visit or stay, and we can donate, but this doesn't provide what so many of us are looking for, which is engaging in a rich relationship with the natural world,



and belonging and connection. Many of us want to feel a deep connection to the land, to put down roots, and have a really deep and meaningful relationship to a place that lasts a lifetime. This is what The Rewilding Collective (TRC) offers, through the chance to co-own a site and take part in its rewilding, growing and developing as a collective alongside the flourishing of the ecosystem.

The land ownership aspect of TRC is also important to us because we recognise that it is the lack of access to land in the UK that has contributed to such a drastic decline in our biodiversity. When people don't have access to the land, they cannot connect and therefore don't prioritise its protection. We protect what we love, and how can we feel love if we are strangers? Less than 1% of the population owns approximately 50% of the land in England, with this tiny percentage being those with wealth and privilege. We want this balance to be redressed and for a greater diversity of people to have access to land and rewild it together.

ACTIVE AND PASSIVE REWILDING

The actions that people need to take to heal an ecosystem vary depending on the health of the site. The more degraded, the more work that we need to do to help restore. This is called active rewilding, as it involves active intervention from us, humans, to reinstate the natural process and reintroduce the missing species that the ecosystem needs to then take care of itself. Seeing as we have so thoroughly degraded our landscapes in the UK, active rewilding is needed almost everywhere.

Passive rewilding refers to when an ecosystem can rewild itself, without the need for active intervention from humans. Once the practices that have been degrading the system have been halted, life will come flooding back all by itself.

The Rewilding Collective's approach is very likely to start with lots of active interventions, such as fencing out deer, reintroducing missing plants, and processes such as mimicking boars digging and knocking down trees to create woodland glades. Once the pieces of the ecosystem have been returned then a more passive approach is likely to follow, with our role being to monitor the ecosystem and stop anything that could degrade it in the future.



THE REWILDING SPECTRUM

As well as the active vs passive axis, site size also affects the sort of actions that should be taken on a site. The smaller the site, the more intervention is needed, as the site is too small for ecological processes to be carried out by large animals. Think of a small site like an ecosystem in miniature. You can't shrink the animals that should be there, so you learn to mimic their impacts instead. This then requires more time and more intervention from us. The larger the site gets, the more space there is for animals to roam and live naturally, with these behaviours being the things that help the ecosystem recover.

The Rewilding Collective is actively looking for sites that are a minimum of 100 acres, so that we can have some animals present, as well as plenty of work to do for our human members.

DISPELLING MYTHS

Questions have been raised about rewilding and how to ensure that there is enough land for human needs as well as for wild landscapes. Some argue that the land needs of our population, for housing and agriculture, make rewilding a concern. The perception that we can't rewild because we are already taking up large amounts of the countryside for food production, housing and urbanisation simply isn't the case. In the UK only ~6.1% of land is used for housing purposes. The remaining land is primarily utilized for agriculture (England ~63.3%, Scotland ~66%; Wales ~80%; Northern Ireland ~77%), though much of that land is not used for essential food production. Forestry, grouse moors, deer and pheasant shooting estates, open land, and water make up the remaining ~20.0%. These figures highlight the relatively small proportion of land dedicated to essential food production and housing compared to other uses.

NATURE VERSUS AGRICULTURE

The climate and ecological crisis challenges us to make profound changes throughout society - including in how we produce food and work with the land. Fortunately, however, we do not need to make a choice between growing food and restoring nature, as it is the intactness and health of our ecosystems that creates the healthy soils, rain and other ecosystem services that are essential for the conditions needed to produce food.

We have depleted our ecosystems in the UK to such an extent that farming is now heavily reliant on chemicals to continue to produce food,



and these chemicals are contributing to the reduction in pollinators and the pollution of water courses. All in all, the state of the UK's ecosystems is cause for deep concern. This is evidenced in the UK government's own report published in December 2024 that states that "Long term decline in the UK's natural capital is a pressing risk to UK food production," and, "Climate change, nature loss and water insecurity pose significant risks to the ability of global food production to meet demand over the longer term." Currently only 5% of the land in the UK is both protected and effectively managed for nature.

Our current agricultural system is highly inefficient, using large areas of land to grow crops to feed animals due to a culture of high meat consumption. Research indicates that a global shift to a plant-based diet could reduce agricultural land use by up to 75%, potentially freeing up vast areas for rewilding.

The Rewilding Collective does not rewild land of high agricultural value (known as grade 1, 2, and 3a) due to the necessity of this being used for food production. It is estimated that around 27% of the UK's landmass is classified as having a high agricultural value, but that approximately 70% of our land is farmed, with many of these farms producing very little food per acre. The more marginal land is often used for animal agriculture, such as cattle and sheep farming. Changing dietary habits to reduce meat consumption is one way of contributing to the reduction of carbon emissions and it therefore makes sense to us that some of this more marginal land is rewilded instead.

LIVESTOCK AND ANIMAL MANAGEMENT

Having animals present on a rewilding project site is essential for the proper functioning of the ecosystem. Animals carry out many different processes on the land such as spreading seeds, cycling nutrients, and creating a variety of niches which then provide habitat and food sources for a greater variety of species. TRC rewilding sites are likely to be in the 100 - 200 acre range (although this is not our upper limit) which is too small to support some relevant species. TRC complies with the Dangerous Wild Animals Act, which necessitates a license to release many wild animal species and rewilding projects often use domesticated livestock as proxies instead.

It is common in UK based rewilding projects to have a mixture of animals, domesticated and wild, creating habitat complexity and creating a diversity of ecological niches through their grazing, browsing, trampling, defecating/urinating to fertilize the soil, and seed dispersal. TRC aims to introduce a mixture of animals that will serve these purposes. Their numbers, species composition and length of time on the



land will depend on the size of the land and other characteristics such as gradient and soil type.

TRC will try, as much as possible, to ensure that the animals that we introduce can live wild and natural lives and display wild and natural behaviour. This is better for the ecosystem and its biodiversity and the health and wellbeing of the animals themselves. Wild ecosystems see boom and bust cycles of populations of animals with numbers regulated by availability of food and habitat, as well as predation. We will be trying to mimic this phenomenon as much as possible, adding and removing animals in response to how their presence affects the ecosystem.

The actual number and types of livestock that we shall allow onto our rewilding projects will be determined by various factors including: soil type, fertility and topography, grass cover, availability of other forage and shelter, local advice regarding carrying capacity, ecological needs, animal health issues and veterinary advice.

Male animals can be brought in for short periods for breeding, as this is an important part of the lifecycle of an animal and a key to them displaying natural behaviours that correlate with an increase in biodiversity. However, this will mean that numbers will grow beyond the carrying capacity of the land, which will be addressed depending on the context and the preferences of TRC's members.

MINIMAL DISTURBANCE TO WILDLIFE

The notion of human presence on the land vis-à-vis disturbance to wildlife is a complex one. The myriad of species found within the natural world do not behave in a uniform way. There are some that do not mind human presence and some that are very affected by it. For example, many parts of Dartmoor are silent, but towns with old trees are full of bird song. The presence of a suitable habitat is often a better indicator of whether species will be present, rather than the absence of humans.

It is common with rewilding projects to do an assessment of a site to see which species are present and which ones are likely to return as the habitat and food sources reappear, and to then organise access paths for humans accordingly. Both Knepp and Heal Somerset's rewilding sites have split their sites in half, with half out of bounds for humans and the other half with an access track, which means that species that are more affected by human presence can have an area to retreat to. The Rewilding Collective will use this approach, including keeping dogs on leads.



HUMAN REWILDING?

There are many who are interested in rewilding and also passionate about the idea of 'human rewilding'. This can be defined as the process of reconnecting individuals with their natural environment and ancestral practices to enhance physical, mental, and emotional well-being. It involves integrating nature-based activities and lifestyles that align more closely with human biology, fostering a deeper connection to the natural world.

The Rewilding Collective recognises that human rewilding is a highly likely outcome of the rewilding of the ecology. As people become stewards of a site there is the opportunity to develop a deep connection with the place over time, which may strengthen a sense of belonging within the web of life, with an enhancing of emotional, mental and physical wellbeing that comes from this re-established belonging.

Your opportunity

In joining The Rewilding Collective you:

- Can co-own land managed *for* nature
- Can reap the rewards of hands-on work
- Know you're making a difference
- Can have a quiet corner of the world to spend time in

To keep updated with developments, please [Contact Us](#).

