



## Rewilding: Restoring Ecosystems for Nature and People

### INTRODUCTION

This Policy sets out the John Muir Trust's position on rewilding.

### WHAT IS REWILDING?

The term 'rewilding' was first coined in 1990<sup>1</sup> but has only come to prominence in the UK in the last five years<sup>2</sup>. It has no standard definition but it is being used to describe an approach to nature conservation that is; *inspiring and engaging people to restore natural processes, repair damaged ecosystems and reintroduce lost species, to create a richer and wilder environment for the benefit of nature and people*. The approach can cover non-intervention management in urban greenspaces to reintroduction of keystone species, including carnivores, in remote wild places. The ideas associated with rewilding are underpinning work by a variety of organisations in the UK<sup>3</sup> and Europe<sup>4</sup>. The approach is closely aligned with the ethos of the John Muir Trust and how it has taken forward land management in the last 30 years.

Rewilding is *not* about re-creating an environment as it was at a particular point in the past. Nor is it about excluding people. While ultimately rewilding is about allowing natural processes to dominate, initially intervention is often required to repair the long term damage done and to re-start natural processes. Interventions are often necessary and desirable like reducing deer grazing to enable woodlands to regenerate, or re-introducing missing 'keystone species' (i.e. those which profoundly influence ecosystem function) like beavers which shape water courses and water flows.

Rewilding is one approach. It might not be suitable or desirable everywhere; for instance where agricultural production is the priority or a particular natural state is required. It is an important addition to the range of approaches that land managers can employ.

In the UK, most land has been or continues to be managed. Large areas have been de-forested, burned, grazed, fertilized and polluted. Most large wild mammals, have been exterminated. As a result, most ecosystems are largely dysfunctional for nature and people, being no longer able to provide their full range of 'services' such as clean water, reducing run-off and flooding, locking in carbon etc. Nature conservation has been confined to relatively small, isolated areas<sup>5</sup> which are largely degraded semi-natural habitats. In the uplands in particular these are dominated by sheep, grouse or deer with low ecological and natural value. Rewilding has the potential to reverse these impacts.

### REWILDING IN RELATION TO OTHER TRUST POLICIES

Essentially the Trust has had rewilding at its core since its inception as reflected in the first three objects of the Trust's Memorandum of Association<sup>6</sup> to: *'Conserve wild places and their landscapes, both for their own sake and for the sustenance and inspiration they give to humanity; Protect existing wild places so as to conserve their natural processes, and their indigenous animals, plants and soils; Renew wild places, where they have been damaged, by encouraging natural processes;*'. Similarly, the Trust's Vision<sup>7</sup> states: *'Restoration of natural processes across large areas of wild land will help to reverse declines in native wildlife; Non-native invasive species will be actively controlled, while previously lost native species will be reintroduced.'* The Trust's re-introduction policy<sup>8</sup> states that: *'...the Trust works on habitat*

<sup>1</sup> Fraser, C. (2009). Rewilding the World. Despatches from the conservation revolution. Metropolitan Books.

<sup>2</sup> Monbiot, G. (2013). Feral. Rewilding the land, sea and human life. Penguin

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.banc.org.uk/node/47>

<sup>4</sup> <http://wild10.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/A-Vision-for-a-Wilder-Europe-Oct-2013.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Hughes J & Brooks, S (2009) Living Landscapes; towards ecosystem-based conservation in Scotland. Scottish Wildlife Trust.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.jmt.org/memorandum-articles-of-association.asp>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.jmt.org/vision.asp>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.jmt.org/reintroductions.asp>

enhancement, it also supports re-introductions where the habitat and ecosystem can support the re-introduced species, particularly when the re-introduction will help wild land restoration’.

Initially the Trust bought wild land to protect it, and then focused on conservation through active management and engagement with people<sup>9</sup>. Rewilding is a natural progression, repairing wild land through the restoration of natural processes, creating functioning ecosystems and re-introducing keystone species. Rewilding is entirely consistent with and has the potential to enhance aspects of the Trust’s current land management, policy, and people engagement work.

## THE BENEFITS OF REWILDING

Rewilding has the potential to deliver many benefits for nature and people, namely:

- Establishing better functioning ecosystems, allowing nature and people to be more resilient to the effects of climate change, as well as providing other ‘ecosystem services’ (such as clean water, reduced flooding, increased carbon storage, enhanced biodiversity),
- Setting a context for long term conservation objectives, and providing more effective and efficient delivery of them by restoring and connecting habitats within damaged and fragmented landscapes,
- Inspiring and engaging people’s interest and connection with wild nature, as well as benefitting people’s health and well-being, and creating new employment opportunities (e.g. nature tourism).

## HOW THE TRUST WILL ADVOCATE REWILDING

The Trust will, on its own and through engagement with UK and European rewilding alliances and initiatives, advocate and promote:

- Strengthening and enlarging protected areas and connectivity between them in the wider countryside, including large landscape scale ecological restoration projects,
- Cultural, political and fiscal incentives for rewilding (e.g. payments for ‘non-intervention management’),
- Re-introduction of keystone species at appropriate times, in suitable areas and where there is public support,
- The benefits of rewilding for nature and people.

## RE-INTRODUCING KEYSTONE SPECIES

The existing re-introduction policy<sup>5</sup> sets out the Trust’s overall position. In relation to rewilding, the emphasis is on the re-introduction of keystone species. The Trust supports the re-introduction of keystone species following IUCN guidelines<sup>10</sup> which detail the need for full public consultation, involvement and support. The Trust believes that prior to any re-introduction being carried out there needs to be comprehensive political, public and local support. The Trust accepts that management solutions will be required to mitigate conflicts if they arise. On this basis, the Trust’s position on the re-introduction of the following keystone species is:

- Beavers: the Trust believes that re-introduction across the UK is possible and desirable now,
- Lynx: the Trust believes that a trial re-introduction project to Scotland should be implemented within the next five years,
- Wolves: the Trust believes that there is no ecological barrier to their reintroduction into remote parts of Scotland but a public education programme, scientific assessment and public consultation will need to inform any subsequent trial reintroduction which should only be considered following assessment of the Lynx reintroduction,
- Bears: The Trust believes that their re-introduction into the wild is currently unlikely in the UK.

The Trust believes that any consideration of further reintroduction of previously resident native species to the UK should be done within the context of a comprehensive *rewilding* or appropriate *biodiversity strategy*.

## PRIORITISATION

In taking forward rewilding the Trust will, on its own and through engagement with UK and European rewilding alliances and initiatives, advocate and promote:

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.wildlandmanagement.org.uk/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://portals.iucn.org/library/sites/library/files/documents/2013-009.pdf>

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- The benefits of rewilding for nature and people.