

Written evidence from Knepp Estate (PAE0013)

Authors: Charlie Burrell and Molly Biddell

What contribution could rewilding make to the UK's target to protect 30% of land and sea by 2030?

1. Rewilding could make a significant contribution to the UK's target to protect 30% of land and sea by 2030, if 'protect' refers to protecting and restoring nature and biodiversity.
2. Rewilding has proven successful at creating important succession-based habitats which result in species diversity and abundance. The nature of rewilding means that it creates a mosaic of habitats, increasing habitat resilience and diversity within a landscape.
3. Rewilding is one of the most cost-effective ways to restore nature. Allowing natural process to lead nature recovery reduces the cost of labour and creates a relatively cheap cost per hectare for effective habitat and species restoration.
4. Rewilding is an adaptive, nature-led process, functioning within the context of a changing climate, which thereby increases our landscape's climate resilience. It can provide important links in the landscape for migrating species arriving on the northern edge of their climatic range.
5. Rewilding can be beneficial for joining up key habitats and creating nature corridors at a landscape scale.
6. Rewilding delivers a plethora of ecosystem services – to name a few - biodiversity uplift, carbon sequestration and storage, cleaner water, natural flood management, better water retention in the landscape, pollination, and sustainable meat production.
7. Rewilding is a concept that has captured the imagination of an increasingly urban and nature-deprived public. As an emotive concept it can successfully gain the public's buy-in and has a track record of reconnecting people to nature. Being connected to nature is key to caring about it.
8. Rewilding can happen anywhere – it can run from the centre of the city out to remote rural landscapes. It is habitat and location agnostic, making it scalable and adaptable.
9. However, it is hard to define what the Key Performance Indicators of rewilding are, as rewilding is a nature-led process. This therefore requires the UK Government to look past restrictive targets, and instead understand nature for the complexity that it is. It is hard, and wrong, to flawlessly predict the outcomes of a rewilding project.

How does the regulatory regime directly governing protected sites (e.g., SSSIs) and protected landscapes (e.g., national parks) affect those adopting rewilding practices?

1. The regulatory regime directly governing protected sites is not conducive to or supportive of rewilding. Sites designated for specific habitat types are often too prescriptive for the dynamism of process-led rewilding.

2. Managing land for priority habitat and species-specific targets is relevant in certain areas but is too narrow for rewilding. It limits the scope for experimentation and cannot account for the inherent unpredictability of project outcomes, which sit at the heart of many rewilding projects.
3. That's not to say that elements of rewilding can't be applied to designated protected sites. Rewilding is most successful at scale, lending itself to large landscapes, therefore it could be supported by areas such as National Parks or AONBs, if it fits with their own broader objectives. A larger landscape identity can be helpful to create contiguous nature corridors, an example is the Weald to Waves initiative.
4. We believe that a designation that could be beneficial for rewilded land is that of National Nature Reserve (NNR). NNRs focus on experimentation, and therefore we think this designation could encourage new thinking around rewilding.
5. Prescriptive land designation is antagonistic to rewilding, and we do not feel that it is necessary to enable or incentivise rewilding. There is a risk that protecting areas for rewilding becomes counter-intuitive and deters land managers from the experimentation of rewilding. It would also be very difficult to designate an area of rewilding at the start or early stages of a project, as the outcomes for nature only start to emerge over time.

How do wider policies, such as ELMSs, affect the prospects for rewilding in ways that could contribute to the UK's '30 by 30' target?

1. Countryside Stewardship is beneficial for providing finance to enable rewilding schemes, as is Landscape Recovery funding.
2. The Sustainable Farming Incentive isn't particularly helpful for rewilding projects, but we support it as sustainable food production and rewilding are land uses that must go hand in hand.
3. NEIRF and NERC funding has been beneficial for enabling us to work with partners to fill data gaps within emerging natural capital markets in order to create sustainable long-term finance streams to incentivise rewilding.
4. Development-led markets such as Biodiversity Net Gain and Nutrient Neutrality could also incentivise and enable rewilding, providing metrics and assurance schemes allow for the complexity of rewilding outcomes.
5. [Nattergal](#), Knepp's sister company, created to scale rewilding, relies on the emergence of private natural capital markets, and therefore we are supportive of the government's intention to help scale these markets. We need the government to continue to de-risk these markets, particularly for early-adopters and investors, and to provide guidance on key principles that the market is unable to define.