

REWILDING QUICK START GUIDE

REWILDING NETWORK PRACTICE NOTE

**THE REWILDING
NETWORK**

Supported by Rewilding Britain 

GETTING STARTED

Rewilding is the large-scale restoration of nature until it can take care of itself – and us – again. In a country suffering biodiversity loss, habitat destruction and climate breakdown, each new rewilding project can help restore nature's remarkable web of life.

Every rewilding project is unique, situated in a specific place and reflecting its geography, ecology and communities. How you might undertake a rewilding project on your land will depend on the geography of the site, the former activities that took place, and your overall ambition to move up the rewilding spectrum. This document is intended as guidance only, and your final strategy should reflect the nuance of the land and the history and culture of the local area.

Rewilding means restoring degraded or missing ecosystem function in the landscape and making space for nature to then evolve naturally as a result of this recovery work. Nature's timescales can be very different to human timescales, with some ecosystem cycles taking only hours or days to complete (e.g. the lifecycles of some species, the rotation of the Earth), and others taking centuries or millennia to complete (e.g. the movement of carbon through the atmosphere and planet's crust, the lifecycles of some species). At its core, rewilding is about de-centering humans as the 'steward' of nature, and allowing natural processes to flourish and support us.

Every site is different and there isn't a standard template we can all follow to deliver rewilding in Britain. However, there are broad considerations that apply to most land in Britain. Based on the experience of the Rewilding Network, the main interventions are explored in this guide.

1

SUPPORT PEOPLE AND NATURE TOGETHER

Rewilding can enrich lives and help us to reconnect with wild nature while providing a sustainable future for local and wider communities.



2

LET NATURE LEAD

From the free movement of rivers to natural grazing, habitat succession and predation, rewilding seeks to reinstate natural processes, including reintroducing missing species where appropriate.



3

CREATE RESILIENT ECONOMIES

Rewilding creates opportunities for resilient new nature-based economies. It's about finding opportunities for livelihoods that thrive alongside and enrich nature.



4

WORK AT NATURE'S SCALE

Rewilding is restoring ecosystems with enough space to allow nature to drive the changes. Scale may come from single landholdings or through joining up nature so it can thrive.



5

SECURE BENEFITS FOR THE LONG-TERM

Rewilding leaves a positive legacy for future generations. Securing the continued, long-term benefits of rewilding areas is key to a healthy, prosperous future for nature and people.



DEVELOPING A REWILDING STRATEGY

A rewilding strategy identifies the interventions that will need to take place across the rewilding area in order to restore absent or degraded ecosystem processes. Some interventions may depend on other works being completed first, and a good strategy should outline a timeline for when work may be undertaken. A great strategy will be adaptive, recognising that the land may respond to interventions in ways you haven't anticipated, resulting in plans having to shift to accommodate new conditions.

There are some rewilding interventions that tend to occur earlier in British rewilding projects, usually because they are interventions on which multiple ecosystem processes depend, and/or because they require significant work that is likely to be disruptive and therefore are better to complete before pronounced recovery of biodiversity starts.

RESTORING HYDROLOGY

Restoring the natural movement of water in the landscape is often one of the first actions undertaken after surveys, consultations and initial community engagement work has been completed. This can be done by breaking up or blocking land drains, creating new ponds in areas where water seems to naturally pool, restoring rivers or reconnecting them with their flood plain, or creating scrapes. Some of these interventions may require planning permission or consents, so be sure to check our [Legislation and Regulations guide](#) before starting any works.

CHANGING OR REMOVING GRAZING

If your land has previously had high numbers of sheep or cattle, you may want to remove grazing entirely to allow vegetation to recover for a few years (it can take 5-10 years depending on how heavily grazed the land is). If grazing has been less severe, it may be more appropriate to reduce numbers so that some areas can rest but animal grazing and movement continues. Our [Guide to Grazing and Browsing for Rewilders](#) explores this in more depth.

DEER MANAGEMENT

Deer numbers can be high in many places in Britain, and they may be suppressing a vegetation pulse on your land. Deer are part of our ecosystem in Britain, and their browsing behaviour is a natural ecosystem function. However, in high numbers they can unbalance the system and we can observe this in many areas at present. It's worth undertaking a herbivore impact assessment to identify whether deer browsing is high. If this is the case, you should also consider a deer survey of your land using thermal imaging drones (experts can undertake this for you). This will inform whether deer management is needed. The British Deer Society provide key resources for this on their website and we provide detail for rewilding projects in the Rewilding Network.

REMOVE INTERNAL FENCING

An important early rewilding intervention is to remove any redundant fencing. This not only improves the aesthetic of the land, but also allows wildlife and grazing animals to move freely (if the fencing is dangerous, for example if it is barbed, it also reduces the risk of injury to wildlife and humans).

If the rewilding project is likely to need grazing animals (this won't be appropriate in all contexts as they have preferred habitats), you will need a perimeter fence. Care should be taken to mitigate the impact of fences on wildlife and humans.

Now is also a good time to remove any redundant or old signage from the rewilding area.

NATURAL REGENERATION, OR PLANTING

We recommend natural regeneration as the first approach for rewilding. It creates resilient scrub and woodland habitats, protects local genetic variation, and limits the risk of plant diseases or pathogens being accidentally introduced to an area. Seed dispersal is a natural ecosystem process, and one that is often suppressed. If you remove grazing, cease hedge-cutting and have good seed sources, you should see natural

regeneration happening in the first two years. If you don't have a natural seed source, or natural regeneration isn't happening (check deer numbers before moving onto this step), then you may want to consider scrub and tree planting. Seed islands should be considered to kick-start natural regeneration, and make sure you plant in natural formations rather than in lines. You can also use exclosures to identify whether browsing pressure is affecting natural regeneration.

BREAKING UP THE GROUND

If you don't have pigs on site or wild boar in the area, you may want to create some disturbance and break the ground up a little. Soil disturbance is a natural process that creates pockets of bare ground, can oxygenate soil, and allows new seed to germinate. Many species, including various birds, reptiles and insects, have evolved to utilise these bare pockets that open up temporarily as rootling animals move across the land. In the absence of such animals, you can mimic this behaviour by hand, with a digger, or with a chain harrow. This activity can also help to break up vegetation and start natural regeneration.

SPECIES REINTRODUCTIONS

Species reintroductions are often a key part of rewilding. However, it's worth noting that some species may return once you've restored the native habitat. You may also need to do some habitat restoration before conditions are right for species reintroductions, so don't rush into this step.

If you're intending to reintroduce species which roam across large areas, you will need to look at how you can link up to others in the area.

MAIN REWILDING INTERVENTIONS

- Reduction or removal of sheep grazing
- Cessation of arable farming
- Cessation of livestock farming
- Introduction of grazing animals
- Natural regeneration
- Tree planting
- Removal of internal fencing
- Breaking or blocking of internal drains
- Peatland restoration/rewetting
- River restoration
- New watercourse creation
- Wetland/pond creation
- Installing woody debris dams
- Managed realignment of coastal area
- Habitat restoration
- Tree thinning
- Large deadwood piles
- Deer management
- Species reintroductions
- Cessation of burning
- Cessation of shooting
- Carrion left in the landscape
- Sky carrion table
- Removal of infrastructure

WE'RE HERE TO SUPPORT YOU

The Rewilding Network is here for you. The Network exists to provide support and help make your project a success. Take advantage of our online events, in-person gatherings, and online forum to ask questions of your peers, or contact our team with your queries or questions and we'll do everything we can to help.

The Rewilding Network publishes research, case studies, guides and practice notes to help facilitate knowledge exchange. We offer funding through our Innovation Fund to test out new approaches, such as feasibility studies, business plans, community engagement and education programmes. We also have a Challenge Fund, supporting projects who want to work at seascape or landscape scale.

With over 250 rewilding projects, a fifth of which are at least 600ha (1500 acres) in size, there is a wide array of projects for you to connect with and share knowledge.



“The Network has been an absolute mine of information and support, there’s so many resources available to landowners and people interested in rewilding and it’s just a fantastic Network of supportive people.”

Hannah Dale, Wild Wrendale, Rewilding Network member