

Boost for Scotland's international reputation for wilderness and wildlife

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Scotland's international reputation as a key destination for experiencing world-class wild landscapes and outstanding wildlife is to be boosted by Trees for Life joining a prestigious and growing European association of rewilding projects.

The conservation charity was invited to become a member of the European Rewilding Network – placing its restoration of the globally unique Caledonian Forest in the Highlands, especially in Glen Affric and Glenmoriston, firmly on the European map.

A key focus of the network is to show how rewilding – the restoration of damaged natural ecosystems – can benefit economic development, including through nature-based tourism, wildlife watching and volunteering opportunities.

“To have our work saving the Caledonian Forest – Scotland's equivalent of the Amazonian rainforest – recognized in this way is a major milestone, and highlights its European significance,” said Steve Micklewright, Trees for Life's Chief Executive.

“As well as sharing knowledge and experience with dozens of organisations, from Portugal to Sweden and from Greece to Ukraine, we'll be able to promote Scotland's wild native forests and the country's inspiring rewilding initiatives to audiences right across Europe.”

Rewilding Europe, based in The Netherlands, coordinates The European Rewilding Network. Its Managing Director, Frans Schepers, said: “Having Trees for Life join our network of major rewilding initiatives is a positive step forwards in making Europe a wilder place. The charity's pioneering work shows how we can all help save and restore globally important places like the Caledonian Forest.”

Trees for Life believes that the benefits of rewilding include further establishing Scotland as a wildlife tourism hotspot and a world leader in the international drive to tackle forest and biodiversity loss.

A review of Scotland's wildlife tourism sector by VisitScotland this year highlighted how the country's landscapes, nature and wildlife are key reasons for people to choose it as a travel destination. Research in recent years has also shown that wildlife tourism generates an estimated £276 million a year for the Scottish economy.

Trees for Life qualified for membership of the European Rewilding Network through its large-scale restoration of the Caledonian Forest. Characterised by Scots pine trees – as well as trees such as aspen, willow and birch – the forest is a unique habitat that supports internationally significant species.

Today just one per cent of the forest's original area is left, but Trees for Life has already restored large areas in Glen Affric and at Dundreggan Conservation Estate in Glenmoriston through planting over 1.3 million trees and encouraging natural regeneration. The charity's ambitious new Caledonian Pinewood Recovery Project will take forest restoration to the next level by helping to restore 50 areas of remnant pinewoods – these are mainly made up of ancient 200 year old ‘Granny’ Scots pines which are dying, and there are no young trees to succeed them. These fragments are in danger of disappearing forever without urgent action.

To find out more about Trees for Life's award-winning work, visit www.treesforlife.org.uk.

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