

Heal Somerset publishes first ever State of Nature report focusing solely on rewilding

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National charity Heal Rewilding has published its inaugural *Heal Somerset State of Nature 2026* report, the first State of Nature-style publication to concentrate entirely on nature-led recovery.

The report sets out the results of the initial suite of surveys of species and habitats at the charity's Heal Somerset rewilding site, which it has owned and managed since December 2022. It also highlights the important role nature-led approaches can play in tackling the UK's biodiversity crisis, strengthening climate resilience and supporting healthier, more resilient ecosystems.

Thirty-five surveys have been carried out to date. Of those, the five formal baseline surveys found 60 breeding bird species, 15 bat species, 404 invertebrate species and 113 vascular plant species. The first comparative baseline survey, for small mammals, carried out at Heal Somerset and a nearby organic dairy farm, found five species compared with three species respectively, and 188% more abundance, with 49 small mammals found at Heal Somerset compared with 17 at the dairy farm.

The report also covers results from structured observations and informal species records. Ninety-four species of birds have been informally recorded since 2023, including 21 red-listed and 28 amber-listed species, and 24 species of butterfly have been seen.

Structured as far as possible to mirror the UK's *State of Nature 2023* report, the report on Heal Somerset seeks to demonstrate how rewilding can sit alongside more traditional conservation approaches within national discussions about nature recovery.

Heal Rewilding says the report was inspired partly by the absence of substantive content on rewilding within the UK's *State of Nature 2023* report, despite the rapid growth of the sector in recent years.

The UK's *State of Nature 2019* report – which documented severe declines across species and habitats – was itself one of the catalysts for the founding of Heal Rewilding in 2020. Alongside the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan commitment to create or restore more than 500,000 hectares of wildlife-rich habitat, it reinforced the urgent need for new spaces dedicated primarily to nature recovery.

"When we read the 2023 State of Nature report, we were struck by how little attention was given to rewilding despite the extraordinary growth of the movement," said Jan Stannard, co-founder of Heal Rewilding. "There are now hundreds of rewilding projects across Britain and many are seeing remarkable ecological changes. But stories alone are not enough. If rewilding is to be fully recognised within national nature recovery strategies, we need robust, long-term data that demonstrates impact."

Rewilding Britain's Rewilding Network includes 1,002 rewilding projects of 50 hectares or more across Britain, together covering more than 206,550 hectares of land. The organisation aims to encourage rewilding projects to undertake comparable ecological surveys, to contribute towards a large-scale national database of evidence about the impact of nature-led recovery.

Beyond biodiversity recovery, Heal says rewilding can also play an important role in climate mitigation and adaptation. Healthy ecosystems can help store carbon, improve soil and water health and strengthen resilience to climate-related pressures including flooding, heat and drought. The charity also points to growing recognition that global biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse may pose wider societal and economic risks, including to national security.

"Nature-led recovery is fundamentally different from highly controlled conservation management," said Stannard. "We cannot – and would not want to – dictate exactly how the ecosystem recovers from its heavily modified starting point. There may be ecological winners and losers along the way, but we hope to demonstrate an overall net gain in biodiversity and ecosystem health."

The long-term goal of the monitoring programme at Heal Somerset – and all Heal's future rewilding sites – is to assess ecological health and attribute impact specifically to rewilding, using a different type of survey and interpretation of findings which species and habitat monitoring alone cannot achieve. The charity acknowledges that, as a small organisation, it is not yet able to monitor every ecological process taking place on the land. However, by systematically gathering data over time, Heal hopes to contribute meaningful evidence to the growing national conversation around rewilding and nature recovery.

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The *Heal Somerset State of Nature 2026* report is intended as the first in a long-term series, with updated editions planned every four to five years to track ecological change and measure progress. Heal hopes the report will help strengthen recognition of nature-led recovery approaches in future national assessments, including the UK's next *State of Nature* report expected in 2027.

While the UK's biodiversity crisis remains severe, Heal believes rewilding offers an important source of hope – not only through the return of wildlife and ecological processes, but through the creation of living landscapes where people can reconnect with nature and witness recovery happening in real time.

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About Heal Rewilding

Heal Rewilding is a registered charity working to raise money, buy land in England and rewild it, to help nature recovery, climate action and wellbeing. Through the rebuilding of wildlife populations, community involvement and storytelling, Heal aims to reconnect people with nature and help tackle the climate and ecological crises. It bought its first rewilding site, Heal Somerset, in December 2022, which is open for free access to the public 50 weeks a year.

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Images to accompany the story are here:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1UO0kzS4Gw16q0p9WfQpSTzn3-Fu9_KT1?usp=sharing

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