

Leading UK rewilding organisations call for action to build an inclusive rewilding sector

Monday 18 October, 2021

Rewilding in the UK is now generating a growing number of jobs. They must attract a broad cross-section of society.

The inclusivity imperative

The practice of rewilding provides new economic opportunities by supporting livelihoods and income linked to the different forms of value that nature recovery can generate. In the UK, the rewilding of marginal land is already [boosting job numbers in the land management sector](#). The potential to link rewilding with a growing demand offers the prospects of new jobs in conservation finance and technology.

Yet as the UK's nascent rewilding sector develops, and more nature recovery-related jobs become available, how can we ensure the new sector is shaped and developed by people from all walks of life? British people of all backgrounds want to make a meaningful contribution to solving the climate and nature emergencies, so how do we harness their talent and desire for change in the most inclusive and accessible way possible?

"In the conservation sector, some people still hold the false perception that young people, people from ethnic minority backgrounds, and those from less privileged backgrounds aren't interested in helping nature," says Hannah Needham, Operations Director at [Heal Rewilding](#). "But in reality, where people from these groups appear less engaged, it's often because they face a range of barriers that are invisible to the group who currently dominate the sector: older, middle-class white people.

"Unfortunately, where socio-economic barriers limit the involvement of these groups in wildlife conservation, we miss out on their skills, their ideas and their energy. Rewilding is known for being progressive and holistic - as the sector develops in the UK we must seize this opportunity to do things differently and embrace social diversity."

Reinforcing the green ceiling

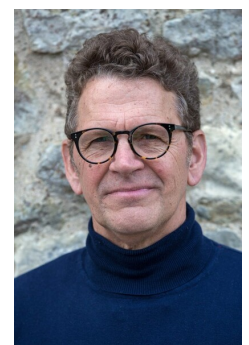
[Green 2.0](#), a US group campaigning for more diversity in conservation organisations across the Atlantic, has coined the phrase "green ceiling" to describe how few people from ethnic minorities work in the sector. The term is equally apt on this side of the Atlantic.

While the UK has experienced significant ethnic change since the 1950s, and particularly since the late 1990s, the UK's conservation sector remains stubbornly homogeneous. [Research](#) carried out by think tank [Policy Exchange](#) in 2017 found that just over 3% of environment professionals identify themselves as minorities, compared to an average of nearly 20% across all occupations. Moreover, only 9% of UK students in higher education studying subjects that could lead to professions in the environmental sector identified themselves as belonging to non-white minorities, compared to an average of 22% across all higher education subjects.

[Soraya Abdel-Hadi](#) is an award-winning writer and artist and founder of [All The Elements](#), a network to support everyone working to increase diversity in the outdoor sector. She believes there are multiple reasons for this discrepancy.

"Firstly, accessing job opportunities in conservation and ecology typically means starting off by volunteering, which can be time-consuming and expensive. This not only makes the conservation sector a much harder sell for prospective students and those at the bottom of the career ladder, it actually stops many from getting involved at all. Most members of our society need to be able to earn money to pay for life's essentials. There are only a privileged few who either can afford - or have a support network that allows them the flexibility - to work for free. This is reflected in who we see in the sector."

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Hannah Needham agrees.

"When I first started out, my friends told me that it was impossible to get a job in conservation. I soon found out why: all entry-level and graduate roles required applicants to have a practical experience. To get this, I undertook an unpaid 12-month traineeship where I volunteered for three days a week. Knowing I wouldn't be able to afford rent, despite working a second job at my local pub, my family put me up in their spare room for a year for free. Not everyone has these advantages - a free room in a house near a nature reserve - which makes the system inherently elitist."

Recruitment and remuneration

Soraya Abdel-Hadi also points to the absence of career paths and salary issues as factors that dissuade many people from applying for conservation jobs.

"Career paths in the conservation sector aren't particularly clear. Many people starting out in a profession want some idea of where they're going to be in five or 10 years, not just now. On top of this, the remuneration being offered is also less than in comparable positions in other economic sectors, which means the financial incentives just aren't there."

Last but not least, the way conservation sector jobs are typically recruited for also skews the demographic make-up of applicants.

"Environmental organisations need to move beyond their usual channels when advertising for positions," says Hannah Needham. "In the past, Heal Rewilding has contacted groups such as [Black Girls Hike](#), [All The Elements](#), [We Go Outside Too](#), [Flock Together](#), [Solidaritree](#) and [The Wanderlust Women](#), and even shows such as the [Seize Your Adventure](#) podcast, to ask them to share our advertisements among their network members. They've all been really welcoming and helpful."

"Companies also need to speak to people who are experts in developing inclusive recruitment policies," adds Soraya Abdel-Hadi. "Then they need to embed those policies in their organisation. There's no point in reaching out through new channels to different audiences and getting them to apply for jobs if the recruitment process discriminates against the amount or type of experience they have, or their education, or even their name or where they live."

A burgeoning sector

Progressive recruitment policies and competitive salaries will be critical if the rewilding sector is to attract diverse talent. Of equal importance will be the creation of a wider range of attractive jobs that offer pathways to careers inside and outside the sector.

With this in mind, Ecosulis is investing in the development of new products and services at the intersection of rewilding, technology and finance - in particular, the development of a rewilding token and biodiversity credit that can be produced, traded and invested in.

"We are finding that commercial innovation linked to rewilding creates new jobs with highly transferable skills," says Ecosulis Head of Innovation and leading rewilding expert Dr. Paul Jepson. "Linked to this, we are formulating new job titles that capture associated career prospects. For example, we have ditched the term 'ecologist' in favour of 'ecosystem analyst', which much better describes the role and its technical competencies."

Ecosulis launched the [UK's first rewilding graduate internship programme](#) in March 2021. [Ella Milne](#) and Dan Bass, the first recruits, are already heavily involved in the development and delivery of technology-empowered [rewilding products and services](#), which are increasingly in demand as investors, companies and local authorities aspire to become nature positive and climate neutral. The one-year internship positions are paid and include a structured programme of professional training and development in applied rewilding. [Four more positions](#) are available in the 2021-2022 iteration of the programme - no work experience is required, and people of all backgrounds are invited to apply.

Hope for the future

Soraya Abdel-Hadi is optimistic that the rewilding sector can embrace diversity, but believes it will take concerted effort to maintain and build momentum.

"It's very important that individuals from underrepresented groups see themselves reflected in those working within the conservation profession. Then, where those individuals are present, to recognise that it doesn't mean there aren't still barriers just because they are there. Barriers to accessing the sector are intersectional - that means we need to tackle them all in turn to create large-scale, long-lasting change. It's important to keep challenging the status quo."

With Heal Rewilding itself working hard to promote [equality, diversity and inclusion](#), Hannah Needham has her own vision of how she'd like jobs in the rewilding sector to look 20 years from now.

"By that stage, rewilding-related professions will be accessible to people wherever they're based - in the city or the countryside. It will no longer be the norm that those of us working in rewilding earn £10,000 less per year than our friends with comparable jobs in other sectors. Rewilding jobs will be valued and respected by government, business and society, open to and performed by people from across UK society. And the sector will be stronger and more productive for this."

"Rewilding offers solutions that could see us become the first generation in history to reverse the decline in nature and address the combined climate and ecological emergencies," says Ecosulis CEO Cain Blythe. "Transformative change such as this will require mobilisation of the talent, knowledge and cultural values of a broad cross-section of society. There is now a unique opportunity to make this happen."

"Ecosulis aims to be a catalyst for this change, accelerating rewilding on a global scale while creating a wilder, healthier and more inclusive world."

Press contacts

For more information about the Ecosulis rewilding internship programme and rewilding services, please contact Dr. Paul Jepson, Ecosulis Head of Innovation (paul.jepson@ecosulis.co.uk /+44 (0)7741669822).

About Ecosulis

As a leading ecological consultancy and contractor with significant rewilding expertise, Ecosulis specialises in accelerating nature recovery across the UK. Underpinned by our investment in cutting edge research, innovation and technology, we work on landscape-scale projects that support wild nature, benefit wider society and realise the nature restoration ambitions of our clients.

Dr. Paul Jepson, Ecosulis Head of Innovation, and Cain Blythe, Ecosulis CEO, co-authored "[Rewilding: The Radical New Science of Nature Recovery](#)", which was published in 2020 and is rapidly becoming one of the go-to books for those looking to learn more about the science of nature restoration.

For more information on Ecosulis, please visit www.ecosulis.co.uk.

Company Contact:

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Ecosulis

T. +44 (0)1235 612216

E. paul.jepson@ecosulis.co.uk

W. <https://www.ecosulis.co.uk/>

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