New film asks Scottish Government and public to choose rewilding

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An alliance of nature charities in Scotland is ramping up its call on the Scottish Government and people to choose rewilding at a critical moment in the country's political and environmental history with the launch of a new short film.

Despite Scotland's reputation as a place of natural beauty, from the dramatic peaks of Skye's Trotternish Ridge to the vast sweep of Glencoe, the Scottish Rewilding Alliance says the science tells a very different story. Scotland is one of the most nature-depleted places in the world.

As part of its campaign to make Scotland the world's first Rewilding Nation – a move backed by more than a dozen MSPs – the Alliance is hosting a free online event on Thursday 22 July to launch its new film 'Choices'.

The film presents its Scottish audience with a number of 'choices' about their relationship with nature.

These include do we choose to expand our natural pine forests into huge areas of trees, shrubs and wildflowers – a place full of bird song and wild animal tracks? To have flower rich meadows in our towns and cities and create places where our children can develop, explore and play? To ensure oceans teeming with fish, whales and dolphins – full of food and supporting coastal communities who rely on nature for their living?

The Alliance says people can help achieve these aspirations by supporting rewilding, which is the large-scale restoration of nature.

The live launch event will hear from a panel of people who have already chosen to make nature recovery a priority for their respective businesses and communities.

They include Lynn Cassells from Lynbreck Croft in the Cairngorms, Sophie Ramsay from Bamff Ecotourism estate in Perthshire, Will Goudy from the Seawilding project at Loch Craignish in Argyll, and Kevin Cumming from the Langholm Initiative in Dumfries and Galloway.

Mark Ruskell MSP from the Scottish Greens will deliver the event's keynote speech. On 15 June, Ruskell (Mid-Scotland and Fife) submitted a motion to the Scottish Parliament to make Scotland the world's first Rewilding Nation. The motion was backed by polling in which 76% of Scots expressing an opinion supported rewilding, with just 7% opposed.

Steve Micklewright, Convenor of the Scottish Rewilding Alliance and Chief Executive of Trees for Life, said: "As Scotland readies itself for the United Nations Climate Change Conference COP26 in Glasgow later this year, the Scottish Government needs to demonstrate global leadership by prioritising rewilding.

"If the SNP makes a deal with the Scottish Greens to create a majority in Holyrood, we're asking that it includes a promise to rewild at least 30% of Scotland's land and sea by 2030. This can be achieved by restoring and expanding woodlands, moorlands, peatlands, rivers and marine habitats, and without loss of productive agricultural land.

"A community fund to make rewilding accessible from towns and cities, creating pollinator corridors and urban wildflower meadows could improve the population's mental health and wellbeing, while reducing pollution and making urban areas more enjoyable places to live."

Peter Cairns, Director of SCOTLAND: The Big Picture and host of Thursday's live event, said: "As a nation we're only just beginning to experience a baseline shift in our perception of Scotland's environment. While open hillside is still deemed by many to be beautiful, there's an increasing awareness that our celebrated landscapes are dramatically lacking in biodiversity, native woodland and wildlife.

"We're far past the point of inaction – that's no longer a choice we can afford to make. Despite many superb conservation initiatives, Scotland is lagging behind other countries, with its nature in steep decline."

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Declining or at risk species include red squirrels, wild cats, capercaillie and great yellow bumblebees. Recovery or return of species such as beavers, cranes, sea eagles and pine martens happen slowly, while elk and lynx are among the species already made extinct.

The Scottish Government has put 37% of Scotland's seas into forms of designation, but damaging activities such as scallop dredging and bottom trawling are only banned from less than 5% of coastal waters. Government assessments reveal that the extent of seabed habitats continues to decline. Wild salmon populations are at historically low levels. Seabirds are feeding their chicks plastic waste.

The Alliance recommends using rewilding as a natural solution for increasing absorption of atmospheric carbon, building rewilding into post-Covid green recovery plans, and establishing a native species recovery policy and a nationwide network connecting nature recovery projects.

To sign-up for the online launch of 'Choices' on Thursday 22 July, 19:00-20:00, visit https://bit.ly/ChoicesLaunch.

Ends

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