

Seven decades for Scotland to reach 30% nature recovery target at current rates, new figures show

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It could take seven decades before large-scale nature restoration is underway across 30% of Scotland's land, new figures from the Scottish Rewilding Alliance show.

The coalition of more than 20 organisations calculates that rewilding across Scotland is now underway across 2.5% of the country's land, with 195,615 hectares rewilding.

This is an increase of 32,985 hectares since the Alliance's last assessment one year ago, which reported that 2.1% of Scotland's land was rewilding.

In line with global targets, the Scottish Government is committed to protect at least 30% of its land and sea for nature by 2030. But at current rates of increase, it will take 65 years before major nature restoration is underway across 30% of Scotland's land.

Rewilding has been surging in recent years, and across Scotland there are now nearly 200 projects led by communities, charities, farmers, landowners, public bodies and others. But the Alliance says a significant increase in political support is now needed to reach the target.

Thousands of people across the country have backed the Alliance's call for Scotland to be declared the world's first Rewilding Nation, with nature recovery across 30% of its land and sea. This week the Scottish Rewilding Alliance is taking those voices to parliamentarians by speaking with MSPs at a dedicated display stand in the Scottish Parliament.

"Urgent political action is needed. Leaving it until 2090 before Scotland can benefit from nature recovery across 30% of its land is something we can't afford," said Steve Micklewright, Scottish Rewilding Alliance co-convenor and chief executive of Trees for Life.

"Politicians from all parties need to step up. With political will, rewilding can help us tackle the nature and climate emergencies while benefiting health, jobs, sustainable food production and re-peopling, and ensuring clean air and water, and healthy rivers and seas."

Rewilding 30% of Scotland can be achieved by restoring habitats including peatlands, native woodlands, wetlands, rivers and seas, while maintaining and benefitting productive farmland.

Scotland is ranked one of the world's most nature-depleted countries. Research shows that intensive agriculture and climate breakdown are having the biggest impacts on habitats and wildlife, with other threats including non-native forestry, pollution, and introduced species.

Polling shows that 80% of Scots think the Scottish Government should have policies in place to support rewilding.

But rewilding is not yet included in the Government's key policies and frameworks, such as the planning framework, net zero plan, and biodiversity strategy. There are fears that planned legislation, including the Land Reform Bill, may be less ambitious than planned when it comes to nature restoration.

Levels of marine recovery are unknown, due to government delays on ensuring effective Marine Protected Areas and lack of support for large-scale marine restoration. Based on known rewilding projects, however, the total area of Scotland's seas in recovery is believed to be dangerously low at less than 1%.

"With political leadership in line with its international commitments, Scotland could become a world leader in nature recovery – the opportunities and benefits are huge," said Karen Blackport, the Alliance's co-convenor and chief executive of Bright Green Nature.

"Declaring Scotland a Rewilding Nation would lead to meaningful action with ministers committing to restoring the country's natural environment through legislation and funding to enable rewilding and empower local communities."

The Rewilding Nation Charter at www.rewild.scot/charter, calling on the Government to declare Scotland

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a rewilding nation, has been signed by thousands of people. The campaign has been backed by high-profile names including Hollywood star Leonardo DiCaprio, actor Brian Cox, singer Nathan Evans, and activist Laura Young (Less Waste Laura).

At this week's display in the Scottish Parliament, MSPs will be invited to sign the Rewilding Nation Charter, hear from constituents, and play a specially designed rewilding game outlining the crucial importance of natural processes.

Company Contact:

Scottish Rewilding Alliance

T. 07753 488146

E. richardbuntingpr@gmail.com

W. <https://www.rewild.scot>

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