

Three-quarters of Scots support rewilding says new research

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Findings come as call launched for Scotland to become world's first 'Rewilding Nation'

More than three quarters of Scots support rewilding in Scotland, according to research conducted for the Scottish Rewilding Alliance, a coalition of over 20 organisations.

The findings come as the Alliance launches a campaign calling on the Scottish Government to declare Scotland the world's first Rewilding Nation, with a commitment to rewilding 30% of the country's land and sea within a decade, ahead of the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26) to be held in Glasgow in November.

A new opinion poll shows that 76% of Scots support rewilding – the large-scale restoration of nature to the point it's allowed to take care of itself – with just 7% opposed.

The Rewilding Nation campaign kicks off today (17 February), with an inspiring new animation narrated by wildlife presenter and filmmaker Gordon Buchanan showing how rewilding can help make Scotland a place where nature recovers, wildlife flourishes and people prosper.

"The world faces overlapping nature, climate and health crises, but Scotland has the opportunity to show bold leadership by becoming the world's first Rewilding Nation. We have the space, political influence and public backing to become a world leader in saving nature and ourselves," said Steve Micklewright, Convenor of the Scottish Rewilding Alliance and Chief Executive of Trees for Life.

With habitats and species being eradicated rapidly worldwide, the United Nations has declared 2021-2030 the Decade of Ecosystem Restoration. The Scottish Government has committed itself to bold action to tackle the crisis facing biodiversity through its Edinburgh Declaration.

Yet far from being the nature-restoration trailblazer it could be, and despite many superb conservation initiatives, Scotland is lagging behind other countries – with nature in steep decline and its landscapes among the world's most nature-depleted.

Only 1.5% of Scotland's land is national nature reserves and just 4% native woodland, while 25% is severely nature depleted and does not support the nature-rich forests, peatlands and river systems it should. Rural landscapes now support fewer people than previously.

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.

"It's past time to reboot our relationship with the natural world, and Scotland can lead the way. By working with nature instead of against it, rewilding can restore life to hills, glens, rivers and seas – while tackling climate breakdown and offering fresh opportunities for farming and local economies," said Rebecca Wrigley, Chief Executive of Rewilding Britain.

The Alliance says rewilding at least 30% of Scotland's land and sea by 2030 can be achieved by restoring and expanding woodlands, moorlands, peatlands, rivers and marine habitats, and without loss of productive agricultural land.

Hugh Raven, Chair of Open Seas, said: "The new opinion poll shows people know that nature's health is our nation's wealth. Incentivising lower impact fisheries around our coastline would help degraded habitats and fish populations recover, and regenerate our harbours and coastal towns. Recovery in places like Lamlash Bay shows what can be achieved by communities, but we urgently need to rewild

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larger areas of our seas.”

Tom Bowser, farm owner and Ranger with Argaty Red Kites, said: “Declaring ourselves a Rewilding Nation would be a powerful statement of intent that we’re serious about tackling the climate and nature crises, reconnecting people with nature, and regenerating our communities.”

The Alliance recommends using rewilding as a natural solution for increased 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 restoration projects.

“We’re being seriously outpaced by climate breakdown and biodiversity loss, so trying to save nature piecemeal isn’t enough. Scotland has the opportunity to restore the web of life that supports our health and wellbeing, while acting as a rewilding inspiration globally,” said Peter Cairns, Director of SCOTLAND: The Big Picture.

For more details and to view the Scottish Rewilding Alliance’s new animation, Rhythms of Life, following its launch on the evening of 17 February see www.rewild.scot.

Ends

Notes to editors

* United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration: www.decadeonrestoration.org

* Scottish Government’s Edinburgh Declaration on post-2020 global biodiversity framework: www.gov.scot/publications/edinburgh-declaration-on-post-2020-biodiversity-framework/

* COP26: <https://ukcop26.org>

* 1,000 people were asked for their views on rewilding in the opinion poll conducted by market research agency Survation (www.survation.com) on behalf of the Scottish Rewilding Alliance.

* Join the Scottish Rewilding Alliance as it calls for Scotland to become the world’s first Rewilding Nation. Register here: <http://rewildingnation.eventbrite.co.uk> Weds, 17 February 2021, 19:00 – 20:00 GMT

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