

SHORT COMMUNICATION

## The surprising benefits of rewilding in ecological restoration

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Ecological restoration is a critical endeavor in our efforts to heal and rejuvenate our planet's ecosystems. Among the various approaches to restoration, "rewilding" has emerged as an exciting and effective method. In this article, we will explore the concept of rewilding, its surprising benefits, and its role in the restoration of our natural world.

**Keywords:** Shallow lakes, Bottom sediment, Carbon burial rate.

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### Introduction

Rewilding is a conservation philosophy and practice that seeks to restore ecosystems to their natural, self-regulating state by reintroducing keystone species, reducing human intervention, and allowing natural processes to resume. The aim is to create thriving, biodiverse landscapes that closely resemble their pre-human, wild conditions.

While rewilding can take various forms, it often involves the following key principles:

Reintroducing species that have been extirpated (locally extinct) from an area, especially apex predators and keystone species, to restore ecological balance. Revitalizing degraded habitats and creating suitable conditions for native flora and fauna to flourish. Minimizing human interference, such as the cessation of livestock grazing, to allow natural processes to unfold. Allowing ecosystems to evolve naturally over time, promoting the growth of native vegetation and the return of wildlife.

The concept of rewilding is not just about ecological restoration; it carries with it a range of surprising benefits that ripple through ecosystems, communities, and even human well-being:

Perhaps the most apparent benefit of rewilding is its ability to enhance biodiversity. By reintroducing key species and creating healthier habitats, rewilded areas often experience a resurgence in native flora and fauna, fostering greater species diversity. Rewilding helps restore ecological balance and resilience. Reintroduced predators, such as wolves or big cats, can control herbivore populations, preventing overgrazing and allowing plant communities to recover. This, in turn, supports numerous other species. Healthy, rewilded ecosystems act as significant carbon sinks, sequestering carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and helping mitigate climate change. Rewilded landscapes provide essential ecosystem services such as clean water, pollination, and disease regulation. These services benefit both nature and human societies. Rewilding efforts can boost tourism and create economic opportunities for local communities. People are drawn to rewilded areas to witness the return of charismatic species and enjoy the beauty of restored landscapes. Rewilding can help communities reconnect with their natural heritage and cultural traditions, fostering a sense of pride and stewardship. Access to wild, natural spaces has been linked to improved mental and physical health. Urban rewilding projects, such as community gardens and green spaces, can provide residents with natural sanctuaries.

While rewilding offers a promising approach to ecological restoration, it is not without challenges and considerations:

Some rewilding efforts face resistance from local communities who may be concerned about the reintroduction of apex predators or changes in land use. Rewilding often requires changes in land management practices and may encounter legal and policy barriers.

Successful rewilding requires ongoing monitoring and research to assess its impact on ecosystems and human communities. Climate change poses a significant challenge, as it can disrupt the natural processes that rewilding seeks to restore.

Rewilding is more than just a conservation strategy; it's a holistic approach to healing our planet. By letting nature take the reins, we can not only restore biodiversity and ecosystem health but also reap a multitude of surprising benefits. The successes of rewilding projects around the world demonstrate the remarkable resilience of nature when given the opportunity to rebound.

As we face the interconnected challenges of biodiversity loss, climate change, and habitat degradation, rewilding offers a beacon of hope. It reminds us that we are not separate from nature but an integral part of it. By working with nature and allowing it to thrive, we can secure a more sustainable and harmonious future for ourselves and the countless species we share this planet with. Rewilding serves as a testament to our capacity to restore and rejuvenate the natural world, leaving a legacy of ecological richness for generations to come.

## **Description**

Rewilding initiatives around the world have showcased the remarkable transformations that can occur when nature is given a chance to recover. Here are a few inspiring success stories:

The reintroduction of gray wolves in Yellowstone in the 1990s has had a cascading effect on the entire ecosystem. The wolves' presence helped control the elk population, allowing vegetation to rebound and in turn attracting a greater variety of birds and mammals. This vast rewilding project in the Netherlands saw the creation of a diverse wetland ecosystem after the removal of farmland. It now hosts a thriving population of large herbivores and has become a paradise for birdwatchers. The conversion of a traditional English farm into a rewilded landscape has brought back a variety of native species, including nightingales, turtle doves, and purple emperor butterflies. This rewilding project has become a model for sustainable agriculture and conservation. In the Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan, the Tenzinling Nature Park showcases the successful rehabilitation of injured and rescued animals, such as the Himalayan takin and snow leopards, before their release back into the wild. The Chinese government's reforestation efforts in the Loess Plateau have transformed a severely degraded landscape into a green and productive region, benefiting both the environment and local communities.

As the world grapples with accelerating environmental challenges, the concept of rewilding is gaining momentum and evolving to meet new complexities and opportunities. Here are some trends and considerations that may shape the future of rewilding:

Rewilding efforts are increasingly focusing on larger landscapes or even entire regions. These initiatives recognize that nature knows no boundaries, and restoring connectivity between ecosystems is essential for long-term success. Urban rewilding projects are becoming more common, transforming abandoned lots, rooftops, and brownfield sites into green spaces teeming with biodiversity. These projects offer urban residents opportunities to connect with nature. Many rewilding projects now prioritize partnerships with Indigenous communities, acknowledging their deep knowledge of and connection to the land. Indigenous peoples often play a critical role in ecological restoration efforts. Rewilding is increasingly seen as a strategy for building climate resilience. Restored ecosystems are better equipped to absorb and adapt to climate-related challenges, such as extreme weather events and changing precipitation patterns. Public involvement in rewilding initiatives is growing. Citizen science programs, community-led reforestation, and urban conservation efforts are empowering individuals to take an active role in restoring nature. Advances in technology, such as satellite imagery and genetic analysis, are aiding rewilding efforts by providing valuable data for monitoring and decision-making. Beyond land-based rewilding, efforts are emerging to restore marine ecosystems, including coral reefs and seagrass beds. These underwater initiatives are vital for preserving ocean biodiversity. Innovative funding models, such as payments for ecosystem services and biodiversity offsetting, are being explored to finance rewilding projects. The reintroduction of keystone species, often referred to as "ecosystem engineers," is a central aspect of rewilding. These species, like beavers or elephants, have a profound impact on their environments, shaping ecosystems for the benefit of other species. Recognizing that ecosystems are dynamic and ever-changing, rewilding efforts increasingly adopt adaptive management approaches. This means being flexible and responsive to new information and changing conditions.

In the face of the ongoing biodiversity crisis and climate change, rewilding represents a powerful tool in our conservation toolkit. However, its success depends on a global commitment to prioritize and invest in nature restoration.

Governments must enact policies that support rewilding, including protected area designations, land-use planning that promotes habitat connectivity, and regulations that address invasive species and overexploitation. Raising awareness about rewilding's benefits and importance is crucial. Public support can drive political will and private investment in these initiatives. Continued research is necessary to refine rewilding techniques, understand their ecological impacts, and assess long-term outcomes. Monitoring and evaluation are essential to ensure rewilding projects remain effective. Adequate funding is required for rewilding efforts. This includes government grants, private philanthropy, corporate support, and innovative funding mechanisms. As many ecosystems cross national borders, international collaboration is essential. Nations must work together to address transboundary conservation challenges.

## Conclusion

Rewilding is a transformative concept that is reshaping how we think about ecological restoration and our relationship with the natural world. It represents a hopeful vision of a future where nature is not just protected but allowed to flourish on its own terms. The surprising benefits of rewilding extend far beyond ecological health; they encompass improved human well-being, economic opportunities, and a deeper spiritual connection to the planet. Rewilding is a testament to the resilience of nature when given the chance to rebound. As we stand at a pivotal moment in the history of our planet, rewilding serves as a reminder that our actions can either accelerate the decline of ecosystems or help them recover and thrive. It calls us to reevaluate our relationship with nature and embrace a stewardship role that honors the intricate web of life on Earth. In doing so, we can shape a future where biodiversity flourishes, ecosystems regenerate, and humanity lives in harmony with the wild world that sustains us all.


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