

# Rewilding Discourses

Evaluating different discourses of rewilding amongst land-use  
stakeholders in the UK

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## 1 Abstract

Rewilding- the restoration of natural processes, sometimes including animal reintroductions - is drawing increasing popular and academic interest as a radical approach to conservation and land management, but is plastic term with contested and sometimes conflicting definitions. Popular polemical presentations of rewilding have contributed to raising awareness of issues in current conservation policy, which focusses on maintaining specific habitats in a steady-state. At the same time, conflict and controversy has been created as existing land users perceive themselves to be under threat from a new movement to rewild the landscape.

A series of 18 semi-structured interviews were conducted with a range of stakeholders from Wales and Scotland including members of rewilding NGOs, the farming community, and professional ecologists, to answer the question:

*“What are the discourses of nature and the environment that both inform and challenge rewilding projects in the UK?”* and the subsidiary question:

*“Why do people associate with and reproduce these different discourses?”*

Significant differences, as well as agreements, were discovered between respondents. Reintroduction of carnivores such as wolves and lynx to Britain was generally deemed unrealistic in the short term. There was also broad support for the role farmers are playing to increase biodiversity and habitat under existing agri-environment schemes, and general agreement that such schemes need revising to facilitate greater integration of food production and conservation.

Divergent perceptions of current land management were expressed, a key difference lying between the value ascribed to culturally and naturally produced landscapes. Amongst rewilding advocates there was a lack of distinction made

between romantic desires to return to a pristine “wilderness” and the move towards “wildness” as a process.

To move forward, the rewilding movement needs to clarify its goals of restoring natural processes rather than attempting to return to a historical baseline. Greater mediation and bridge-building is required between all stakeholders.

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### 3 Table of Contents

1	Abstract .....	ii
2	Acknowledgments .....	iv
3	Table of Contents .....	v
4	List of Tables .....	vi
5	List of Figures.....	vi
6	Abbreviations.....	vi
7	Introduction.....	1
8	Literature Review.....	4
8.1	Origins and Definitions .....	4
8.2	Shifting Baselines.....	5
8.3	Land sharing or land-sparing? .....	7
8.4	How wild is wild? .....	8
8.5	Animal reintroductions.....	10
8.6	Contested natures and Inner Rewilding .....	12
8.7	Misanthropy and “forced rewilding.” .....	14
8.8	Objectives and scope of the present investigations.....	15
9	Methodology .....	15
9.1	Sampling strategy and interview protocol .....	16
9.2	Analysis.....	18
10	Results .....	18
10.1	What are the dominant debates within rewilding in Britain?.....	19
10.1.1	<i>Definitions and use of the word “Rewilding” .....</i>	<i>19</i>
10.1.2	<i>Carnivore reintroductions .....</i>	<i>24</i>
10.1.3	<i>Herbivores.....</i>	<i>27</i>
10.1.4	<i>Stepping back: how much can we allow natural processes to take over?.....</i>	<i>28</i>
10.2	Attitudes to wilderness and nature.....	29
10.2.1	<i>Visions of landscape.....</i>	<i>29</i>
10.2.2	<i>Inner rewilding.....</i>	<i>32</i>
10.3	Productive land-use.....	37
10.3.1	<i>Forestry and woodlands.....</i>	<i>37</i>
10.3.2	<i>Upland Sheep farming .....</i>	<i>39</i>
10.4	Cultural value of farming.....	44
10.5	Rewilding and Conservation Policy .....	47
11	Conclusion .....	49
12	APPENDIX 1 Interviewee Disclaimer.....	52
13	APPENDIX 2 Interview schedule.....	53
14	References.....	54

## 4 List of Tables

Table 1: Principle rewilding strategies, approaches and interpretations .....	5
Table 2 Summary of interviewee by stakeholder group .....	19
Table 3 Summary of interviewees by location .....	19

## 5 List of Figures

Figure 1 Carrifran Wildwood, Scottish Borders Picture Credit: Graham Strouts .....	1
Figure 2 Spectrum of protected areas and management intensity .....	9
Figure 3 Trees regenerating in an enclosure at Cwm Idwal, North Wales Photo Credit: Graham Strouts .....	10
Figure 4 mosaic landscape at Hafod y Llan National Trust Farm, Snowdonia National Park Phot Credit: Graham Strouts .....	42

## 6 Abbreviations

NIA.....Nature Improvement Areas  
NNR...National nature Reserves  
SSSI....Site of Special Scientific Interest  
RSPB...Royal Society for the Protection of Birds



Figure 1 Carrifran Wildwood, Scottish Borders Picture Credit: Graham Strouts

## 7 Introduction

Rewilding has been defined as a process

*“to restore self-regulating ecosystems, with a strong emphasis on the role of top-down control of ecosystems by large predators.”*

(Soule and Noss 1998).

A discourse has been defined as *“groups of statements that structure the way a thing is thought, and the way we act on the basis of that thinking”* (Rose 2001 p.136).

Public and academic interest in rewilding has increased rapidly in recent years, with multiple discourses emerging around the term in both academic and public forums (Lorimer et al

2015; Svenning et al 2015). In the US, public interest has been galvanized by the relatively high-profile reintroduction of wolves to Yellowstone national park (Ripple and Beschta 2004). In Europe, the NGO *Rewilding Europe*, initiated in 2011, now has 43 member projects from 18 countries, covering 3.7million hectares of land at some stage of the process of rewilding (Rewilding Europe 2015). The charity *Rewilding Britain*, inspired by George Monbiot's book *Feral* (Monbiot 2014), was established in 2015, with the stated aim of establishing three core areas of rewilded land of 100,000ha each by 2030 (Rewilding Britain 2015).

Romantic ideals and the appeal of a novel form of radical conservation has so far left collation of a strong scientific evidence base lagging behind (Corlett 2016). This has lead to diverse definitions of rewilding which has become a plastic term, with multiple interpretations (Jørgensen 2014).

Rewilding has been as a holistic process for ecological restoration and resilience (Monbiot, 2013, Jepson and Shepers 2016) and a tool for delivering ecosystem services as part of a suite of technologies for land management (Navarro and Pereira 2015). Other researchers have cautioned about unintended consequences and over-reach from expectations about what rewilding can achieve (Nogués-Bravo et al 2016), while more traditional land users may see their more conservative values threatened by land-use changes demanded by rewilding (Schnitzler 2014, Rebanks 2015).

Beyond its role in conservation, rewilding is also proposed as a remedy for social and psychological problems considered to be part of a "modern malaise" brought on through industrialization, consumerism and loss of contact with the natural world (Taylor 2004). By contrast, ecomodernists, while acknowledging the therapeutic benefits of contact with nature, see rewilding as something that is facilitated by more modernization, with increasingly intensive and efficient energy and food-production technologies potentially freeing up more land for wild nature (Lewis 2015).

There is an increasing recognition by ecologists and conservationists that habitat and biodiversity protection are as much social issues as ecological ones, which is reflected in the

rise in popularity of inter-disciplinary research (Moon and Blackman 2014). Different groups such as farmers, hillwalkers and conservationists may hold very different values concerning how they feel the countryside should be used. Within rewilding itself, differing interpretations could lead to widely differing policy outcomes. Following this understanding, this dissertation sets out to address the research question:

*“What are the discourses of nature and the environment that both inform and challenge rewilding projects in the UK?”*

and the subsidiary question:

*“Why do people associate with and reproduce these different discourses?”*

Related concepts such as “nature” (Proctor 1998), and “wilderness” (Oelschlaeger, M. 1991, Cronon 1996), as well as environmental issues such as climate change (Nisbet 2014) and wind farm development (Woods 2003) have been subjected to similar analysis to reveal the sometimes hidden or unconscious meanings underpinning such terms, including deep-rooted historical and cultural associations. To apply a similar analysis for “rewilding”, the method of semi-structured interviews was chosen to attempt to uncover and understand meanings which otherwise may not be directly observable or identifiable through more quantitative methods such as formal surveys (Moon and Blackman 2014).

Rewilding strategies have implications for a whole range of public policy issues, in particular the future of farming and conservation policy post-Brexit, and with debates becoming potentially more fractious between competing interests, it is becoming increasingly important to find forums in which different perspectives are voiced and listened to.

## 8 Literature Review

### 8.1 Origins and Definitions

The term “rewilding” has its roots in environmental activism and was first used by *Earth First!* co-founder Dave Foreman in 1990 (Fraser, 2011), who subsequently co-founded the Wildlands Project in the US. Rewilding entered the academic literature in 1998 with the publication in north America of a paper by Soule and Noss who defined it by the “3Cs”: extensive *core areas* of protected land with high levels of biodiversity; wildlife *corridors* providing connections between the core areas; and *carnivores*- the re-introduction of top predators to restore the full functioning of the eco-system through their regulatory behaviours (Soule and Noss 1998). Since then, the term has been adopted in a malleable and plastic way both by activists and within academic research, comprising various pre-existing approaches to conservation as well as promoting new ones (Jørgensen 2014, Nogues-Bravo et al 2016).

Some of the main rewilding strategies for conservation are summarized in Table 1, along with examples of sites where they are being practiced.

*Trophic rewilding*, refers to the reintroduction of missing trophic levels, generally carnivores which are deemed to have top-down control over the wider plant and animal communities (Soule and Noss 1998; Svenning et al 2015);

*Pleistocene rewilding* also refers to trophic rewilding, but with a specific baseline of restoring the megafauna that became extinct at the end of the Pleistocene era, between 13,000 and 10,000 years ago (Donlan et al 2005; Zimov 2005);

*Naturalistic grazing* seeks to recreate the open wood pastures maintained by wild herbivores, including use of taxon replacement (Vera 2000);

*Active restoration* is a pre-existing approach, not necessarily specifically associated with rewilding but often used in conjunction with other rewilding approaches, and typically involves tree planting, often within extensive fenced areas (Ashmole and Ashmole 2009);

*Productive land abandonment* is a passive approach involving the withdrawal of management by default or by design, as for example where agricultural land is left to natural

succession, often regenerating with scrub and woodlands (Navarro and Pereira 2015). These last two approaches are more applicable to the European context.

*Novel ecosystems* are new ecologies that have been observed to emerge after disturbance, for example the introduction of invasive species. This is not specifically a rewilding strategy, but is proposed as an alternative to attempting to re-create historical baselines (Marris 2014).

*Abiotic rewilding* applies to rewilding of natural features, include re-meandering of canalized rivers (Tweed Forum 2016), and may be carried out in conjunction with any of the above approaches.

Type	Description	Reference	Sites
Trophic rewilding/ “active rewilding”;	Cores, Corridors, Carnivores	Soule and Noss 1998	Yellowstone; Vincent Trust
	Pleistocene rewilding	Donlan et al 2005 Zimov 2005	Pleistocene Park, Siberia
	Naturalistic Grazing	Lorimer et al 2015 Greenaway 2011	Ostvaardersplassen Knepp Castle
	“Active restoration”: Tree planting;	Ashmole and Ashmole 2009; Wild Ennerdale (2016)	Carrifran Wildwood; Wild Ennerdale
Abiotic rewilding	River Re-meandering	Svenning et al 2015 Tweed Forum 2016	Eddleston Water Project
“passive rewilding”	land abandonment	Navarro and Pereira 2015	Cwm Idwal, Wales
	“New wild”/ Novel ecosystems	Marris 2014 Wilkinson 2004	Ascension Island

*Table 1: Principle rewilding strategies, approaches and interpretations*

## 8.2 Shifting Baselines

*“Taken as a whole, rewilding discourse seeks to erase human history and involvement with*

*the land and flora and fauna.”*

(Jørgensen, D. 2014)

Despite the emphasis on restoration of natural processes, much rewilding discourse has been focused, either implicitly or explicitly, on romantic ideas of restoring past ecologies to something assumed to be more “natural”, and before widespread human influence on the environment, raising the question of shifting baselines (Alagona et al 2012).

For example, Monbiot, who’s 2014 book *Feral* has played an influential role in driving public debates on the issue, rejects the traditional conservationist approach which he sees as an attempt to “freeze living systems in time” and “manage nature as if tending a garden” while at the same time strongly advocating trophic rewilding and mega-fauna replacement with reference to assumed ecological assemblies in history or pre-history (Monbiot 2014 p.8).

In the US, a baseline prior to European settlement in A.D. 1492 is generally assumed, influenced by ideas from 1960s anthropology which saw pre-agricultural tribal societies as having lived in a natural balance with their environments (Kaplan 2000). However, there is strong evidence to suggest that early humans had extensive impact on the natural environment, using fire as an aid to hunting (Chase 1987; Diamond 2007) and causing megafauna extinctions (Sandom et al 2014).

Perceptions of what a rewilded landscape might look like may vary considerably then, depending on aesthetics and differing baseline assumptions. For example, the Trees for Life restoration project in Scotland aims to recreate vast swathes of the continuous forest that was presumed to have once covered most of the Highlands. Closed forest cover did once cover much of Scotland some 5000 years ago (Smout 2000) but much earlier, before humans arrived, large herbivores would have maintained a much more open mosaic (Sandom et al 2014b).

*Pleistocene rewilding* aims to recreate these conditions believed to have been present at the end of the Pleistocene approximately 11,700 years ago, even proposing use of fossil DNA to

ultimately resurrect extinct animals such as mammoths (Church and Regis 2012; Shapiro 2015).

To avoid such baseline disputes, Navarro and Pereira (2015) are careful to distinguish *ecological rewilding* as a tool for management, rather than an attempt to recreate past ecologies. Ecological rewilding acknowledges that conditions have changed so much that there can be no return to the time before agriculture, and we now manage complex socio-ecological systems in which humans are deeply embedded. This is a distinctively European approach, with a focus much more on restoring ecological processes such as succession and disturbance than with animal reintroductions, and is open to the potential for “novel ecosystems” to emerge, in some cases made up of plant species which are currently controlled as invasive (Marris 2014, Pearce 2015).

A distinction should be made, then, between “*wilderness*” -which retains connotations of returning to a previous state “without humans”- and “*wildness*” which prioritizes natural processes, but which could be just as relevant to urban and peri-urban landscapes as to remote unpopulated areas (Chapman 2006, Prior and Brady 2015). This approach does still require a radical restructuring of current conservation policy to allow for the establishment of experimental rewilding sites (Jepson 2015).

### 8.3 Land sharing or land-sparing?

Rewilding is relevant to the *land-sparing/land-sharing* debate (Fischer et al 2014). Much post-war conservation policy has been focused on a *land-sharing* approach (Adams 2003), whereby farmland and conservation goals are integrated. *Land sparing* by contrast would tend to separate production from wildlife and reduce the total area of farmland required through increasing yields, thereby “saving” land for nature elsewhere. The more ambitious rewilding projects are likely to require some land-sparing, since reintroduction of large carnivores require extensive restoration at scale (Svenning et al 2015).

This is the approach advocated by “ecomodernism” which sees technological intensification of farming through precision agriculture and genetic engineering as essential to make space

for nature in the *Anthropocene*- the term proposed for the new geological epoch dominated by human impacts (Ecomodernist Manifesto 2015). An increase in land abandonment may indicate we are already close to “Peak Farmland”, meaning that efficiency gains will lead to less demand for new arable land even as production continues to rise (Ausubel et al 2015). Between 2000 and 2030 some 20million ha. is projected to fall out of agricultural use across Europe (Navarro and Pereira 2015, FAO 2016). At least some of this land will be rewilded as succession replaces management, a process also known as “forest transition” (Rudel et al 2016).

#### 8.4 How wild is wild?

The “restoration paradox” (Chapman 2006) refers to the contradiction implied by using management and intervention to restore- or recreate a state of wildness, where there is no management. Animal reintroductions (see below) could be seen as an extreme case of management, and many restoration projects at least require fencing and tree planting for an indeterminate number of years (Ashmole and Ashmole 2009). The question remains to what degree, and when, can we withdraw and allow natural processes to become dominant.

Various scales of relative “wild-ness” have been proposed, and attempts made to map areas along a continuum from least- to most-wild (Carver 2014). Gross (2014) suggests that in popular conception, rewilding must include the reintroductions of top carnivores, lynx or wolves, before many people perceive a place to have been truly “rewilded”. Jepson and Shepers (2016) posit a hypothetical 10-point scale of rewilding. Areas approaching something that might be considered intact wilderness with all trophic levels present would be graded at 9-10, while even reducing the frequency of mowing to allow more wildflowers to seed is considered a rewilding process, taking a meadow from stage 1 to stage 2. Lawton (2015) has produced a similar scale representing the degree of wilding for various projects (Figure 1).

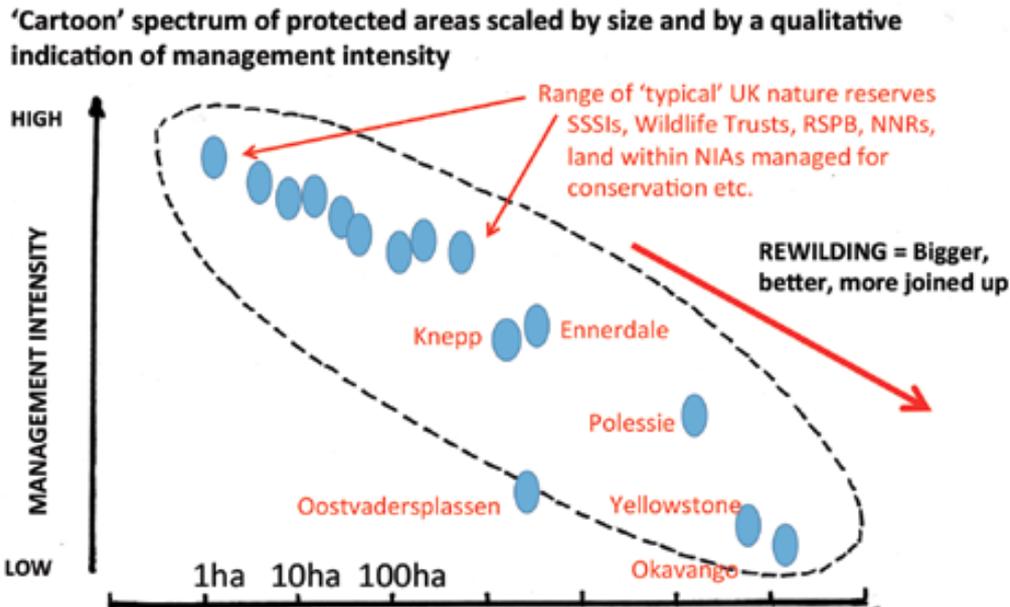


Figure 2 Spectrum of protected areas and management intensity

Source: Lawton (2015)

Rewilding Europe (2015) propose a similar scheme for assessing projects and landscapes by degrees of rewilding according to agreed scientific criteria. The importance of this lies in taking the focus away from the relatively rare environments where wolves can be reintroduced, allowing public support to be garnered more easily.

However, some surveys of public opinion have also shown considerable resistance to other landscape changes that would occur lower down a rewilding scale. While visitors to Snowdonia were found to have a generally positive attitude towards increasing tree cover in some areas (Rundell 2015), an Italian study found that local villager's attitude towards land abandonment and consequent changes in vegetation were generally very negative, with a strong sense of cultural and economic loss of the farming communities that had been present previously (Hochtl et al 2005).

Cultural values, then, are likely to play a strong role in determining the acceptance or otherwise of significant landscape changes. Some communities in Scotland are opposed to rewilding because they see associations with the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Highland clearances. This is particularly an issue where extensive fencing is involved, which has also caused conflicts with

ramblers groups in the Highlands, and could reduce ecological resilience by preventing natural processes such as gradual migration of woodlands (Fenton 2008; Somers 2012).



*Figure 3 Trees regenerating in an enclosure at Cwm Idwal, North Wales Photo Credit: Graham Strouts*

## 8.5 Animal reintroductions

Monbiot (2015) lists 15 species suitable for reintroduction to Britain including raptors, wild boar and some marine animals. A number of successful animal reintroductions have already been undertaken in the UK, including raptors, insects and herbivores (Wikipedia, n.d.). The Vincent Wildlife Trust (VWT n.d.) conducted a successful translocation of pine martens from Scotland to Wales for population enrichment in 2015. There are also active proposals to reintroduce the European lynx into Britain (Lynx Trust 2016).

Sandom and Macdonald (2015) identify three main groups of keystone animal reintroductions under consideration: large mammalian predators such as wolves and lynx; rooting animals such as wild boar; and dam builders such as beavers. The latter two groups

already have new populations- escapees in the case of boar in several locations in the south of England, and official and unofficial beaver populations in Scotland and an official release also in Devon.

Ecologically, boars are valued for ground disturbance which can break up the vegetation and facilitate seedling regeneration; while beavers dam rivers creating ecological niches and potentially aiding in flood mitigation (Busher and Dzieciolowski 1999, New Scientist 2015). Any animal introduction could subsequently become pests requiring control (Clements 1991).

By far the most controversial reintroduction is that of top carnivores. The most notable case of wolf reintroduction has been in the Yellowstone National Park in the US which is cited as a successful example of trophic rewilding (Ripple and Beschta 2004), with the wolves controlling elk populations and thus enabling woodland and scrub regeneration. Just how successful they have been at this is contested (Kauffman et al 2010; Marshall et al 2012). Cultural acceptance may be more problematic in the UK, where wolves have been absent since the early 17<sup>th</sup> century (Monbiot 2013), compared to just 70 years in Yellowstone.

There are significant socio-economic constraints to reintroductions, which cannot be undertaken without broad support from local communities who may attach great value to cultural landscapes (Lorimer et al 2015, Sandom and Macdonald 2015). Public support for carnivore reintroductions has also been found to be mixed. A survey in France showed vigorous opposition including protests and in some cases destruction of the animals after poaching sheep, even when compensation has been available (Enserink and Vogel 2006). Other surveys in Scotland (Nilsen 2007), Snowdonia (Rundell 2015) and across the Polish-Slovak border (Rewilding Europe 2013; Navarro and Pereira 2015) found more positive responses.

Animal reintroductions themselves may require high intensity management (Sandler 2009; Dawson et al 2011). The risks of migration beyond the designated area may be underestimated, while there are also cases of the introduced species failing to establish

(Ricciardi and Simberloff 2009; Noguez-Bravo et al 2016). Herbivore reintroductions to facilitate naturalistic grazing regimes have given rise to legal and ethical controversies when ostensibly wild animals were left to starve during harsh winters (Greenaway 2011, Lorimer et al 2015). Some scholars have also pointed to ethical issues arising from the internal contradiction of choosing specific breeds of animals that meet certain standards of “wildness”, while accepting the need to cull or remove others which fall outside of these boundaries, for example, after hybridization (Shelton 2004, von Essen and Allen 2016).

Meanwhile, across parts of the US as well as Europe, many wolf populations are making a come-back through natural migration, sometimes adapting to human- modified landscapes, indicating an increase in tolerance and a shift in philosophical values concerning the designation of “wild” (Buller 2008).

While the powerful image of the role charismatic carnivores play in trophic cascades may be beneficial in resurrecting interest in the conservation movement, the potential downside is unrealistic expectations and possibly the sidelining of complex realities in favour of a good story (Marris 2014).

## 8.6 Contested natures and Inner Rewilding

“Nature” and “wilderness” are not only separate entities but socially constructed concepts which have evolved and changed over history and vary from culture to culture (Nash 1982; Fitzsimmons 1989; Cronon 1996; Macnaghten and Urry 1998; Adams 2003). Various spectrums of thought have been proposed, with discourses of nature spanning from:

- nature conservation to deep ecology (Oelschlaeger 1991);
- radical environmentalism to “Promethian environmentalism” (Lewis 1992);
- and from Survivalism to Green Rationalism (Clayton and Myers 2009, from Dryzek, 1997).

The “darker green” end of these spectrums tends to hold a sacred conception of nature, often linked to the idea of a supposed “natural balance” found in ecosystems. Early ecology was largely based on Clements’ “organismal metaphor” (Clements 1916), which portrayed ecosystems as “super-organisms,” and drew on the western philosophy of the Great Chain of

Being (Botkin 2012). A second early influence on ecology was cybernetics (Odum 1981), which was influential in shaping both popular and scientific views of ecosystems as functioning like machines, a view perhaps itself shaped by the rise of computers that were being used to model the natural world by early ecologists (Botkin 2012). The machine analogy also supported the holistic view of nature as something that could easily unravel if it was disturbed too much by humans, for example by removing some of its parts (trophic levels).

Popularised by early conservation pioneers such as John Muir (Marris 2011), these ideas of a “balance of nature” and steady-state “ecosystems” arguably remain the most common popular conceptions of the natural world, and still influence environmental policy despite much contemporary ecological science now adopting more dynamic models (Perry 2002, Adams 2003; Botkin 2012). Nature has been found to be often far more stochastic and adaptable, while the “ecosystem” concept itself is the subject of ongoing controversy and debate as to its meaning and usefulness (O’Neill 2001).

Some approaches to rewilding may also harken back to this sense of “wholeness” and a romantic search for something felt to be lost in the modern world. So-called “inner rewilding” refers to perceived psychological or sometimes spiritual benefits of rewilding for human wellbeing. Of all the popular rewilding authors, Taylor (2005) most explicitly cites spiritual motivations for rewilding, and states that the wealth and relative security of the modern world has resulted in *“a primal fear of nature and her cycles of abundance and scarcity, growth and death, vibrancy and decay.”* (Taylor, p162)

More research would be required to establish specific benefits of “wilderness experience”. There is a large body of work supporting the physical and mental health benefits of outdoor activities and time spent in the natural world (Kaplan 1984, Clayton and Myers 2009), access to trees and natural spaces for urban dwellers (Cohen et al 2007), and popular hobbies such as gardening (Haith 2015). There is also some evidence for therapeutic benefits of wilderness experiences (Frumkin 2001, Schuster et al 2005), but there are many possible factors involved- including the influence of new experiences, solitude, sense of achievement

and danger (Ewert 2001), and few studies have controlled for “wilderness experience” alone (Clayton and Myers 2009).

Wilderness also has multiple negative cultural associations, including representing the antithesis of civilization, and fear of both external *Nature* and internal *human nature*, which could potentially be let loose should the barrier between nature and culture break down (Nash 1982, Harrison 1992). This juxtaposition is most famously explored in William Golding’s 1954 novel *Lord of the Flies* (Golding 1997). The alternative to the romantic view of nature as benevolent and nurturing for humanity is expressed in Tennyson’s 1850 poem *In Memoriam* as “Nature Red in Tooth and Claw” (Hunt 1970). Clearly, while there are undoubted therapeutic benefits to outdoor experiences in the world of nature, closeness to the natural and the wild does not guarantee security or well-being. Being *close to nature* carries risk and can lead to tragic outcomes (Krakauer, J. 1997).

### 8.7 Misanthropy and “forced rewilding.”

The conservation movement has been historically associated with misanthropy, and the forced removal of indigenous people in the early establishment of national parks such as Yosemite (Chase 1987, Dowie 2011), which Monbiot (1994) refers to as “*forced rewilding.*” Such a discourse reinforces the separation between humans and nature, implying that “wilderness” equates to the absence of humans and human influence. In this sense, wilderness is not so much something to be preserved, as something which is produced, as a cultural artifact, through the literal removal of people (Ginn and Demeritt 2008).

The darker side of misanthropic environmentalism still pervades more extreme rewilding discourses and can readily be found on online forums and blogs (see for example The Happy Anachronism blog, 2012; The Rewild West n.d.). Drastic reductions in human population, either forced or through some kind of ecological collapse, are seen by these writers as a necessary and even desirable pre-requisite to any genuine rewilding (Foreman 2015). At times, these views can seem uncomfortably close to certain strands of Nazi ideology, which was itself strongly informed by belief in the purity of pristine Nature, underpinned by their

mythology of the *urwald* (primeval forest) which they associated with the Fatherland and Aryan supremacy (Biehl and Staudenmaier 1995; Schama 1996).

## 8.8 Objectives and scope of the present investigations

The research presented here is designed to assess the range of discourses informing current rewilding debates in the UK, and to identify the differences and commonalities between positions both advocating and opposing rewilding.

## 9 Methodology

The literature review demonstrates that there are multiple discourses of rewilding, which are shown sometimes to be in conflict. However, the main drivers of the rewilding movement is mainly NGOs and private individuals rather than academics, and there has been little research to date identifying their main ideologies and motivations of, nor of other landusers who may be impacted such as the farming community.

The purpose of this research is to identify and interrogate the range of discourses that occur between these key stakeholders. A methodology of semi-structured interviews has been chosen for this purpose, since key aspects such as ontological positions regarding human-nature relationships will not be revealed from surveys quantifying levels of support or opposition to various aspects of rewilding.

Three broad categories of stakeholder form the focus of this research: rewilding advocates and activists; farmers and farming representatives; and ecologists and conservationists. The results of 18 semi-structured interviews conducted during June and July 2016 are presented. Time constraints meant that the research area was primarily confined to the upland areas of north and mid- Wales, although for comparison, two rewilding advocates in Scotland, a farmer's representative in Cumbria and park ranger in Exmoor were also interviewed.

In addition to the interviews, during the period of the research a field trip was conducted to the Carrifran Wildwood project in Scotland, and a public debate on rewilding at the Hay

Festival was also attended. Public debates and discussion in the media and social media were also followed throughout the research period.

An abbreviated version of grounded theory was employed (Cloke 2004). Abbreviated because, due to time constraints of the Masters dissertation, there has been no opportunity to return to the field for further research after the initial analysis, although there are several possible directions for future study suggested by the results.

A “moderate” constructivist position is adopted for this study. That is to say, while “pure” grounded theory is intended to be inductive, with theory grounded in and arising from the fieldwork, I begin with a contextualized stance from the literature review that shapes the initial research questions, then move to inductive analysis of the data to “*theorize connections between local worlds and larger social structures*”. (Charmaz 2006 p.133).

### 9.1 Sampling strategy and interview protocol

Initial “gatekeepers” for farmers and rewilding groups in this area were contacted and interviewed, and provided introductions to other candidates; some early interviewees also gave introductions to other interviewees, while others were suggested by friends and colleagues. Efforts were made to gain a spread of opinions and views from groups who might be expected to interpret rewilding differently, based on preparatory research, and the potential different discourses identified in the introduction.

Each interview lasted approximately one hour. Interviewees were asked to sign a disclaimer prior to each interview (Appendix 2). This was to ensure they were aware that the purpose of the research was for an MSc dissertation, that they agreed to be interviewed, that they knew they need not answer questions if they did not wish to and were free to end the interview at any time. It was explained that the interview would be recorded and later transcribed, but that the material would only be reproduced anonymously. Anonymity was considered essential for ethical reasons, and in order to facilitate more open sharing of views, particularly since the topic of discussion is controversial.

Most of the interviews were conducted at mutually suitable venues around north and mid-Wales. Two were conducted during a field trip to Scotland, and 5 were conducted via Skype. In addition to being recorded, detailed notes were made during each interview. Software used to record two of the Skype interviews was only partially successful, and the unrecorded sections of those interviews were reconstructed from notes. All subsequent Skype calls were recorded using the hand-held voice recorder.

As a guide for the interviews, a series of 20 relevant questions were drawn up (Appendix 1). These were not always adhered to rigidly, the objective being to establish a natural flow of conversation using the questions as guides more than fixed categories or as boxes to tick. The questions were designed to be specific enough to elicit useful responses, but flexible enough to allow the interviewee to interpret in their own way and lead the discussion to the areas they felt were important.

The interview process was to some extent iterative, with themes that were revealed as being more interesting or significant in early interviews helping to inform the focus of the later ones. For example, a question on the impact of windfarms was asked in early interviews, but was relegated to a less significant issue after early responses identified it as tangential given recent policy changes favouring off-shore installations. In this way, the interview process was able to become more focused and refined over the research period.

One of the main purposes of the interviews was to attempt to uncover the relationship between personal opinions, preferences, beliefs and motivations. There is a narrative element to the research then, with some of the early questions asking about changes they have experienced both in the world around them, in their own opinions and understandings, and how they came to the beliefs they currently have. Follow-up probing questions were used where appropriate to encourage respondents to consider more deeply *why* they took certain positions, or had certain preferences, in order to try to reveal underlying assumptions. This is especially important for the topic in hand, where the definition of the word *rewilding* is itself contested, and where respondents may be conflated in their own views, or where they may not have fully considered those questions themselves.

## 9.2 Analysis

A process of open coding was used initially to group the discourses on various topics that had been identified in the initial questions. These were thematically organized on the basis of normative statements on different issues- for example, different uses of the word “rewilding”; attitudes to sheep farming; differing perceptions of nature. Although an initial framework had already been established by the topics identified in the questions, other codes not previously identified emerged from the data. *In vivo* codes, arising directly from interview responses, were given particular attention for revealing participant’s priorities, perspectives and meanings.

## 10 Results

A total 18 interviews have been completed through the early summer of 2016. Each interviewee is assigned a code, “RW” simply meaning “Rewilding” followed by a number, which designates the order in which they were interviewed.

Interviews took place in North Wales, the Scottish borders. The following interviews were conducted by Skype: RW9,15,16,17,18.

Table 2 summarizes interviewees by background/stakeholder category;

Table 3 summarizes interviewees by home location.

The interviewees comprise the following broad categories of stakeholder group:

Category	Interviewees in each category	Total no. of interviewees
Farmers/farmer representatives	RW2; RW5; RW6; RW18	4
Rewilding advocates/NGOs:	RW4; RW7 and 7a; RW8; RW10; RW11; RW15; RW16;	7*
Foresters/forestry researchers	RW3; RW9;	2

Ecologists/conservationists	RW1; RW12; RW13; RW14;	4
Independent commentators:	RW17	1

*Table 2 Summary of interviewee by stakeholder group*

\*RW7 and RW7a are a couple; RW7 had agreed to be interviewed, and his partner RW7a was also present. Her contributions are identified in the text by the code “RW7a” although the two together are treated as one interview.

Region	Interviewee codes	Total
Wales	RW2,3,4,5,6; RW10,11,12,13,14,15,16,17	13
Scotland	RW7,7a,8,9,	3
Exmoor	RW1	1
Cumbria	RW18	1

*Table 3 Summary of interviewees by location*

The interview data will be broken down for discussion into four main areas: dominant debates within rewilding; “inner rewilding”- therapeutic and psychological motivations; farming, forestry and land-use; and rewilding and conservation policy.

## 10.1 What are the dominant debates within rewilding in Britain?

### 10.1.1 Definitions and use of the word “Rewilding”

Scholars from diverse perspectives have questioned the value of the term “rewilding”. Carver (2016) cites suggestions that “*nature-led eco-systems*” may be a more neutral and less threatening term, while Saunders (2016), in defence of existing conservation policy and expressing skepticism of much rewilding discourse, prefers “*shared-willed land*” to include human involvement. Navarro and Pereira (2015) focus on what they call *ecological rewilding*, which aims to restore ecological processes, and avoids any suggestion of a romantic or

retrospective goal of return to an (undefined) baseline. Interviewees revealed different discourses and understandings of the concept of rewilding, expressing concerns about public perception, and often dissatisfaction with the term itself.

*I've never been that happy with it [the term "rewilding"]...the "re-" bit I think, because were looking beyond conservation, and it gives the idea that we are trying to recreate something rather than looking forward...The word has that connotation and a lot of environmental policy also seems to be about trying to recreate something that is not there any more, rather than something forward and dynamic...rewilding doesn't have a menu. (RW10)*

RW15 acknowledged the issues around the word with its implications of "going back" but suggested that the word is still meaningful if it is understood as a process of *going back to a state of wildness*- without having to specify what that state actually looks like, or it needing to refer to any particular state that would be known or identified in advance:

*So the process is rewilding and the ultimate end point- the ambition, is to have a fully functioning wild eco-system where natural processes don't just dominate, but they are the only processes going on. (RW15)*

Some were concerned about public perception surrounding the word- *to talk about rewilding is right out there* (RW1)- and a group in Scotland had avoided the word entirely for having "a lot of baggage" associated with it, choosing "reviving" as more neutral than "restoring".

Interviewees from the farming community were also aware of these issues. RW6 in particular discussed the shifting base-lines of rewilding and current conservation policies. For example, while much of the Amazon may have disappeared in the just the past 20 years, to return to the same (relatively) untouched state in Wales would mean going back centuries, long before living memory:

*So they have to accept that they are doing is creating a brand-new ecosystem and if that is what they want then so be it, but don't expect curlews and other open moorland species to be there if it is covered by oak forest. (RW6)*

RW6 also directly linked some of the aspirations or implications of rewilding discourse with the forced eviction of native Americans from Yellowstone when the National parks in the US were first established. For him, rewilding strongly implied, , that humans were no longer seen as part of nature, that the specific role we have carved out in ecological function as managers of the landscape has been swept aside and ignored, as if we have no place here at all:

*... people no longer regard us as animals. But we are top carnivores. We have a God complex as if we think we are no longer part of nature. So you can remove lynx...[or] other species and it causes damage because of the explosion of deer numbers or whatever, but when it comes to the removal of humans who have been controlling badgers all crows for thousands of years, the same equation doesn't run.. (RW6)*

Castree (2001) supports this position when pointing out that both “ecocentrists” and technocratic geographers share the same ontology of seeing nature as separate from humanity, either something “to get back to” or to dominate and control.

Ecologists also took exception to the word rewilding:

*Well first of all I should say I have a real issue with the word rewilding in the UK. I think it's completely misleading to the general public the idea that there is this consideration of making it completely wild. I don't like using the word “wild” in the UK...the U.K.'s asset is its cultural history, and the interconnectedness between culture and the landscape, that is what is so unique about the UK... (RW13)*

In much the same way as described by RW4 above with regard to local perceptions of nature and the human-nature relationship, RW18, a farmers' representative, felt the term was experienced as threatening to their community:

*We had George Monbiot come to the AGM of the Federation of Cumberland commoners two years ago, so it certainly something that commoners feel is a threat to their way of life; commoning has been taking place for over 1000 years... It used to be that about 50% of England was common land and now it is only 3%, so Commoners feel that their way of life is being threatened by this attempt to re-wild, and they feel that they provide something of immense value to the country already, in terms of a managed landscape... we are part of a culture of shepherding, we are a pastoral society, so commoners feel they are very much the guardians of that tradition. (RW18)*

She found Monbiot to be a very polarizing influence- *"Monbiot is so rude about sheep farmers..."* and that while he did have some valid points to make about current conservation policy, he was perceived by farmers as being uncompromising and not interested in other points of view- *"He is entitled to his vision but he is not entitled to impose that on society."*

RW8 was quite explicit in adopting the mechanistic view of nature:

*Aldo Leopold's famous quote, "the first rule of intelligent tinkering is, to keep all the parts." So if you haven't kept all the parts you can't put it back together again. It's like a Toyota.*

-while RW17 was skeptical about how well trophic rewilding would be able to repair nature "by replacing the bits":

*I do get annoyed that some of the bucolic ideas of the rewilders: "Jays will fly from the lowlands to the uplands carrying a little acorn which will fall into the lovely sphagnum moss and regrow into this magnificent oak..." - it won't, it will be stunted, just so tall after 10 years and then an elephant will come and stand on it....(RW17)*

For RW17, climate change meant that there was no going back to an imagined past state of nature, and any ideas of restoring purely “native” vegetation should be discarded: in a warming climate, and with increasing numbers of tree diseases, rewilding requires being open to radically new environments in the future, and accepting the novel ecosystems that are likely to emerge.

He was highly critical of what he sees as an elitism amongst some in the rewilding community:

*... Personally of course I would love to have wolves howling up the back here, but we can't let ambition overrule the realities of the situation, and more than that I think there is a real arrogance, an elitism: "let's just play with this idea, it sounds great, I love lynx!"; Paul Jepson says, "this is punk conservation". (RW18)*

Rewilders were also criticized for proposing taking large areas of land to share with nature, rather than redistributing it to the local people. He identified an arrogance in the rewilding movement that simply assumed it knew best for the land, and that other opinions were not even discussed:

*you can't kick off the natives and then say "oh well, you're a tourist, you can come in" because you have paid to come in and see the lynx. I don't like the them-and-us aspect, it is society as a whole you are dealing with. (RW17)*

Instead, like RW13 above, rewilding was seen as something that needs to be fully integrated with people, and with current land practices including farming, and culture.

RW9 proposed a conciliatory way forward. While the debates around rewilding have been polarized, with too much focus on carnivore reintroductions, the heat generated has at least been beneficial in terms of getting the debates out into the open:

*We need many different landscapes and an integration providing many different services, and the problem is that often the debate gets sidetracked into different visions fighting their different corners....*

*...Overall though there is a lot more common ground amongst different groups than the public debate tends to imply...we need to find the common ground. (RW9)*

### 10.1.2 Carnivore reintroductions

While many respondents expressed support for the idea of wolf and lynx reintroduction in principle, few saw little likelihood in trying to reintroduce either wolves or lynx to Britain in the foreseeable future. The debate was considered too polarizing, and its emphases in the media potentially alienating, setting back the rewilding cause (RW1,10,13,15,17,18).

*...[you hear people say] “public opinion says that 90% of people want the lynx brought back in”, but by saying that they had divorced themselves from rural communities, that fault-line again, “you are either with us or you are against us.”*

(RW17)

RW10 and 11 expressed the strongest commitment, seeing it as a goal of *Rewilding Britain* to educate the public that humans can co-exist peaceably with large carnivores, but still did not expect to see it happen in their lifetimes.

Rewilders tended to emphasize the trophic role carnivores could play in controlling herbivores- and thus facilitating woodland regeneration (RW8, 10, 11, 14). For RW7, the lynx was the “highest priority” as a specialist roe deer hunter, expecting trophic rewilding to be viable in Scotland:

*... Since Yellowstone came over the parapet everyone has understood much better that controlling the numbers [of herbivores] is not the right way to look at it although it is the way we used to look at it. Changing the pattern of browsing is terribly important. (RW7)*

Others were skeptical:

*“I can’t see them having much impact [on herbivore populations].” (RW12).*

*... we want to introduce species, but will they do what we want them to do? There is a huge naivete... (RW17)*

An alternative motivation expressed by RW4 and RW16 was carnivore reintroductions as a moral duty, believing them to have a right to space for their own sake:

*A big part of what motivates me is about giving something back to nature- the other stuff, the trees, the animals, we take up too much space...I am absolutely not misanthropic, “get rid of them all”, but that said we definitely do take up more than our fair share of space, and more than our fair share of stuff, so from a justice point of view I feel the need to be fair to other brothers and sisters, so I wouldn’t give a damn if I never saw them because they are not there for me. (RW4)*

Echoing Monbiot (2014), RW10 expressed personal reasons for wanting to see carnivores:

*... just knowing they are out there because we were tracking by footprints in the snow and you go out and you find fresh footprints and you know a few hours before there was also, it makes the outdoor experience a lot richer. (RW10)*

The reality of living alongside carnivores may not match these romantic sentiments:

*... I’m afraid, much as I would love it personally, really, if you want wild beasts go and live in Romania. Go to Norway, that’s full of big beasts but they shoot 2000 lynx every year. (RW17)*

Such views were echoed by RW18:

*I think it is just a massive distraction from all sorts of other biodiversity...*

*... and I just think it is cloud cuckoo- land, you know introducing lynx into habitats that are not ready for them just means the lynx is going to die. It's not good for the lynx, it is not good for conservation...*

*...I think we can use payments and other fiscal incentives and lots of other ways to shift people towards protecting more biodiversity, and I don't think introducing lynx is going to actually improve habitat biodiversity. (RW18)*

One ecologist was opposed to the idea as offering little by way of improved ecology and having much more negative implications for farmers than others had suggested:

*Wolves I think are completely inappropriate...[lynx also], completely inappropriate. I was in the Alps and I saw the impact that wolves have on shepherds. Before I was on the fence... but now I see they are a serious problem. I met shepherds who looked haggard at the end of the summer; I meant one shepherd who only has a flock of three hundred and his flock was down to 200 after two years of wolf attacks. (RW13)*

Geographers researching in the French Alps have come to similar conclusions. Wolves have colonized regions of the French Alps from Italy since the early 1990s, with multiple eco-social implications and effects. (Buller 2008) These include a shift in perceptions regarding the aesthetic value of the landscape, from the *biosecurity* engendered by tranquil pastoral scenes, to a focus on *biodiversity*- the inclusion of wolves- which in this case has created a place with embedded danger, and consequent economic and emotional impacts on farmers. Given that the wolves have been attracted by the availability of human's livestock, and that counter measures used including fencing and large (non-native) Pyrenean guard dogs have detracted from the "wild" character, many questions are raised as to the nature of wilderness, wildness and rewilding in such a context.

As RW13 commented, *"the landscape did not look wild at all, there were like big roads down every valley. Well there are lots of valleys without roads, but lots of people use those mountains. It's not a wilderness"*.

### 10.1.3 Herbivores

Herbivores play an important role in the rewilding literature, partly through keeping woodlands open (Vera 2000). Although the degree of openness relative to canopy closure that existed historically is disputed, integration of larger herbivores, including cattle, in wood pasture can lead to more diverse habitats and allow better regeneration than sheep alone (RW8, 18).

Amongst rewilders however, different perspectives emerge:

*this is one of the disputes we have, I see them as grazing units, others see them as aesthetic tourist attractions. That is why the herds of wild horses are popular in Exmoor are seen to be really attractive, they look the way horses were supposed to look back in those days. Welsh ponies don't really fit with the aesthetic of this wild, prehistoric vision. (RW4)*

Cattle largely disappeared on much upland hill farming area, as they are much more expensive to keep, requiring daily visits to feed and water, and feeding all winter (RW13,14). An additional issue, of great concern to farmers, is the prevalence of TB (RW6).

With less sheep on the Welsh hills, other herbivores may move in. In Wales, this is likely to be goats, which themselves are listed as a controlled pest (RW6) rather than welcomed as a wild herbivore under existing regulation. The question was raised (RW13) as to whether there are necessarily any benefits in having wild herbivores, rather than farmed animals:

*how come the farmer can't do that with his animals, why can't it be domestic animals?*

This again exemplifies the disparity of discourses between rewilders who prefer to fill trophic levels with wild animals, and more traditional views which see humans and their farm animals as having done this adequately for a long time. If more sites follow the lead of Ostvaardersplassen towards more naturalistic grazing, there is likely to be an increase in similar ethical and legal issues concerning the status of the animals.

#### 10.1.4 Stepping back: how much can we allow natural processes to take over?

Rewilding is caught in the “restoration paradox” (Chapman 2006) in that to achieve the goal of reinstating natural processes, with little or no management, multiple management decisions need to be taken. Interviewees were aware of this issue to varying degrees and had a range of responses. For some, it is an emotional issue:

*...for many people there has been a very strong emotional attachment to this idea of a pristine primeval wilderness, quite spiritual, quite animal in our spirit, it might sound bonkers, but you have to admit that we do feel like that sometimes. (RW4)*

The alternative version of rewilding is not to go back, but to move forwards into a “new wild,” which could involve embracing novel ecosystems and plants now considered invasive, allowing new ecosystems allowed to emerge:

RW8:

*Then there is the Sika deer, they might come in as well. You might end up with Sika and Sitka! But that might not be a bad thing -it would be a new ecosystem....*

*So if we step back it is only in the context of what happened in the past- we put Sitka spruce in, we've killed all the wolves all the bears, the lynx, so it is all in that context, so stepping back is not really stepping back, it's no use trying to re-wild things when we have already trashed everything. How can that be rewilding?*

These views were echoed by RW10 and 14: the environment has already been so thoroughly impacted, it will not easily revert to a “wild” state without management for some time.

RW10 nevertheless argued that current environmental policy was “not working” but things had often improved where stepping back from management had occurred.

RW12 said ecologists have already made some of these proposals, but she was under no illusions that this would be a managed landscape:

RW12:

*... it is almost like playing God, but we have maps for all these areas and there were only a few areas which we would designate for wilding and just let things go there.*

“Playing God” would seem the complete opposite of the rewilding philosophy of stepping back and letting natural processes take over. The rewilding advocates tended to accept that these were unresolved issues and ongoing debates within the rewilding movement.

## 10.2 Attitudes to wilderness and nature

Many environmental narratives have portrayed environmental degradation as being both a result and a cause of social and psychological breakdown. A balanced ecosystem was a reflection of a balanced natural order in human society, and a pre-requisite for emotional, psychological and spiritual health (Botkin 2012). We will now consider how rewilding discourses are influenced by differing visions of landscape, and the concept of “inner rewilding”.

### 10.2.1 Visions of landscape

A rewilded landscape could mean less sheep and traditional farming practices, more trees and less open landscape in the hills, and possibly thicker vegetation making access more problematic. Initially new plantings require extensive fencing to protect trees from sheep or wild herbivores, also with implications for public access and tourism.

RW12 felt that a more diverse landscape with more broadleaf woodland on the lower slopes would be an attraction for outdoor recreation, while others preferred a more open landscape:

*Wales and Scotland are breathtaking to me because they have more space so I keep myself refreshed by going there. (RW1)*

While some rewilders point to the potential tourist attractions of reintroducing carnivores, RW18 (from the farming community) took the view that Britain's unique charm is in its ordinariness, the very fact that it is not like Yellowstone, and was concerned that this was not valued by rewilding advocates. The fact that it is not a strictly "natural" landscape might not matter.

*I think people love the intimacy of little farms juxtaposed with fells, they like the fact that it is pretty it may not be wild but it is the countryside. I was listening to "Remains of the Day" ...it is all about this butler going on this journey and reflecting on his time, and he was standing somewhere like Salisbury and he was looking over the English countryside, effectively saying the glory of the English countryside is that it's not extraordinary, it's not the Alps or Yellowstone or whatever, but its glory and beauty is almost in its every day-ness, and that is a characteristic that I don't think George [Monbiot] values. We are all entitled to our views. I've been to lots of national parks, I've lived in Indonesia, but I think it is a matter of values and culture and what you're looking for...(RW18)*

Other rural commentators have agreed with this view in the past- *"The appeal of the British countryside has always been its domestic nature- our idea of a typical scene includes a cottage, the village church, the shepherd going to his flock or the cattle in the meadows."* (Haines 1972 p105.)

Differing perceptions and aesthetic preferences concerning the nature of the dominant upland ecology of open moor are striking, and perhaps fundamental to the tension between "radical" conservationists and traditionalist perceptions. Monbiot is clearly aware of these differing visions, saying that what others see as wild, *"I see as bleak and broken."* (Monbiot 2003 p66)

Reviewing *Feral*, one blogger who works with a collaborative community project around Pumlomen, the same area described by Monbiot, confesses *"I am now almost embarrassed to admit that I loved walking in the area."* (Jones 2016).

A comparable issue is described by Macfarlane concerning a disputed windfarm development on Lewis. Since it was in the interests of the windfarm company to portray the moor as a wasteland- a '*terra nullius*' - the dispute came down to competing views of the nature and value of the moorland itself, and, crucially, the language used- and available- to describe it:

*The task that faced the Lewisians...was to find ways of expressing the moors' invisible content- the use of histories, imaginative shapes, natural forms and cultural visions it had inspired, and the ways it had been written into language and memory...to create an account of the moor as 'home-ground', and for that they needed to re-create its place-language."* (Macfarlane 2016).

This emphasis on tradition, culture and values represents a very different landscape tradition from rewilding and wilderness. This has particular relevance for upland farmers in Wales, amongst whom there is a far higher proportion of Welsh speakers than among the population in general (RW6).

RW4 articulated clearly how in Wales people's understanding of and relationship to the natural world is intimately bound up with language, traditional culture and folklore, and where concepts such as *rewilding* may not be accepted because of perceptions of them being imported by outsiders:

*.... That is exactly in those terms people contest rewilding because they say the traditional cultural knowledge of Welsh sheep farming and community, the "cynefin", they talk about the landscape being a quilt of "cynefineodd", all the different stories, and always about animals, so it is a worked landscape... while this "wild land", "wilderness"- these are very anglicized terms, very romantic, very Wordsworth, very Muir ...poetry, cultural knowledge is produced by shepherds who are working the land, so the language in which Welsh culture knows the landscape is intrinsically tied to working it... so it is not surprising there is a different vision.*

Traditional communities may resist the notion of rewilding, then, specifically because of its implicit assumption of “nature without people”- an inconceivable notion when all the cultural references are of a landscape shaped by the interaction of people and nature.

There are also alternative ecological assessments to Monbiot’s views of the moors as “sheep-wrecked deserts” since globally, these environments are considered rare and important (The Wildlife Trusts, n.d.; Fenton 2008). The difference in values may come down to the perception that largely man-made landscapes- even if very ancient and having co-evolved with centuries of human history and culture- have a lesser worth than something “natural” and “wild”.

### 10.2.2 Inner rewilding

“Inner” or human- rewilding is the idea that humans suffer from a psychological or spiritual malaise from being over-socialised and especially, over-industrialised in the modern world. RW15 explains it is

*...about being more in the moment, so you are more in tune with nature, so you are more like a wild person, not an industrial person. So that is a big area, and even more vague than rewilding landscapes.*

Amongst the rewilders, RW4 and RW8 described how they felt motivated by the aesthetic beauty of nature as an early inspiration for protecting it, with both citing some of the great American nature writers as their inspiration:

*When I first got into conservation, I didn’t really have expert knowledge into ecological knowledge and so forth, I had an appreciation of a kind of landscape aesthetic which lines up with a Wordsworth view of the Lake District,... but also an appreciation of wilderness in the States, and Ansel Adams’ photographs, and big wide empty spaces and huge mountains; ...it is very much a physical appreciation of nature which was empty and wild and out there;....*

*... I was really drawn to the big open spaces, feeling really small... and then there was learning about history of the landscape and learning that the people who lived here had been violently removed. (RW4)*

The concern expressed here about not falling into the misanthropic strain of early environmentalism- whereby native people were forcibly removed from early national parks in order to make way for “nature”- is in contrast to the conclusion hinted at by another rewilding advocate, RW15:

*Ultimately we need less people- although you cannot promote that as an actual policy.*

The misanthropic undertones of rewilding were also of concern to others:

*I also quite quickly realized that it [rewilding] involved other things that people didn't always want to talk about: the removal of humans. (RW17)*

The issue of humans' place in nature was also referenced by RW7 and RW7a when describing their original motivation for their ecological “wildwood” project in Scotland:

*we went to another meeting and were rather just surprised to find that we rather out of sympathy with them or rather they had moved away from us because they had taken on this idea of “people in the forest”, people living in the forest is not actually what we were aiming at. We were trying to bring back the forest for its own sake, and they were concentrating on bringing it back for peoples' sake, and that would complement our approach, and it was probably about that time that we started using the term ecological restoration.... The term rewilding had basically not been invented at that time. (RW7 and 7a)*

They also felt a strong moral obligation to restore nature for its own sake, expressing concern for human's impact on nature:

*we feel a moral obligation to do something for the natural world, restoring habitats for the species that ought to be there that would be there if man was so dominant, so that it is a very key aspect of our philosophy. (RW7 and 7a)*

One respondent, RW15, expressed what could be classed as “anti-modernist” sentiments. He felt that a deeper connection with the natural world that had been lost with modernity was still intact amongst tribal cultures he has visited. According to this discourse, in addition to environmental pollution and destruction, many modern-day human problems- such as mental health issues, alienation and crime- can be cured if we re-connect with the natural world. These ideas are prominent in Peter Taylor’s 2004 book *Beyond Conservation* (Taylor 2004), and typical of deep ecology literature (see for example Dark Mountain 2013).

*what is interesting about those tribal hunter-gatherer societies, and subsistence farming as well, is that they know how to live in harmony with their environment, they have a properly sustainable lifestyle. They also have rich cultures, and crime is non-existent, and mental health disorders almost non-existent.... it is a real mistake to think of that as some kind of primitive thing, that it is a natural progression into industrial consumerist society with all its problems, that we are on this progression towards some nirvana of high-technology, highly industrialised, highly urban society...*

*...so ofcourse we all have to become wilder... (RW15)*

This extended to advocating bringing wolves into their meetings to ensure that the wolf’s point of view was represented, similar to the deep ecology ritual “A Council for All Beings” in which participants assume the role of chosen animals or plants (Seed 2007):

*they thought the best way to live in the same area as the wolves was to have the wolves represented at their meetings. So that is a kind of Shamanistic thing to do, because you have to put yourself in the mind-set of a wolf.*

This contrasts strikingly with Monbiot’s admission that “*There was no state of grace, no golden age in which people lived in harmony with nature...*” (Monbiot 2014 p.7-8).

Pessimism about the state of the natural world, coupled with a belief in how to improve things, was also cited as a motivation for RW8:

*I think the world is not in a good place, so we should try to restore things as they are. (RW8)*

Echoing the ethical issues of reintroduced herbivores being left to die of natural causes in Oostvaardersplassen (see above), RW8 also talks about the need to accept the darker, more fatalistic side of nature. While humans have a code of ethics that informs culling practices and animal husbandry, he accepts that no such ethical code exists in nature:

*We have codes of practice so we don't shoot mothers that have youngsters, so in the real-world the lynx might kill the mothers and get the babies later on.... this is fine with me.... So yes if the lynx goes and kills the mother of two little bambies they're going to starve to death- then that's just Life.*

Another aspect was the importance of danger and risk that some felt had been lost from our own lives as the modern world has become too domesticated and sanitized-

*...City parks are too safe. Part of the rewilding thing is about coming out of our comfort zone. We are afraid of wolves so we have eradicated them from the landscape; but to be in an environment where you know there is danger- say you knew there were wolves there- all your senses would be engaged. (RW16)*

For some interviewees, knowing “wilderness” and “wild nature” to be there was important for them, even if they did not themselves have access to it or might not be able to experience it. RW16 was concerned to let “*nature to be, for itself, to have places that are wild...*” in contrast to what she saw as

*... our anthropocentric belief that humans are the center of everything and everything that revolves around us, and therefore we have perfect right use and make use of the entire planet. We don't distinguish it as having rights of its own.*

*...I believe it is actually crucial to our survival on the planet to realize that we are nature, connected to it, that we are part of it. So for me that is part of the whole picture, rewilding ourselves in the sense of realizing that we are already wild...*

Rewilding advocate RW4 explains that visions and motivations within the group are nonetheless evolving, and that the deep ecology philosophy is not acceptable to everyone:

*... absolutely I would say that that [a spiritual motivation] is at least 50% of what motivates people....*

*...There is a balance isn't there. Take Peter Taylor for example he has long experience of shamanism in South America, and he is very clear that we need to rewild our souls, the people are not always ready to take to that on. They may feel deeply uncomfortable with it.... for some people wilderness could be too much (RW4)*

Spiritual motivation for rewilding has also been observed at the Knepp castle estate, where a "deep nostalgia towards pre-human landscapes" is reported to have lead to a sense that "this is a journey of spiritual healing for the land." (Anon 2009).

Other rewilders were more sanguine in their statements, while still clearly believing in the aesthetic and perhaps therapeutic benefits of contact with nature:

*I'm very down-to-earth person who doesn't speak about spiritual values that all... and yet there is no better way of spending time than being in a wild woodland with not many other people around I am intensely aware of that.*

*.... we don't sort of start our meetings by holding hands in a circle as some of the groups do. (RW7)*

By contrast, RW17 was somewhat dismissive of the concept of inner rewilding, feeling concern for the natural world could be expressed more prosaically:

*Just spent more time in your garden with your head in a big bramble patch. That will re-wild you quite enough...*

*I think we're overreaching ourselves- we don't know where our food comes from, I don't want to sit in the garden because I want to pave it over and "neatify" it- but I want a lynx! I'm sorry I just don't buy that... (RW17)*

## 10.3 Productive land-use

### 10.3.1 Forestry and woodlands

Britain currently has one of the lowest tree covers in Europe, with 13% compared to the EU average of 37% (Atkinson and Townsend 2011), with half of this comprised of recent conifer plantations. 40% of species lost since 1800 are associated with woodland habitat (Sandom and Macdonald 2015). Restoration of woodland habitat is, then, often one of the first priorities of rewilding. Land abandonment is also resulting in a return of trees and forests, without human management. Globally, temperate forests have seen a net gain of nearly 3million ha in the first decade of this century, mainly on previously productive land (FAO 2016).

Farmers also recognize multiple benefits of increasing farm woodland, including flood mitigation, animal shelter and bio-sanitation. The farmer-led Pontbren project in mid-Wales shows the willingness of farmers to self-organise around these benefits to increase tree cover in the hills (Keenleyside 2013). Each of the farmers interviewed had also been involved in agri-environment schemes which supported tree planting.

Trees and forests hold important symbolic and cultural associations, both positive and negative (Harrison 1992). For rewilding advocate RW7, trees represented more than anything a connection with a lost landscape, and his motivation for the Carrifran restoration project in the Southern borders was to show people what it "should" be like:

*we began to think that surely they should be at least one place the people including visitors could get an idea of what it ought to be like. We go on all the time about the destruction of tropical forests but here there is no folk memory of woodlands on these hills; some people really need to be persuaded that it ought to be wooded, in the sense that it would have been wooded naturally....(RW7)*

This clearly represents a particular aesthetic choice of what the landscape *ought* to look like, yet the Wildwood group's focus on allowing natural processes to prevail once the initial period of planting is complete, with uncertainty regarding the future species make-up of the forest, implies an imaginative concept of "future aesthetics", envisaging the preferences of future generations. Natural processes may not meet the more conventional conservation norms of tidiness, while future generations may have different values in terms of tolerance of "non-native" or invasive species (Prior and Brady 2015).

One such invasive species is invading from the adjoining forestry plantation, and one of the ongoing management tasks for the Carrifran wildwood is to remove the freely-seeding, but non-native spruce. The post-war years saw the rapid expansion of such large-scale plantation forestry across many upland areas of Britain (Forestry Commission 2003). Forestry has provided opportunities for many farmers, some of whom have diversified with forestry grants, while for others, plantations have encroached on their land and provided cover for pests and disease.

Monoculture forestry has been widely seen as having little habitat value, and leading to acidification of water courses and soil erosion from harvesting techniques. However, as with farming, forestry policy today is far more multi-functional, and expected to deliver multiple services including wildlife habitat, flood mitigation, and recreation (Forestry Commission 2013). To meet environmental regulations, all new conifer plantations require a percentage of broadleaves. RW3 questioned this policy, feeling it reflects a negative view of plantations informed by romantic notions of what a forest should look like:

*So people will look at a blanket field of Sitka spruce and say “well, that’s not what I mean by a forest, and we have to get rid of it!”, because they don’t associate Sitka spruce with the forest that they have romantic ideas about. (RW3)*

RW9 also saw changes in forest practice leading to opportunities for “rewilding-by-default”, whereby once felled, in marginal areas “up to 25% of forests are not being re-stocked- they are just being left to scrub up.”

There remains however a tension between forestry and farming, or at the perception of such in some quarters:

*Forestry and farming tend to be portrayed as in conflict- eg on BBC Scotland’s Landward program last Friday, when forestry was portrayed as having taken over good sheep farming land.... one way of looking at it is that forestry is regulated, farming is compensated. Farmers are compensated for losses; foresters are not (eg for losses from disease). Yet forestry has been shown to be far more profitable than farming after subsidies. (RW9)*

In parts of the world where “old-growth” or ancient forests still exists, collisions of traditional and environmental discourses, between foresters and environmentalists are comparable to those between conservationists and farmers. Like farmers, foresters spend their lives in the countryside and often view themselves as guardians, rather than destroyers, of nature, and have little time for the idealism and romantic views of urban activists. (Dietrich 1992)

### 10.3.2 Upland Sheep farming

With 70% of total land use in the UK being for farming (Khan et al 2013) – and over 80% and 90% in Scotland and Wales respectively (Scottish Government 2011), proposals for rewilding is likely to impact farmers more than any other group.

As increasing environmental impacts from the switch to production-focused industrial farming (Lawton et al 2010) and forestry (Woodland Trust 2011) became clear after the end

of World War 2, conservation concerns increased and from the mid-1980s a succession of agri-environment schemes were introduced aimed at supporting farmers to provide a range of ecosystem services. (Potter 1998, Adams 2003, European Commission 2010).

These changes were discussed extensively in the interviews. One concern among farmers was that conservation policies, combined with the switch to area payments, had been implemented too abruptly. Two farmers (RW5,6) argued that a reduction in stock had not lead to significant environmental benefits. Instead, the increase in scrub had reduced the area of grazing, leading to over-grazing in other areas which then became dominated by unpalatable grasses such as *Mollinia* and *Nardus*. Increased vegetation made access difficult, and provided habitat for ticks requiring costly vaccination programs. Another unintended consequence in at least one area was that a withdrawal of sheep had allowed an increase of wild goats, a three-fold increase being cited (RW2).

Ecologists and rewilders (RW10,11,12) accepted these views to a degree, but were more likely to argue that the upland hill areas were a harsh environment and that in some cases many decades with complete cessation of grazing would be necessary before significant improvement would be observed (RW12). In other areas, however, it was felt that some grazing might now need to be reintroduced again in order to prevent succession to woodland and scrub, which, if permitted to regenerate, would change the habitat classification, and hence they would lose their protected status (RW6, 14, 18). Failure to understand this dynamic was leading to a policy response of further stocking reductions, a downward spiral.

Most respondents accepted that some species such as the golden plover required open moorland, and that a rewilding strategy of allowing woodland regeneration would lead to the loss of these species, albeit with the gaining of others. These open moorland species are often the same ones that are protected under much current conservation policy aimed at protecting habitat that is not so much wild, as a product of earlier, less intensive farming methods.

RW5 objected to laws restricting the control of raptors, foxes and crows, which he blamed for the decline in smaller birds, while unfavourable vegetation had increased due to restrictions on traditional burning practices due to a risk to forestry. He felt that conservation policy lacked a holistic vision and that “*everything should be looked at in balance.*”

The changes in the payment schemes have had knock-on effects on farming practices: the practice of *hefting* –whereby sheep are reared on a particular area of land to which they become attached and return to without the need to continual shepherding- has fallen away in some areas (Nouvet 2014) and there has been a progressive move to larger breeds of sheep that would not be suitable for the harsh upland environment. Hence, it would be now difficult to return to the kind of farming practiced prior to 2000. Many farmers had become dependent on the grants and subsidies, and would be unwilling to practice the increased shepherding that would be required.

Some of these differences of views reflect differing visions of what is expected from a landscape. At least three broad approaches emerged from the interviews:

*Ecologists* (RW12, 13, 14) were critical of conservation policies, which derive from scientific assessments and public debates in the 1970s (Sundseth 2014). They tended to favour greater flexibility, with a less rigid bureaucratic process of conforming to pre-established baselines for habitat preservation and much greater consultation with farmers. Their preferred outcome would be an integrated approach that would result in mosaic landscapes in which farming and wildlife habitat were more fully integrated. *Active shepherding*, involving greater grazing management, perhaps with the inclusion of cattle at times, modelled on French alpine experience (Nouvet 2014) was proposed as a method to increase diversity of ground vegetation rather than relying purely on hefting (RW14).



Figure 4 mosaic landscape at Hafod y LLan National Trust Farm, Snowdonia National Park Phot Credit: Graham Strouts

*Rewilders* shared much of the criticism of existing conservation policy, but placed more emphasis on seeing natural processes take over, of stepping back and continuing without a set of management plans or end-goals:

*Rewilding follows succession. Fullstop. Whereas conservation as I see it is just pickling things in aspic, much as national parks do, fence it off, pretend it's the '50s, and manage it like that, which is incredibly boring, because what is the difference between what they fenced in and what they fenced out. (RW11)*

Farmers were also skeptical of the way in which conservation policy had been implemented, but in contrast to the rewilding approach of stepping back, they were more likely to emphasise the way that the countryside has been shaped by farming over a much longer timescale, seeing good nature stewardship as a function of good management:

*... because I was thinking, what is conservation? It is to conserve something. I thought it was extreme conservation- the thought that by doing nothing you would conserve the habitat. I was not happy with that at all. (RW5)*

In common with the rewilding view, farmers also see the system as having evolved to a state of “natural balance” in the past, but see the disruption as being caused by conservation policies which upset that balance by reducing stocking rates. While for rewilders, restoring a “natural balance” requires humans to withdraw from management, for farmers, this natural balance represents a co-evolution between humans and nature:

*I think that man cannot change evolution in terms of wilding and species on the mountain; but to me, history, and how it has been managed before, is much more important than... how academics believe it should be. (RW5)*

Both views frame conservation policy as fragmented and piecemeal. However, for the farmer, a holistic approach must include the human role, specifically the role of the farmer in shaping the landscape over generations and centuries. For him, rewilding is a threat because it would appear to remove the farmer- and human- from the equation entirely.

The farmers positioned themselves as good stewards of the countryside who had always protected wildlife alongside their farming practice, but who have had their traditional role in pest management removed without consultation by conservationists, and expressed resentment at being perceived as responsible for the demise of wildlife:

*It is far more palatable to say we want to save wildlife from the nasty old farmers. (RW6)*

The view that farmers are responsible for the decline in wildlife was also rejected by RW17, an independent rural commentator, since they had been compelled, often against their wishes, by government policy to move to more intensive practices after the war:

*...but farmers hated losing lapwings, and it is the same kind of thing how farming communities have been destroyed by public policy over the years.*

*...People died in the name of producing food and now you're vilifying them. Now all of that back story is key to these debates. (RW17)*

#### 10.4 Cultural value of farming

Widely contrasting discourses between interviewees were expressed regarding cultural and heritage value of farming. For one farmer, loss of community and social cohesion, along with a sense of identity as farmers and food producers, and a certain set of traditional values that came with working on the land were of primary concern:

*to me we have lost the community of gathering the sheep on the mountain now there is a lot less sheep, because I remember time when about three or four farms were gathering their sheep together and put them in the pen to sort out for earmarking, shearing, dipping, weaning, everyone would help together, and in those pens, to some extent, those pens were the university of the young shepherds... and in those communities, in those pens, you learned a lot about agriculture, but in my opinion you learned a lot more than just that, moral issues, how to cooperate with one another. You have to cooperate with everyone, you would have to trust your neighbor and ask them to respect you, and I feel a loss of very important values, and those were my values if you like when I was young. (RW5)*

By contrast, RW3 was dismissive that there was any great cultural value in farming, arguing we should no more regret the loss of sheep farming than we should regret the loss of coal mining. These were the closest views expressed in the interviews to ecomodernist perspectives, accepting the substitution of traditional skills with technology as being largely positive:

*... Good riddance! These [traditional farming knowledge and community] are not desirable attributes... I mean, this society would collapse without the mobile telephone, but nobody now knows how to fix those things... The bulk of people can't farm, without doubt, so are the few farmers [that are left] the keepers of arcane knowledge that we can't do without? - no, its in the library, in paper form...(RW3)*

RW15, a rewilding advocate, also rejected the view that sheep farming was worth preserving as a traditional way of life, arguing for a much earlier cultural baseline:

*Well sheep farming in this country goes back a few hundred years; I think if you go deep enough into our culture and ancestry, we have a really deep, native relationship with wild forest areas and with the wild animals that are native to this country. You only have to read the Mabinogion cycle of Welsh stories where wild animals are such an integral part...They were written down around the 13th Century, but are ancient stories that come from the ancient Celtic tradition; so I just don't agree that sheep farming is really part of our traditional culture. (RW15)*

Many farmers are now involved in some kind of agri-environment scheme which arguably makes their role ambiguous: are they food producers or conservation managers? RW1 expressed how hard it would be for farmers who have always seen themselves as land managers to accept a "do nothing approach" and let scrub return- "it's just not what they do". RW2 felt it was an issue of communication:

*...for 90% of farmers around here they do see themselves as food producers... language is so important....I like farming and I want to see farming here. I think people are important, farming has an important role to play and food production is an integral part of that; I don't really mind how it is described- the money- and how it comes so long as, if it comes for eco-system services, and we deliver them... I've got no problem for being paid to do so. But a lot of farmers feel on the back foot if what they do is not described as food production; a lot of the language used, they are not familiar with it.*

*...there has been very bad communication, incredibly bad when you scratch the surface about what the schemes are trying to deliver, in terms of policy of the last 20 years. (RW2)*

This is supported by other research which shows that, despite the sense of loss of community and cultural values, farmers continue to see themselves primarily as food producers, and economic incentives alone have not been sufficient to induce them to relinquish this position. Farmers have been found to be open to engagement with ecosystem service provision, but this needs to be better integrated with food production if it is to find greater adoption. (Wynne-Jones 2013).

Another concern was that agri-environment schemes should recognize a broader suite of roles played by the farmer in the rural community:

*... Some people need to accept that we are providing wider public goods and other things... the social glue, the fact that the farmer mows the churchyard, he comes out with his digger, there is a whole range of societal benefits of having practical people in our countryside...(RW18)*

The increasing multi-functionality of farming and landscape use (Garcia-Martin et al 2016) is also something that eco-modernists are accused of overlooking when focusing purely on yields (Pearce 2016). Monbiot (2003) accepts there may be some cultural loss with a wholesale transition from upland sheep-farming to a rewilded landscape, but has been criticized for being too dismissive of how significant the impacts of this would be for whole communities. Rewilding has itself been framed as culturally created, in the sense that it still depends on a set of cultural management decisions, and would merely mean supplanting one cultural landscape for another (Whitbread 2014).

Critics point to the low-productivity per acre sheep-farming, but in traditional systems, sheep may have played the important role of gathering fertility from extensive hillside areas for use on crops. While some rewilding advocates- RW7a, 8, 15, 16- expressed support for more local, Organic food to be produced, little discussion took place as to whether rewilding

would support this or conflict with it. It has been argued that rewilding would make Britain much less food secure and more dependent on imports, particularly if it were to spread to more lowland sites such as Knepp, where 3500 acres of land that had been farmed for centuries has recently been rewilded. Importing food may add pressure to wildland in other parts of the world- something that has been criticized of being a “*neo-colonialist agenda*” (Fairlie 2013).

While accepting that cultural landscapes have been acknowledged as being of value, Navarro and Pereira (2012) question whether overall it will be feasible or desirable to preserve many of them, since the subsidies required to maintain extensive farming methods are unlikely to be sufficient incentive to either attract new residents or stem the flow of rural populations towards the cities.

## 10.5 Rewilding and Conservation Policy

Perhaps as much or more than a challenge to the farming community to address the “sheep-wrecked” hills, rewilding presents a critique of conservation policies. The tendency for conservation to “fossilize” the countryside in an imagined ideal state at one particular period was noted almost as soon as conservation organisations began to emerge in the decades after the end of WW2 (Haines, 1972).

Jepson (2015) contrasts *functionalist* rewilding, characterized by flux, restoration, passive-management and uncertainty, with *compositionalist* conservation, characterized by balance, preservation, direct management and measurable targets. Thus, the basis for conservation policy in the EU, Natura 2000, establishes a network of protected areas focused on specific species and “*a natural order founded on the compositional ideal of a premodern ecology*”. (Lorimer 2015 p.110)

Another negative consequence of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has been the widespread destruction of wood-pasture in Romania and elsewhere, since land with more than a limited number of trees on it does not qualify for agricultural subsidies (Monbiot 2016).

A report for English Nature found that a policy of rewilding with large herbivores based on Vera's hypothesis (Vera 2000) would be largely unworkable for the UK, as much for bureaucratic reasons as for ecological ones, since the non-linear nature of this kind of rewilding is an anathema to UK conservation policy (Hodder et al 2005, cited in Lorimer 2015). By contrast, a policy informed by rewilding would favour stepping away from the management plans that are *"still based on site and lists of species rather than ecological functioning"* (RW17) and allow succession to return.

Concerns have been raised however that stepping away from this regulated system could on the one hand increase the risk of unintended consequences, including pathogens and invasive species, and on the other hand risk allowing the dismantling environmental policy by neo-liberal elements who oppose environmental regulation (Lorimer 2015). Thus, current policy is defended as something that was very hard won, in much the same way as the cultural landscape is defended.

Many recognize that upland hill-farming only persists in its current form due to subsidies. These payments could be transferred to more income diversification, as is already happening in some areas. The Knepp Estate in West Sussex which employs naturalistic grazing methods is pointed to as an example of what this might look like, yet ironically Knepp currently depends on conservation payments that require it to comply with the existing paradigm of habitat protection (Anon. 2009). Rewilding on the uplands is pointed to as being very low-cost, requiring management, yet this could also be used as an excuse to simply withdraw support for the countryside.

On the other hand, RW12 argued that rewilding by succession should not be permitted everywhere, because some habitats are important to preserve:

*.... As a conservationist I feel some habitats are really important to save, something on the edge of its range is very different from something in its centre. With a lot of the rewilding they want to loose the reins now and I think it's a bit too early. (RW12)*

RW13 called for a greater role in conservation decisions for the farmer, presenting a remit for conservation aims but leaving it to her to choose how best to deliver them:

*...then the farmer would gain a lot of confidence and felt he is not just taking the medicine but is part of a process, to regain the habitat. (RW13)*

She distanced herself from ecologists who saw conservation as completely separate from agriculture:

*... there are still ecologists who say that, and they do a lot of harm in that relationship with farmers, and in the end it is the farmers who have the say on what happens with this land. ...there is already a big disconnect between the specialists in the NGOs and farmers... There needs to be a lot more feedback. (RW13)*

More positively, there are indications of some movement within the conservation community. The Wildlife Trust for Wales appears to have adopted at least some of the language favoured by rewilders, promoting a strategy of core areas and connectivity between them (The Wildlife Trusts Wales n.d.). While there will likely be both winners and losers, some might feel that the current situation does at least present an opportunity for change.

## **11 Conclusion**

The research presented here reveals both conflicting and converging discourses of rewilding, with implications for farming and conservation policy. These are only tentative conclusions, and more research needs to be done, both quantitative and qualitative, in assessing personal, political and scientific motivations. Two dichotomies need to be addressed: the first concerns different visions of landscape use, between rewilding on the one hand, and traditional farming and conservation approaches on the other. The second lies within rewilding itself, where two competing discourses, wilderness and wildness, need to be resolved.

While post-WW2 changes in agricultural policy have driven a much more production-focused approach, many farming communities are still deeply embedded in a historical landscape which shapes and is reshaped by their cultural values. As radical conservationists, rewilders see much farming as something alien, imposed upon the natural landscape, which they would like to see released from its control. By contrast, as people who work on the land their whole lives, many farmers see themselves as guardians of the countryside and good stewards of wildlife, and are perplexed at negative attitudes towards them which they perceive as interfering in, and even ignorant of issues they have been steeped in their whole lives.

At the same time, while agri-environment schemes since 2000 have created limited opportunities for habitat improvement on farms, greater collaboration in their design between farmers, conservationists and policy makers is necessary for their potential to be fully realized. Such schemes need to be much better integrated into food production. Increased targeted shepherding, possibly requiring more shepherds and training, could play an important role in upland habitat restoration if properly incentivized.

There are also other opportunities for initiating the first stages of a rewilding strategy, some of which are already happening by default, including after forestry harvesting where re-planting is not cost efficient, and other cases of land abandonment. Many farmers already see the value of more trees in the landscape, while some wildlife trusts are moving towards rewilding strategies by promoting core areas and connectivity. Experimental sites could be established to test a range of rewilding technologies, including some animal reintroductions such as beavers and pine martins. Just as challenging will be the need to overturn decades of conservation thinking around what constitutes natural ecosystems and native species.

Thrown to the forefront of public debates by the polemic of writers like Monbiot (2013), rewilding presents a serious challenge to post-war conservation policy, but also exposed wide disparities in competing visions of landscape use. Traditional land uses that have grown accustomed over several generations to a landscape managed primarily for *biosecurity*, is

being challenged by a radical new discourse that prioritises instead *biodiversity*, including proposals for introducing carnivores not seen here for centuries.

However, as suggested by the interviews considered above, the most radical of these proposals- trophic rewilding with wolves and lynx- is not considered to be viable in the short or medium term, even by many of its strongest advocates, who recognize the considerable cultural and political barriers that need to be surmounted. The dilemma is that to some extent charismatic carnivores have come to define the public image of rewilding and are largely responsible for its high profile.

Within the rewilding community however, there are two significantly diverging discourses: one associated with earlier narratives of *wilderness* seeking a return to a largely imaginary past of pristine nature with the ultimate aim of rewilding humanity; the other which seeks to use the natural processes of *wildness* to allow an unfolding into a new wild, allowing for the emergence of novel ecosystems. The primary distinction is the ontological relationship between humans and nature: the first rejects the Anthropocene as an affront to the balance of Nature, and is equivocal about the role humans have to play within it; the second embraces it as a new epoch of human-nature co-evolution.

The UK's decision to leave the EU may provide an opportunity to transform both conservation and agriculture in Britain for the better. For rewilding to realize the contribution it can make to this, it must reconcile its inner ontological paradox, and find a more amenable role for humans in nature.

## 12 APPENDIX 1 Interviewee Disclaimer



Discourses on Rewilding Interview disclaimer

Please sign below to show that you understand the statements and agree to them:

- This interview forms part of research being done on attitudes to rewilding in Britain by an MSc Agroforestry student from Bangor University.
- I understand that my participation in this interview is entirely voluntary and anonymous, and that I do not have to answer any questions that I do not want to and if I wish to stop the interview, I may do so at any time, without giving reasons or explanations.
- The researcher has agreed to answer any questions I may have about the study and how the information I provide will be used.
- The interview will last between 30mins and 1 hour and will be digitally recorded and later transcribed.
- The interview and transcript will be stored in a secure archive.
- I understand that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages and other research outlets but that my name will not be used.
- I have read and understood the above information and I agree to take part in the interview

Name (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

(Interviewee)

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

(Researcher)

### 13 APPENDIX 2 Interview schedule

- 1) Can you introduce yourself and say what your background is and what you do now?
- 2) What are the main environmental changes you have experienced in your lifetime?
- 3) How have changes in farming since WW2 changed farming communities?
- 4) Is over-grazing a problem in the upland areas?
- 5) How do sheep numbers affect biodiversity?
- 6) Are agri-environment schemes leading farmers to become more landscape managers than food producers?
- 7) What is the farmers' view of this? How do they see their role?
- 8) One view is that upland hill sheep farming is very low intensity. Would farming be better done more intensively on the more fertile lowlands, leaving the uplands to rewild?
- 9) Is there a cultural value to Britain's farming communities and upland areas that is worth preserving?
- 10) Should there be more trees in the uplands?
- 11) How has plantation forestry impacted on farming and the environment?
- 12) What impact does developments such as windfarms, fencing have in the uplands?
- 13) What does "rewilding" mean?
- 14) Is "rewilding" the best word?
- 15) Is there a case for introducing large carnivores such as wolves or lynx to the UK?
- 16) What role might there be for wild herbivores and what impact would they have on the landscape?
- 17) How is rewilding being presented by advocates, and what is its public image?
- 18) To what degree can we, or should be withdraw from landscape management and let natural processes take over?
- 19) What are the psychological/therapeutic benefits of being close to nature? How important is it to have connection to "wilderness"?
- 20) What is "inner rewilding"? How important is this and what implications does it have for landscape management?

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