

# Case study

# Rewilding



## What is rewilding?

Rewilding is achieved by restoring ecosystems to a functioning state by re-establishing declining or entirely missing native species with the intention of creating a system that can look after itself whilst also helping society to thrive.

It can be applied to all terrestrial and marine habitats, but Tilhill's expertise lies in one fundamental tool for rewilding most terrestrial habitats – tree planting. It is estimated that 3.04 trillion trees cover the globe today (that's about 422 per person) but this is only 45% of the number that were here before humans existed.

## Why bother?

If the fact that human activity has damaged and defied the ecosystems into their current state isn't enough to justify their restoration then supporters would point to the vast social, environmental and economic advantages that healthy ecosystems provide to us.

### Environmental

One of the most profound uses of trees may be that of their role within ecosystem services. These are the functions of an ecosystem that benefit us. Examples include wildlife habitat, soil creation and maintenance, improving water quality, dampening storm flows, abating air pollution, reducing the urban heat island effect, growing food, producing oxygen, carbon sequestration, climate regulation, shading, wind control and noise absorption.

### Economic

A well-managed forest or woodland can provide strong benefits to the local and wider economy whilst also providing the essential habitats needed for wildlife to thrive and act as an important environmental regulator.

The forestry industry in Scotland is now a larger employer than fishing and is considered to be worth £1 billion to the Scottish economy. Forestry creates jobs from planting through to management and beyond to the timber processing and construction industry to name but a few.

Strict regulations now guide the species that can be planted under FC grant schemes meaning an increase in forest biodiversity creating a wider array of habitats for wildlife to fill. Productive conifer forests harbour many species from the relatively common roe deer to the rare golden eagle. They also increase the resilience of the forest with a wider variety of species, ages and structure being less prone to attack from pests and diseases.

### Recreation

[Glentress](#) forest in Scotland hosts 300,000 visitors every year, on par with the number visiting the Scottish national gallery of modern art in Edinburgh. This is a good indication of the social benefits that interaction with the natural environment can bring.

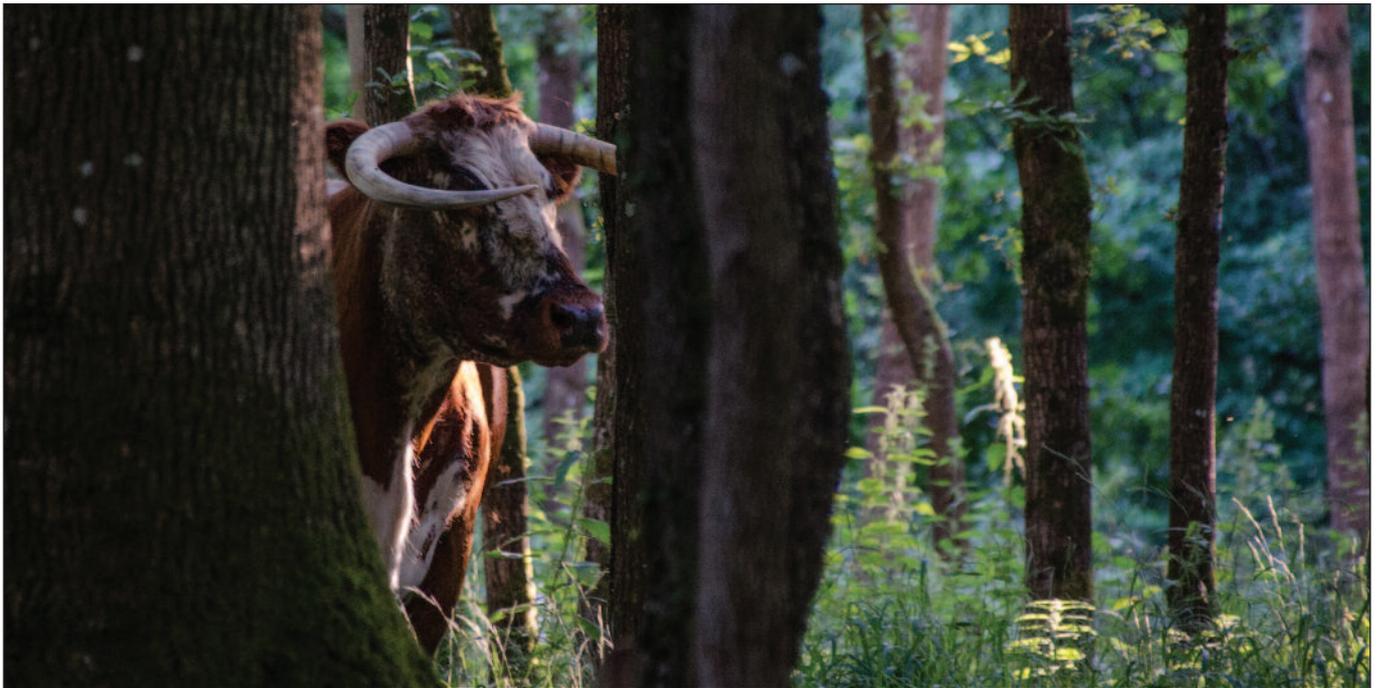
The reason people visit these areas vary but the term 'nature deficit disorder' was coined in Richard Louv's book [Last Child in the Woods](#). This documents the negative effects a disassociation with nature can have on children.

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Above: Red deer in low densities can help to create wood pasture a habitat rich in biodiversity. Thorn scrub protects the oaks allowing them to grow into the open grown trees of the future.

## Case study – continued



Above: Very low densities of Longhorn cattle roam freely within the 1400 ha Knepp Estate.

### How can we do it?

In its most simple sense, to re-wild an area means you could simply refrain from any form of management but the effects of human interference have been so great that ecosystems often benefit from our help or an initial kick start to bring ecosystems back to a healthy and sustainable level.

One tool of rewilding is re-introductions.

This is where animal species ranging from lynx to pelicans can be re-established in an ecosystem where they were previously present. The effects can often filter through the entire trophic cascade and affect even such basic aspects of an ecosystem such as land form.

Tilhill recently commented on the proposed reintroduction of the Eurasian Lynx, see the report [here](#). The report suggests re-introduction would have significant benefits on tree establishment through influencing the grazing behaviour of local deer populations.

Reintroductions can also involve far smaller organisms such as [bees](#). While small in size bees play a fundamental role in pollination without which it is thought much more of the ecosystem could collapse.

Another tool is tree planting or regeneration. This can often be the basis for other factors to apply for example by creating habitat for re-introduction of wildlife or by altering drainage which change river ecology.

One example of this is Glenfeshie estate:

[www.rewildingbritain.org.uk/rewilding/rewilding-projects/glenfeshie](http://www.rewildingbritain.org.uk/rewilding/rewilding-projects/glenfeshie)

Glenfeshie had been managed for many years as a traditional shooting estate until new owners reduced the deer population dramatically to allow natural regeneration of the dwindling Caledonian pine forest. Today the treeline is climbing back up the mountain sides and native trees are restoring themselves to previous levels.

Rewilding is not just limited to relatively isolated areas in the far north. Knepp Estate in West Sussex, South England has switched from intensive farming practices since WWII to a more natural farming system. In this system a mix of grazing species roam freely throughout the estate with little intervention required. The alternative approach has now brought the farm back into profitability, whilst also vastly increasing the biodiversity and health of the ecosystem.

[www.rewildingbritain.org.uk/rewilding/rewilding-projects/knepp-estate](http://www.rewildingbritain.org.uk/rewilding/rewilding-projects/knepp-estate)

Some fantastic photographs capturing the essence of re-wilding can be viewed at;

[www.scotlandbigpicture.com/Index/About#what-we-do](http://www.scotlandbigpicture.com/Index/About#what-we-do)

Tilhill support rewilding as we see it as a great opportunity to support the growing forest industry that is providing sustainable business activities whilst also working with nature to provide many environmental benefits.

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