

LANDSCAPES

Learn more about the wild places where Rewilding Europe operates

PEOPLE

See how rewilding is benefitting society, communities & businesses

WILDLIFE

Dive deeper into the recovery of important and exciting European species

UPSCALING

Be inspired by the amazing growth of the European rewilding movement

Rewilding Europe



Making Europe a wilder place

ANNUAL REVIEW 2022





Rewilding Europe is a proud beneficiary of the Dutch Postcode Lottery

The Supervisory Board of Rewilding Europe formally approved this Annual Review 2022 in its meeting on 1 May 2023.

TEXT: Daniel Allen, Frans Schepers, Johan Booij, Laurien Holtjer, Hugh Webster

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Rewilding Europe
Toernooiveld 1
6525 ED Nijmegen
The Netherlands

info@rewildingeuropa.com
www.rewildingeuropa.com

▲ Black stork
in the Rhodope
Mountains
rewilding
landscape.

Turning up the volume on nature

While writing and composing this year's Annual Review, there was one thing that really struck us – the sheer volume of tangible and impactful rewilding action now taking place in our landscapes. This illustrates the continued growth of our initiative across Europe, made possible by an increasing number of partners and donors supporting our work. It is also indicative of the growing understanding across all parts of society of the need to engage in nature recovery at scale, and a willingness and desire to become part of the rewilding movement.

Driven by our Strategic Plan 2021–2030 ('Strategy 2030'), which we launched at the end of 2021, we are committed to realising a set of ambitious objectives for the end of this decade. It has been amazing to see how we can set things in motion, based on our positive narrative for European nature recovery. With 10 rewilding teams now working in our flagship rewilding landscapes across the continent, in close cooperation with our central team, we are in a good place to turn up the volume on nature, demonstrating and catalysing rewilding at an ever-larger scale.

This Annual Review gives you a good overview of the significant progress Rewilding Europe made last year, with a focus on the rewilding landscapes where we operate. The increasing sense of traction, which is very exciting, generates energy, inspiration and dedication across our pan-European team, and in all of our partners and supporters. On reflection, 2022 was a year when we prepared ourselves to meet renewed ambitions, as a precursor to delivering even more meaningful and tangible impact and results in the years ahead.

We sincerely thank everyone who has joined us in taking this journey and hope that this latest Annual Review motivates you as much as it motivates us.



Frans Schepers
*Executive
Director*



Sabine
Hoefnagel
Chair (a.i.)

Frans Schepers



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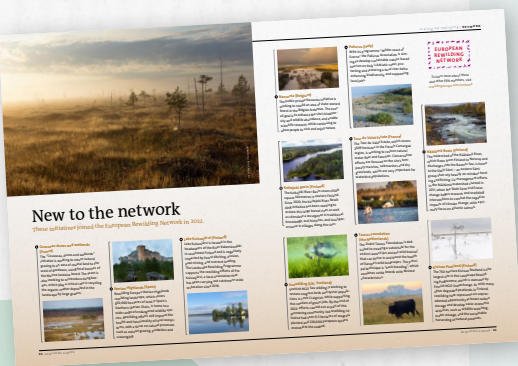
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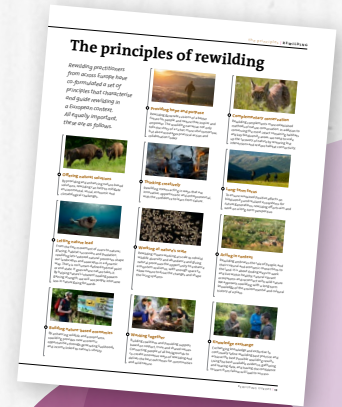
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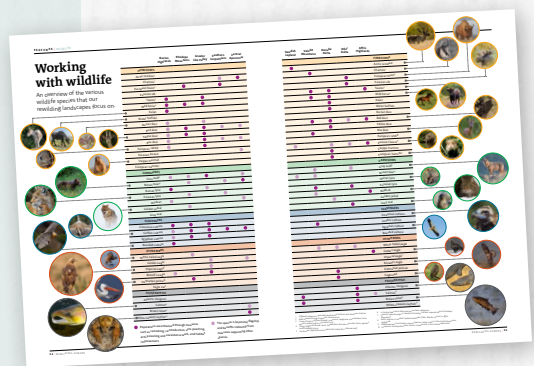
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OUR VISION



Wild nature is valued and treated as an essential element of a prosperous and healthy society, with **far more space** provided for **wildlife and natural processes.**



OUR MISSION

We want to **demonstrate the benefits of wilder nature** through the rewilding of diverse European landscapes, and to **inspire and enable others to engage in rewilding** by providing tools and practical expertise.



WHAT WE DO

Making Europe a wilder place!

- Rewilding Europe **proposes a new conservation vision for Europe**, with natural processes playing a vital role shaping biodiversity-rich landscapes. We understand that nature is fully capable of taking care of itself. This concept should become the main principle for many of Europe's natural landscapes in the future.
- Rewilding Europe wants to **make Europe a wilder place, with far more space for wildlife and natural processes**. Wild nature is an essential element of a prosperous and healthy society. When applied at scale across Europe, rewilding can be one of the most significant and cost-effective means of delivering positive outcomes for both nature and people.
- Rewilding Europe is working to **rewild 15 landscapes across Europe** – these act as practical demonstrations of rewilding principles, models and tools. By showing what rewilding can achieve, these new wilder landscapes inspire others to engage in rewilding.
- Rewilding Europe **demonstrates rewilding as a critical nature-based climate solution**. By enabling nature recovery, rewilding can play a game-changing role helping us to mitigate the scale and impact of climate change, while simultaneously enhancing biodiversity. As a nature-based solution, rewilding is practical, inspirational, cost-effective, and available now.
- Rewilding Europe **aims to provide a viable business case for wild nature across Europe**. The landscapes we select have the potential to become world-class destinations for nature tourism. They also offer a range of additional nature-based economic benefits.
- Rewilding Europe **supports the comeback of large carnivores** – which have a crucially important ecological role – as well as smaller predators, raptors and scavengers. The brown bear, wolf, lynx, vulture and many more species are essential for the natural functioning of the ecosystems in which they live.
- Rewilding Europe **demonstrates that natural grazing is one of the key ecological factors** for creating and maintaining naturally open and half-open landscapes. We want to allow our native herbivores to return in significant, naturally balanced numbers to the lands where they once belonged and where they can play their vital ecological role.
- Rewilding Europe **builds an extensive network of rewilding initiatives across Europe** as part of its European Rewilding Network (ERN). Together we establish best practice by sharing knowledge and experience.
- Rewilding Europe **works with scientific and policy partners to ensure rewilding is recognised in European policy** as a relevant conservation approach, contributing to the achievement of conservation targets as set out in international and national policy documents and agreements.



Working together for a wilder Europe

The extent to which Rewilding Europe can achieve its ambitious vision and mission is very much dependent on how we work together across Europe. Our Strategy 2030, together with a newly signed Network Agreement between our landscape partners, will help us to work as one European team, following an aligned and coherent approach as we move forwards.

Our Strategy for 2030 in a nutshell

Our Strategic Plan for the period 2021-2030 – called ‘Advancing Rewilding in Europe’ (‘Strategy 2030’) – sees Rewilding Europe recommit its efforts towards realising a future for Europe that is richer in wild nature, with all the benefits this provides to people and nature. The strategy is focused on maximising the impact of Rewilding Europe’s twin demonstration and catalysing roles, as we work to deliver wilder nature at landscape scale across Europe.

Based on our Theory of Change, Strategy 2030 is broken down into four main components, each with its own objectives and targets for 2030: Wilder Nature; People and Nature; Building Engagement; and Scaling Up.

The components ‘Wilder Nature’ and ‘Nature for People’ capture the essence of what Rewilding Europe is about, with a focus on our rewilding landscapes. ‘Building Engagement’ and ‘Scaling Up’ are primarily cross-cutting, though both have stand-alone components too. They both supporting the delivery of the other two components and are equally essential for success.

COMPONENT	MAIN FOCUS
Wilder Nature	Increasing the amount of land where natural ecosystem processes function freely without intervention, as well as enhancing the overall ecological health of rewilding landscapes. Simultaneously focusing on wildlife comeback by increasing populations of keystone species, either by supporting their natural recovery, or through reintroduction and restocking, as well as measures to maintain and enhance human-wildlife coexistence.
Nature for People	We recognise that there can be important economic benefits from rewilding – for example, the jobs and revenues generated by nature-based enterprises, or the provision of cost-effective climate change mitigation. But for large parts of society the benefits of wilder nature go far beyond the economic, involving aspects of mental and physical health, recreation, identity and culture.
Building Engagement	Building engagement places great emphasis on reaching out to people and capturing hearts and minds. Engaging content will promote the benefits of rewilding, showcase the impact of the work being carried out together with partners in our rewilding landscapes, and influence the target groups that are key to scaling up rewilding across Europe.
Scaling up rewilding	To enable rewilding to scale up across Europe we engage, inspire and empower others to adopt and apply rewilding principles, models and tools. This applies to both our rewilding landscapes and (particularly) in new landscapes across the continent. Core tools include strategic partnerships, networks, training, mobilising youth, removing policy obstacles, applied research, and work on a range of financial mechanisms.



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Theory of change and overarching goals

When applied at scale across Europe, we believe that rewilding can be one of the most significant and cost-effective means of delivering ‘win-win’ outcomes for nature and people. Making more space for nature and restoring properly functioning ecosystems, for example, can reduce vulnerability to both drought and flooding, greatly increase carbon storage, and provide more

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high-quality habitat capable of supporting richer, more abundant wildlife, including some of Europe’s most iconic species.

At the same time, there will be growing opportunities for nature-related enterprises and for society at large to benefit from increased access to wild nature – something that is now more widely recognised than ever before as crucial for physical health and mental wellbeing.

We believe that by trialling, monitoring and evaluating practical application of rewilding across diverse European landscapes, we can build an increasingly effective and robust range of rewilding tools, know-how and learning. However, we can only ever have a limited impact if our work is restricted to our rewilding landscapes and our local partners working in these regions.

We therefore need to identify, engage, inspire and motivate others who have the capacity and means to embrace our concepts, principles and models, and to apply our rewilding

experience across Europe, in other geographical areas and diverse sectors, at a progressively larger scale. For such scaling up to succeed, we need to be proactive in making our tools, rewilding models and know-how as scalable, accessible, financially viable and relevant as possible, and to be ready to provide additional information and advice.

We have therefore defined two overarching goals up to 2030, which are split between our rewilding landscapes and the wider European continent:

- By 2030 the application of rewilding principles, models and tools are having measurable, demonstrable, and sustained benefits for nature and people in all of our rewilding landscapes.
- By 2030 rewilding is being widely put into practice – at scale, across Europe, and by many different actors from both private and public sectors – as part of establishing a European environment that is richer in nature and more resilient to climate change.



Building a coherent network of Rewilding Landscapes

Our rewilding landscapes are at the forefront of European rewilding. These are the places where we work, demonstrating how rewilding at scale can be a lever of change for nature and people in these regions. Over the next 10 years we will expand the number of rewilding landscapes in which we are demonstrating the practical application of rewilding from 10 to 15 – including marine and coastal ecosystems. At the same time, we will intensify our work in the existing 10 landscapes and focus even more strongly on measuring progress and assessing the impacts of specific initiatives in relation to both nature and people.

As we grow our portfolio of rewilding landscapes, we need to ensure coherence and alignment between all rewilding entities. For this reason, we have established a Rewilding Europe Network Agreement, which binds all the entities driving the rewilding landscapes with the central organisation. This agree-

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Over the next ten years we will expand the number of rewilding landscapes in which we are demonstrating the practical application of rewilding from 10 to 15, including marine and coastal ecosystems.
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ment, which was signed in early 2023, enhances the ability of all local partners and the central team to work collectively to implement a shared, European mission and strategy, sharing expertise and resources and combining actions to amplify impact. It is also meant to ensure good governance at national and regional levels, empowering current

and future directors of local partners to lead the development of national or regional presences, while being part of an international network that has a clear and consistent brand.

The signing of the Network Agreement by the directors of the landscape partners and the Executive Board of Rewilding Europe means all the partners have committed to Rewilding Europe's Strategic Plan 2021–2030, our Rewilding Principles, several policies and guidelines (e.g. the Code of Conduct and Brand Manual), and other specific documents such as long-term landscape visions. A Network Executive Team, comprising all the executive directors of the central and local organisations, has been formalised based on specific terms of reference, and will meet at least three times a year (of which one meeting will be physical). This will allow us to build and strengthen the coherence and co-production of our network, with the Network Agreement as a legal base. This represents a major milestone in the development of our joint initiative.



The principles of rewilding

Rewilding practitioners from across Europe have co-formulated a set of principles that characterise and guide rewilding in a European context. All equally important, these are as follows.



Offering natural solutions

By providing and enhancing nature-based solutions, rewilding can help to mitigate environmental, social, economic and climatological challenges.



Letting nature lead

From the free movement of rivers to natural grazing, habitat succession and predation, rewilding lets restored natural processes shape our landscapes and seascapes in a dynamic way. There is no human-defined optimal point or end state. It goes where nature takes it. By helping nature's inherent healing powers gaining strength, we will see people intervene less in nature going forwards.



Building nature-based economies

By enhancing wildlife and ecosystems, rewilding provides new economic opportunities through generating livelihoods and income linked to nature's vitality.



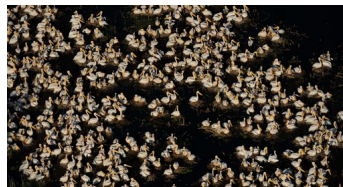
Providing hope and purpose

Rewilding generates visions of a better future for people and nature that inspire and empower. The rewilding narrative not only tells the story of a richer, more vital tomorrow, but also encourages practical action and collaboration today.



Thinking creatively

Rewilding means acting in ways that are innovative, opportunistic and entrepreneurial, with the confidence to learn from failure.



Working at nature's scale

Rewilding means working at scale to rebuild wildlife diversity and abundance and giving natural processes the opportunity to enhance ecosystem resilience, with enough space to allow nature to drive the changes and shape the living systems.



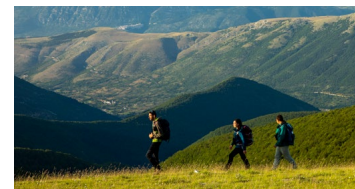
Working together

Building coalitions and providing support based on respect, trust and shared values. Connecting people of all backgrounds to co-create innovative ways of rewilding and deliver the best outcomes for communities and wild nature.



Complementary conservation

Rewilding complements more established methods of nature conservation. In addition to conserving the most intact remaining habitats and key biodiversity areas, we need to scale up the recovery of nature by restoring lost interactions and restore habitat connectivity.



Long-term focus

To ensure sustained positive effects on biodiversity and resilient ecosystems for future generations, rewilding efforts aim and work on a long-term perspective.



Acting in context

Rewilding embraces the role of people, and their cultural and economic connections to the land. It is about finding ways to work and live within healthy, natural vibrant ecosystems and reconnect with wild nature. We approach rewilding with a long-term knowledge of the environmental and cultural history of a place.



Knowledge exchange

Exchanging knowledge and expertise to continually refine rewilding best practice and achieve the best possible rewilding results. Using the best-available evidence, gathering and sharing data, and having the confidence to learn from failure will lead to success.



Advancing rewilding in Europe

The year 2022 was a year of significant growth for Rewilding Europe, helping us to gain more traction in the practice and promotion of rewilding across our continent.

A transitional year

On reflection, 2022 was a year when we prepared ourselves to meet renewed ambitions, as a precursor to delivering even more meaningful and tangible results in the years ahead. Driven by our new Strategic Plan 2021–2030 ('Strategy 2030'), which we launched at the end of 2021, we committed to an updated theory of change, a revised strategic framework, and a set of new ambitions for the current decade. We have now started to work towards new objectives, targets and indicators of success that will guide our work from year to year.

It has been amazing to see how we can set things in motion, based on a new and positive narrative for European nature recovery. Our bold and holistic approach, with its primary focus on practical action in our growing portfolio of rewilding landscapes, resonates with a growing number of people. This increasing sense of traction, which is very exciting, generates energy, inspiration and dedication across our pan-European team.

Below, we highlight a few important general developments for each of our 10 operation landscapes in 2022, before diving deeper into the overall achievements for each of the four key components that comprise our rewilding work.

Organisational strengthening

Fueled by our growing financial income we developed a plan to ensure our central teams and landscape teams are fit for purpose. Following Strategy 2030, we created an Upscaling Team, based on both existing and new positions. This includes a Head of Upscaling, who is part of our eight-person strong Central Management Team. A very timely and important step was the assignment of Johan Booij as Finance & Operations Director as a statutory position in January 2022. This has enabled us to make good progress based on an Organisational Growth and Development Plan for our organisation.

As a result, capacity in the Central Team grew by 37% (now 26 fte), including the new Upscaling Team and an

overall strengthening of the rewilding, enterprise, communications, and finance & operations teams. The same upward trend was seen in our 10 operational landscapes, where we saw capacity grow by around 14% (now 80 fte), resulting in stronger teams working on the ground. This includes new teams in the Iberian Highlands (Spain) and the Southern Carpathians (Romania). A Network Agreement was prepared to ensure coherence and alignment across our growing network of rewilding entities that have been established for each of the landscapes. Agreed by the end of the year, it was prepared for signing in early 2023.

Despite this growth, we are determined to stay agile and avoid becoming bogged down by increased interactions and more complex processes and decision making. To keep our operations efficient and scalable, we continued improving our processes and systems, and will continue to do so over the next few years. We also experienced significant growth in more outward-



▲ Presentation of the 'Wildlife Comeback in Europe' report in September at the David Attenborough Building in Cambridge.

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One of the major highlights of 2022 was the successful launch of the Iberian Highlands in Spain as our tenth landscape in October, following more than two years of preparation.

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facing areas, such as brand recognition, outreach and publicity, partnerships, networks, and governance. Overseeing all of this was intense and frequently challenging, but was very rewarding overall and further increased our confidence. It is important to bear in mind that all of this organisational growth is focused on maximising the impact of Rewilding Europe's twin demonstration and catalysing roles, as we work to deliver wilder nature at landscape scale across Europe.

Rewilding landscape progress

We made huge progress in our rewilding landscapes in 2022, as the 10 feature stories in this Annual Review demonstrate. Each of these stories has a landscape-specific angle that characterises the rewilding efforts being carried out on the ground. Across our landscape portfolio we saw a wide range of interventions and results, ranging from increasing the amount of land being rewilded to the reintroduction of keystone wildlife species; from

creating wildlife corridors to building local business networks; from mapping old-growth forests to developing and executing landscape business plans; from river restoration and dam removal to building wildlife hides; and from releasing Eurasian lynx and European bison to developing local nature-based tourism.

One of the major highlights of 2022 was the successful launch of the Iberian Highlands in Spain as our tenth landscape in October, following more than two years of preparation. This realised our ambition, set in 2011, of establishing 10 operational rewilding landscapes, based on co-production with local teams and entities. We also started a feasibility study on a possible eleventh landscape – the Alpes Dauphiné in France – which we hope to conclude in the course of 2023.

Most of these landscapes saw a steady growth in activities and impact, with the Greater Còca Valley and Central Apennines as front runners. The teams in the Velebit Mountains and Rhodope

Mountains also picked up strongly during the year, while a new team leader in Rewilding Sweden started to build a full new team and strengthen the board. The Affric Highlands took off really well in its first full year, while our work in the Ukrainian part of the Danube Delta was hampered by the war that started early in the year. Despite this, the Ukrainian team have continued much of their work, which is truly remarkable and admirable. Last but not least, we set up a new legal entity in Romania (Rewilding Romania) which will cover operations in both the Southern Carpathians and the Romanian part of the Danube Delta.

Welcome Iberian Highlands

Officially launched in October 2022 in the spectacular surroundings of the medieval Spanish city of Cuenca, the Iberian Highlands rewilding landscape marks a major milestone for Rewilding Europe, adding a further 850,000 hectares of land to help upscale rewilding efforts across Europe. This vast area forms part of the Southern Iberian Chain – a 500km-long mountain range that stretches between the Cantabrian and Mediterranean regions of central-eastern Spain.

The rewilding landscape consists of three contiguous and protected core areas – Serrania de Cuenca, Alto Tajo and Montes Universales, along with other areas protected as Natura 2000 sites – and boasts enormous rewilding potential. The high levels of rural depopulation and land abandonment and one of the lowest human population densities in Europe provide opportunities to give more space back to nature. And although some key species are missing – such as the Iberian wolf – the relatively rich biodiversity is a great starting point for further growth of the nature-based tourism sector. Preparations started in September 2019

to explore this potential through a partnership coordinated by Rewilding Europe involving Spanish NGOs Terra Naturalis, Micorriza, and Foundation FIRE.

Having secured substantial income from the Endangered Landscape Programme, Cartier for Nature, and Rewilding Europe's own core funding, the new landscape took off with the assignment of a team leader and a small team, under the auspices of Rewilding Spain. The team has already started to work on wildlife comeback, the recovery of ecological processes, habitat restoration, and the creation of a network of nature-based enterprises throughout the landscape, based on a comprehensive and ambitious rewilding plan.

Wildlife comeback

Wildlife comeback played an important role and became a central theme of our work in 2022, with three main milestones signifying its importance. The first, involving the publication of an updated 'Wildlife Comeback in Europe' report during a seminar at the University of Cambridge's David Attenborough Building, was a real highlight. The report, addressing and analysing the comeback of 50 iconic mammal and bird species (plus the green turtle), was picked up widely by European and global media.

The second, which saw the launch of the European Wildlife Comeback Fund at the same event, marked the start of a range of wildlife reintroductions and population reinforcements in Europe (see pages 88–91).

And the third milestone saw the publication of a landmark paper about the role of wildlife in the carbon cycle, in which Rewilding Europe participated, providing a first-ever overview of how the recovery of wildlife populations can help to address the negative impacts of climate change.

By the end of 2022, we had:

- ➔ **10 rewilding landscapes** operational, with a total size of **8.8 million hectares**
- ➔ **39,647 hectares** under direct rewilding regime by ourselves (+17% year-on-year)
- ➔ **144,772 hectares** under rewilding regime by third parties in our landscapes and members of the European Rewilding Network (+65% year-on-year)
- ➔ 10 local teams boasting a total of around **80 fte** (+14% year-on-year) and a central team boasting **26 fte** (+37% year-on-year)*
- ➔ **28 donors** and financial partners supporting our work
- ➔ Total income of **8.6 million euros** in 2022 (+37% year-on-year)
- ➔ Total expenses of **6.9 million euros**, with work towards our four main objectives accounting for 86%
- ➔ Management costs accounted for **12%** of total expenditure (of which fundraising costs accounted for **2%**)
- ➔ **52%** of total income was allocated to landscapes and **48%** at central level, mostly in support of landscapes
- ➔ Our continuity reserve grew from 0.7 million euros to **1.3 million euros** (to cover six months of operations)

* 1 fte = 1 full time equivalent meaning one full-time job position (5 days/week).



▲ Rewilding is about letting nature lead, like here in the Rhodope Mountains.



Rewilding Europe Travel

After a nearly two years of preparation, we launched Rewilding Europe Travel as Rewilding Europe’s exclusive travel partner. It evolved from the former European Safari Company and became an independent company registered in the United Kingdom, based on a licensing agreement with Rewilding Europe. Rewilding Europe Travel aims to be catalyst for interest in the wild and generate pride, creating public support and partnerships with a strong focus on our rewilding landscapes. Through the experiences it offers, the company works to create positive attitudes amongst stakeholders for a Europe with much more wild nature, wildlife, and thriving nature-based economies. A focus on small group travel minimises carbon footprint and the impact on rewilding landscapes, while allowing every group member to benefit from expert guiding and interaction with local experts and the host communities. Rewilding Europe Travel has developed a wide range of immersive, pan-European travel experiences and saw a significant increase in booking during its first half-year.



Rewilding Climate Solutions

At the end of the year Rewilding Europe saw the legal formation of Rewilding Climate Solutions. This new commercial entity is fully owned by the foundation and aims to upscale European rewilding by unlocking nature, climate and people positive investment in Europe. This will be achieved by connecting landowners and managers interested in or already engaged in landscape-scale rewilding with carbon buyers and impact investors looking to invest in rigorously verified, long-term, high-impact rewilding initiatives. Through Rewilding Climate Solutions we will enhance the commercial viability of rewilding initiatives by enabling them to sell nature-based carbon credits to the market. Rewilding Climate Solutions will become operational in 2023.

Fundraising success

In 2022 we made remarkable progress in our fundraising efforts, with Rewilding Europe receiving a number of major grants. Firstly, a new partnership with the US-based Grantham Foundation took off with a 3.4 million dollar budget to set up Rewilding Climate Solutions, providing an investment platform for rewilding based on carbon credits. The Arcadia Fund provided a new grant of 5 million dollars to advance rewilding in Europe, with a focus on three main areas of work. We received a 1 million euro donation from the owners of Delinat (a Swiss-based organic wine growing company), while the Endangered Landscape Programme awarded us a 1.5 million euro grant for the Iberian Highlands. We are also excited to have started a partnership with the newly established Cartier for Nature Fund, which has committed 1.5 million euros for three years for both the Iberian Highlands and Southern Carpathians.

We also grew our private donor income further, with several new par-

ticipants making a five-year commitment. For this purpose, we launched a new initiative offering private donors the opportunity to become a ‘Rewilding Patron’ based on a minimum contribution of at least 0.5 million euros per year. By the end of the year, we had registered the first two of such patrons. We also started to offer people the possibility of leaving legacies to Rewilding Europe, with the first ones registered. Other new donations were received from HSBC, Hogan Lovells, the European Commission (Horizon Europe), ForestPeace Foundation, and various other organisations.

As a result of all these efforts, we saw central level income grow from 6.3 million euros in 2021 to 8.6 million euros in 2022, representing a substantial year-on-year increase of 37%. In general terms, we see a more steady and long-term security in our structural income (both restricted and unrestricted).

Total expenses in 2022 were 6.9 million euros, of which 86% was dedicated to our four main objectives. Of our expenditure, 52% was allocated to the rewilding landscapes and 48% spent at central level, largely in support of the rewilding landscapes. Furthermore, Rewilding Europe spent 2% of our total costs on fundraising and 12% on management and development of the initiative. Expenditure levels in 2022 were significantly higher than in 2021, mostly due to the increased efforts of the growing landscapes teams and the ending of limitations caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result of income growth and higher expenditure levels, our donor restricted reserve increased to 3.6 million euros, while our general reserve decreased to 1.5 million euros.

Given the financial situation and growth of the organisation, the Supervisory Board decided to increase our continuity reserve from 0.7 million euros to 1.3 million euros by the end of



SEBASTIAN LUSUTA

2022. The continuity reserve is intended to counter the risk of a period with no or limited income, ensuring that the foundation can continue to meet its obligations, and more specifically cover the costs of organisational operations for a period of six months.

Financial partnership strategy

To realise the ambitions presented in our Strategy 2030, we will need further growth, diversification, and stabilisation of income. To achieve this, we have developed a financial partnership strategy, with the support of external advisors. It sets out directions and presents criteria that will enable Rewilding Europe to build a portfolio of partnerships based on well-defined selection criteria. The ultimate objective is to assure a healthy financial future for the organisation including all of our current 10 and future 15 landscapes, based on a long-term commitment to Rewilding Europe through a diverse mix of funding types, funder segments, and financial partners.

Following this strategy, we seek partners who are focused on the long term and are leaders in sustainability in their respective sectors. We seek pioneers whose mission goes beyond compensation (net zero), who want to add real value and support the delivery of lasting and positive rewilding impact as we work towards our vision and mission (nature positive). Partners should also accept that Rewilding Europe will take risks in its drive to foster innovation and endorse the entrepreneurial approach of the organisation.

At the same time, partnering with corporates can also involve a reputational risk. To minimise this risk and identify and select the best corporate partners to work with, three mechanisms have been put in place: corporate engagement principles (see also pages 102–103), a partner vetting procedure, and a list of corporate ‘dream partners’.

With this strategy in place and these tools developed, we believe we are well prepared to continue shaping our financial partner portfolio.

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We seek pioneers whose mission goes beyond compensation, who want to add real value and support the delivery of lasting and positive rewilding impact.

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Heads in the cloud, feet in the mud

Rewilding Europe has evolved from a visionary idea into an organisation that oversees a portfolio of groundbreaking, landscape-scale rewilding initiatives across Europe.



IBERIAN
HIGHLANDS
SPAIN



RHODOPE
MOUNTAINS
BULGARIA



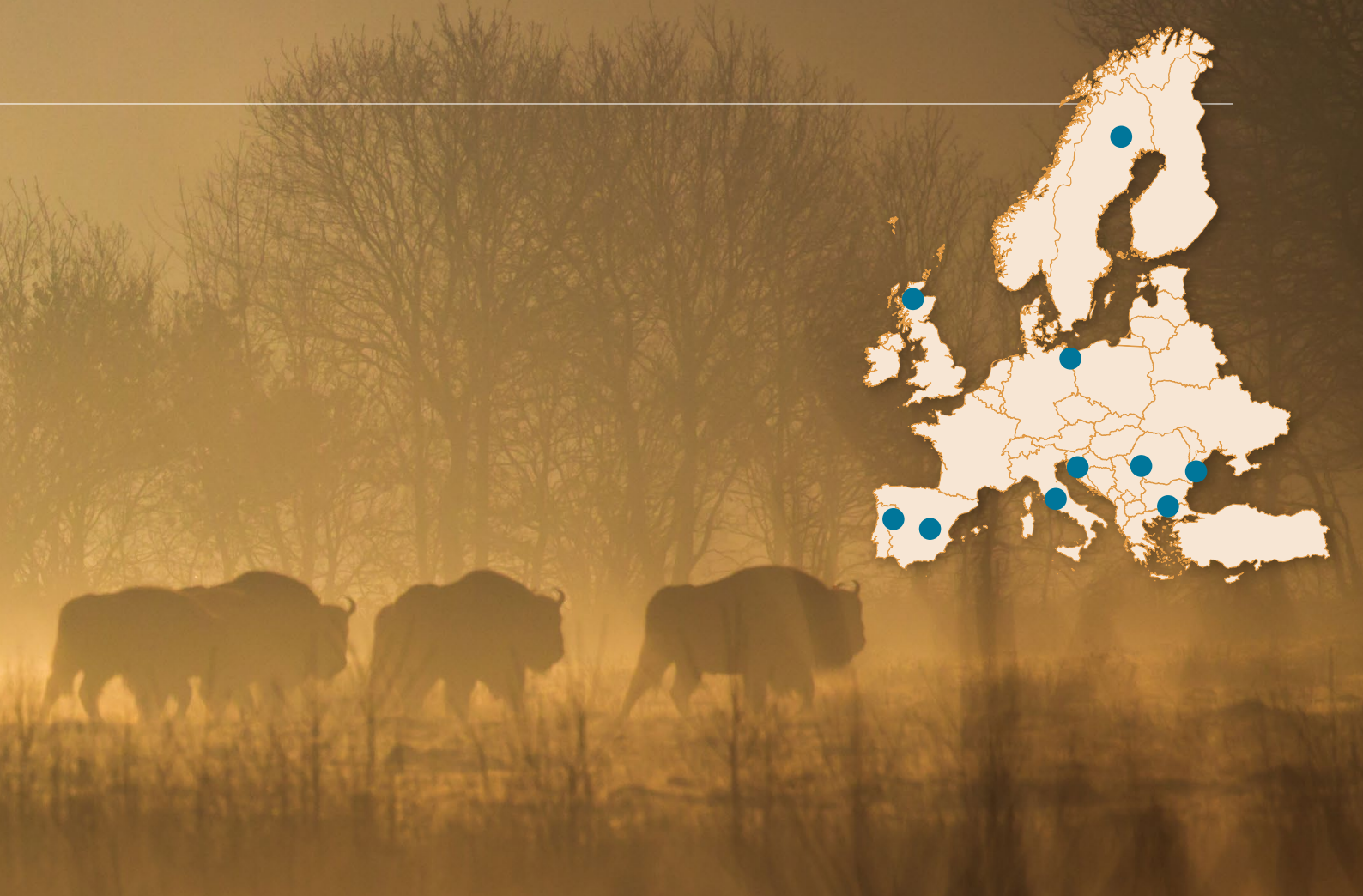
GREATER
CÓA VALLEY
PORTUGAL



SOUTHERN
CARPATHIANS
ROMANIA



CENTRAL
APENNINES
ITALY



Across our rewilding landscapes we work to demonstrate rewilding as one of the best ways of enabling the recovery of nature – both for its own intrinsic values, and as an effective practical solution to the challenges we face at the intersection of biodiversity loss, climate change and the needs and aspirations of human society.

Rewilding Europe has set a pioneering and ambitious course for the future to deliver a Europe that is richer in wild nature, with all the benefits this brings for people and planet. It plays a vital

role in demonstrating how rewilding works in different geographical and socio-economic settings and cultures, and encourages and enables others to engage in rewilding.

Our local partners are bringing back river dynamics, naturally regenerating forests and mosaic landscapes created with the support of large grazers, which are interacting with predators and scavengers. With key species reintroduced and supported in their natural comeback, communities are seeing windows open onto a prosperous future, with

growing opportunities for the development of sustainable nature-based economies. Thanks to rewilding, people in these communities are enjoying an increasing sense of pride, new identity, and connection with their natural environment.

By demonstrating that rewilding can be carried out at landscape scale, and that it can deliver a wide range of benefits for both nature and people, we work to encourage others to act and adopt rewilding, thereby increasing the scale and impact of rewilding across Europe.



SWEDISH
LAPLAND

SWEDEN



VELEBIT
MOUNTAINS

CROATIA



DANUBE
DELTA

UKRAINE
ROMANIA
MOLDOVA



ODER
DELTA

GERMANY
POLAND



AFFRIC
HIGHLANDS

SCOTLAND



FRANS SCHEPERS / REWILDING EUROPE



Changing the narrative



The vast and sparsely populated Iberian Highlands became Rewilding Europe's 10th rewilding landscape in 2022. Enabling wild nature to recover here could transform the outlook for local communities.



▲ Iberian ibex.

sweeping pine, oak and juniper forests, as well as areas of steppe and agricultural land.

"The Iberian Highlands sit at a crossroads of competing climates and diverse habitats," explains Pablo Schapira. "These have become a sanctuary for a wide range of species, including thriving populations of raptors – such as the Bonelli's eagle, Egyptian and griffon vulture, and peregrine falcon – as well as ungulates, such as the Iberian ibex, multiple deer species, wild boar and mouflon. But top predators, such as the Iberian lynx, Iberian wolf and brown bear, are currently missing."

Socio-economic challenges

The huge rewilding potential of the Iberian Highlands isn't simply a product of their relatively intact ecology. Today the Iberian Chain and surrounding area have one of the lowest human population densities in Europe. Lower, even, than the northernmost part of Finnish Lapland, which explains why this region is frequently referred to as "Spanish Lapland".

"We sometimes joke that the human being is the most endangered species in the Iberian Highlands," says Basilio Rodríguez García, Rewilding Spain's Enterprise Officer. "In fact, rural depopulation – which began in the 1950s – is a very serious issue. Most of the people now living here are very old and not involved in the economic system at all, and there are very limited opportunities for people who want to stay in

- **Country**
 Spain
- **Focal landscape**
 Iberian Highlands
- **Size of landscape**
 850,000 ha
- **Work started in**
 2022

A fresh perspective

Pablo Schapira, team leader of Rewilding Spain, ventures out into the Iberian Highlands on an almost daily basis – typically for work, sometimes simply to connect with nature. His travels through the landscape often bring to mind many years spent on the African continent.

"The high plateaus and sweeping, half-open grassland evoke parts of Mozambique, Rwanda and Ethiopia, where I spent much of my early career involved in conservation," says the highly experienced Spanish biologist. "My time in Africa was formative for me. It has given me an understanding of rewilding which governs my thinking and practical efforts today, back in the country where I was born and grew up."

Rewilding as a concept is fairly new in Europe, but has been integrated into conservation approaches in other places, such as Africa, for quite a while.

"When we talk about bringing back species that have disappeared because of human intervention in the landscape, and restoring entire ecosystems and natural processes, this is relatively common in Africa, but is not generally labelled rewilding," says Schapira.

"The timeline in Europe is different. Many people have grown up without any significant contact with wildlife species and wild nature, which means they've forgotten what it's like to live alongside wildlife. For a landscape like the Iberian Highlands, rewilding can really enhance the wildness of nature and improve the lives of people in local communities at the same time."

Milestone addition

Located in the provinces of Guadalajara, Cuenca and Teruel, the Iberian Highlands are part of a range of mountains known as the Iberian System (Sistema Ibérico).

- **Larger landscape**
 Located in the provinces of Guadalajara, Cuenca and Teruel, the Iberian Highlands are part of a range of mountains known as the Iberian System (Systema Ibérico).

- **Main habitats**
 Plateau landscape with extensive pine and juniper forest, grasslands and steppe vegetation. Deep canyons with rivers, high cliffs and deciduous forest.

- **Focal species**
 Cinereous, bearded and Egyptian vultures, Iberian ibex, Iberian wolf, Iberian lynx, Przewalski and other horse types, Tauros, red kite and black woodpecker.

- **Team Leader**
 Pablo Schapira

After extensive preparations, they became Rewilding Europe's tenth rewilding landscape in October 2022. Their inclusion in the Rewilding Europe portfolio represented a major milestone for the initiative, adding a further 850,000 hectares of land to help upscale European nature recovery efforts.

The Iberian Highlands rewilding landscape consists of three contiguous and protected core areas – the Serranía de Cuenca and Alto Tajo Natural Parks and Montes Universales mountain range – together with multiple Natura 2000 sites. Dominated by awe-inspiring canyons, carved into the limestone bedrock by the Tajo (Tagus), Guadiana and Ebro rivers, they are characterised by

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Population density in the landscape: less than 2 people/km².

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the area. Young people don't want jobs in farming or forestry, so they end up leaving for the city. Many people have a negative view about the area and don't see how things can be turned around – it's a very entrenched narrative."

The fact that land has been widely abandoned in the Iberian Highlands has allowed some wildlife species to make a comeback. However, it has also caused ongoing problems. Rural depopulation has led to a decrease in animal husbandry, which has disappeared completely in some municipalities. Without the grazing impact of large domesticated herbivores, open areas of the landscape are being encroached by shrubs and bushes, which means the risk of catastrophic wildfire is increasing. In 2005, one such fire damaged nearly 12,000 hectares of pine and Pyrenean oak in the area.

Leveraging natural assets

In the face of its ongoing socio-economic challenges, the Iberian Highlands could become one of Europe's most spectacular connected natural landscapes. Existing protected areas represent core assets for restoring the landscape – not only for the benefit of nature, but local communities too. By enabling the development of a thriving nature-based economy, rewilding at scale can encourage people to return and revitalise the area.

"The low population density in the Iberian Highlands means that every action we carry out can potentially create a big benefit," says Pablo Schapira. "For example, if we reintroduce some animals or support nature recovery in the landscape and this creates one or two jobs – either directly or through increased tourism – then maybe this will enable one or two families to return to a local village of 30 people. This can mean the difference between having a school or shop in that village open or closed."



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 "Many people have a very negative view about the area and don't see how things can be turned around – it's a very entrenched narrative."

.....
1000
 hectares of old-growth forest identified so far.

At the moment rural tourism in Spain is very underdeveloped. Rewilding could help to attract growing numbers of people to wilder areas, and to spend money there.

"In terms of nature-based economic drivers in the Iberian Highlands, I would say tourism has the most potential for growth, followed by forestry," says Basilio Rodríguez García. "In 2023 we will organise our first nature-based tourism fair, begin guide training, and look to provide financial support and advice to entrepreneurs who want to start nature-based companies through Rewilding Europe Capital. Rewilding Europe Travel will start selling experiences in the landscape from the autumn."

Realising a vision

If rewilding is to revitalise the socio-economic fortunes of the Iberian Highlands, it will need to do so based on thriving wildlife populations and healthy, resilient natural ecosystems. As its reputation as a fantastic place to experience wild nature grows, so the landscape will attract ever greater numbers of visitors.

"Once upon a time, larger grazers and browsers shaped Europe's natural heritage in a very similar fashion to the elephants, wildebeest and zebras of today's African savannah, supporting

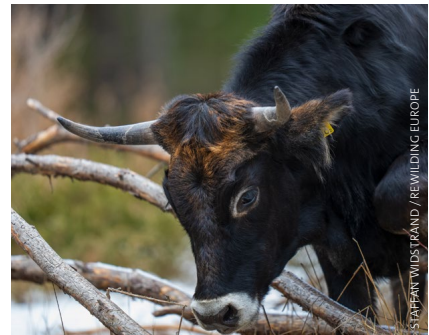
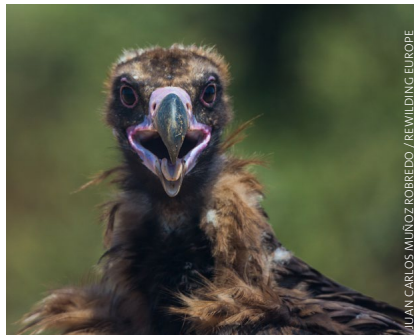


▲ Sunset at the Castle of Zafrá in the Sierra de Caldederos.

◀ “Five years from now I would love to see a landscape that has integrated large wild and semi-wild grazers, with all the benefits this will bring,” says Pablo Schapira.

▶ Cinereous vulture.

▶▶ Tauros in Frias de Albarracín.



complex food webs that also included predators and scavengers,” says Pablo Schapira. “This is the vision we are working towards in the Iberian Highlands.”

With support from the Endangered Landscapes Programme, Cartier for Nature, and the Arcadia Fund, Rewilding Spain is stepping up natural grazing across the Iberian Highlands. In collaboration with local partners, herds of Tauros (a back-bred wild bovine) and Serrano horses have been reintroduced, with more releases to come, including Przewalski’s horses, and kulan (wild donkeys) in arid steppe areas. Such actions are already beginning to bear fruit.

“We are seeing the changes in the vegetation where the Tauros are grazing,” says Ricardo Almazán, General Manager of La Maleza Nature Park, a Rewilding Spain partner which helps to manage the Tauros herd, which now numbers 25

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 “The low population density means that every action can create a big benefit.”

animals. “They are opening the forest, lowering the levels of scrub, removing overgrown vegetation from the river, and stimulating grassy areas to reappear. This, in turn, is attracting wild ungulates such as roe deer and fallow deer.”

The growing presence of large grazers in the Iberian Highlands will benefit scavenging species such as vultures, and create enabling conditions for the comeback of carnivores. Going forwards, Rewilding Spain is working with

partners to return cinereous vultures to the landscape, and will also carry out a pilot release of Iberian lynx, with a view to scaling up the reintroduction to establish a permanent population. The Rewilding Spain team hope that the Iberian wolf, which has a population around 60 kilometres away, will return of its own accord.

“My time in Africa has made me incredibly passionate about using nature recovery as a driver for socio-economic development,” says Pablo Schapira. “Five years from now I would love to see a landscape that has integrated large wild and semi-wild grazers, with all the benefits this will bring. I’m also conscious of the fact that we need to deliver quickly for local communities, and that we have a part to play as a role model for the scaling up of rewilding across Spain.”



The subsidy challenge

In the Rhodope Mountains, agricultural subsidies are promoting the intensification of grazing, which is negatively impacting nature and local rewilding efforts.

A rich and varied landscape

The sparsely populated Eastern Rhodope Mountains of southeast Bulgaria are one of Europe's great biodiversity hotspots. Varying in elevation from 300 to 1200 metres, the landscape here is bisected by dramatic river valleys and plunging gorges lined with black basalt and white limestone cliffs. Mediterranean forests alternate with maquis (Mediterranean shrubland) and lush, flower-filled meadows, which eventually give way to rocky slopes and rugged mountaintops.

Thanks to the varied and pristine nature of the region's habitats, minimal human disturbance, and a strategic location between Europe and Asia, the Rhodope Mountains are home to an astonishing number of plant and animal species. Nowhere in Europe is the flora so rich, or the amphibian and reptile diversity so high. Of the 38 European birds of prey, 36 species can

been seen here, while a healthy wolf population manages the densities and distribution of wild herbivores. Even the brown bear, absent for many decades, is staging a comeback.

Perverse subsidies

One of the key ecological process supporting the great biodiversity of the Rhodope Mountains is extensive livestock grazing, which has always been the main land use in the region. While most of the area's wild grazers have long since disappeared, domesticated livestock have acted as their proxies for centuries. Low-intensity farming

with cattle, in particular, helps to maintain the area's nature-rich mosaic landscapes, with their mixture of open grassland, forest edges, open woodland and scattered groves.

"The main business in the Rhodope Mountains rewilding landscape is the breeding of livestock, mostly cattle," explains Hristo Hristov, a rewilding officer attached to the Rewilding Rhodopes team. "Most of the herds are small, between 100 and 200 cows, and the cattle within them have assumed the ecological role of natural grazers in the landscape. Herds have defined social structures and are free-roaming

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One of the key ecological process supporting the great biodiversity of the Rhodope Mountains is extensive livestock grazing.


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RHODOPE MOUNTAINS

BULGARIA



- **Country**
 Bulgaria
- **Focal landscape**
Eastern Rhodope Mountains
- **Size of landscape**
250,000 ha
- **Work started in**
2014
- **Larger landscape**
Part of large escarpment between Greece and Bulgaria (the Rhodopes and Orvilos Mountains), including a number of Natura 2000 sites and national reserves.
- **Main habitats**
Mediterranean and continental temperate forests, river valleys, cliffs, grasslands, and steppe.
- **Focal species**
Griffon vulture, cinereous vulture, Egyptian vulture, red deer, fallow deer, wild horse, wolf, brown bear, European bison, European souslik.
- **Team leader**
Andreana Trifonova

A skewed system

In Europe, as in many other parts of the world, intensive livestock farming exerts unsustainable pressure on the land, leading to biodiversity decline and severe environmental pollution, as well as significant greenhouse gas emissions and negative impacts on human health. Intensive livestock rearing systems are also driving antimicrobial resistance and have been linked to a higher risk of zoonotic diseases (diseases transferred from animals to humans).

This twentieth century model of animal production cannot continue – for our own sake, as well as that of the planet. On the other hand, many European ecosystems – such as those in the Rhodope Mountains – have developed alongside human management and the extensive (low intensity) rearing of livestock. When adequately managed, these landscapes can maintain and enhance biodiversity, lock up significant amounts of carbon, and provide a wide range of other benefits.

Unfortunately, the CAP – a complex system of agricultural subsidies and other programmes accounting for over 350 billion euros, or around one-third, of the entire 2021–2027 EU budget – is failing to provide enough support for those engaged in extensive grazing, pastoralism, and the management of semi-wild and wild animals across Member States. This is pretty short-sighted, given the pivotal role these practices play in carbon sequestration,

for most of the year. As a result of wolf predation, they are also an important part of the circle of life, which supports scavenging species such as vultures.”

While extensive farming has long played a role in maintaining biodiversity in the Rhodopes, Hristov is concerned by a worrying trend. This has seen the subsidies of the European Union’s Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) support the steady intensification of local livestock farming, with one farm of over 1000 cows already present in the landscape.

“This level of grazing leads to degradation of the land and the wild nature it supports in many ways,” says the rewilding officer. “These subsidies, without which this huge farm wouldn’t exist, create financial incentives for people to raise more and more livestock. On top of this, veterinary and animal welfare regulations effectively mean the cows are removed from the circle of life – they are locked up at night, they are fenced off, they are not part of nature any more. It’s fair to say subsidy-based pressure is a clear and present danger to biodiversity in the Rhodopes.”

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“It’s fair to say subsidy-based pressure is a clear and present danger to biodiversity in the Rhodopes.”

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HARSTO HRISTOV / REWILDING RHODOPE

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 “These subsidies, without which this huge farm wouldn’t exist, create financial incentives for people to raise more and more livestock.”

biodiversity protection, and soil and water conservation. Counterproductively, CAP subsidies are instead heavily skewed towards more intensive, less sustainable farming.

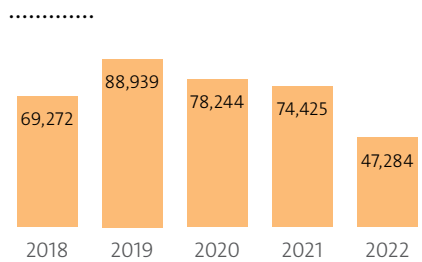
Big vs small
 Since Bulgaria joined the EU in 2007, the impact of the CAP on Bulgarian livestock farming is further slanted by the country’s agricultural system. While the largest share of land remains divided between numerous small owners, most of them are urban dwellers incapable of organising a substantial level of agricultural production. Rural land is therefore managed predominantly not by its owners, but by big *arendatori* (land tenants), who appropriate a disproportionately large chunk of the EU subsidies on offer.

In 2018, for example, 82 per cent of Bulgarian beneficiaries received less than 18 percent of CAP subsidies, with many of the smallest farmers remaining outside the CAP system altogether. The current design of the policy, which allocates subsidies mainly per unit of land cultivated or managed – while simultaneously overlooking a whole range of environmental and socio-economic factors – has seen many high-biodiversity areas of mosaic landscape in Bulgaria ploughed into arable fields.

Impact on rewilding
 In 2020, a new way of evaluating rewilding progress – developed by Rewilding Europe in collaboration with a range of partners – was applied across seven of our rewilding landscapes. A range of indicators, collectively selected as a way of measuring the ecological impact of rewilding interventions, were measured in each landscape and compared to their value in the year rewilding began. Changes in these indicators were then used to generate an overall rewilding score.

While five of our landscapes generated a positive rating, the Rhodope Mountains registered a score of -13%. This doesn't mean that rewilding interventions at specific pilot sites within the Rhodope Mountains are failing to have a positive impact, but reflects changes happening in the larger landscape around them. A major contributor to the negative outcome of the assessment are the subsidies of the CAP.

“It’s unfortunate that the people taking the decisions in national government don’t really understand extensive grazing and the important role it plays in supporting the health of wild nature in the Rhodopes and other parts of Bulgaria,” says Rewilding Rhodopes team leader Andreana Trifonova. “The distribution of CAP subsidies is carried out



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 Cattle numbers in the landscape are decreasing because small farmers practicing extensive grazing are being forced to close their farms due to CAP requirements.

- ◀ Rhodope Shorthorn cattle in the Rhodope Mountains.
- ▶ Livestock breeder Izetin Sali.
- ▼ Rewilding Rhodopes team leader Andreana Trifonova.

according to strict guidelines and there is no allowance for such grazing. There is also a strong lobby in this country for farmers who are carrying out intensive agriculture, so the dice are loaded in their favour."

Countering the trend

Farms with livestock that are extensively grazed represent modern, multifunctional agriculture because they provide numerous public goods at low cost. They make a valuable contribution to effectively tackling the European challenges of protecting and enhancing biodiversity and minimising the impact and scale of climate change.

In terms of the CAP, bold policy action is required to not only better support extensive farming, but to develop subsidies which initiate a just transition for intensive livestock farms towards lower animal numbers, and which take into account the ecological requirements of habitats and species. Rural policies may need to be better targeted to allow people to make better use of the socio-economic benefits that rewilding can provide.

Recommendations for how the CAP could be amended already exist. A report produced through the three-year, Rewilding Europe-coordinated GrazeLIFE initiative (2018–2021), which considered the Rhodope Mountains as one of its study areas, outlined how European policies – particularly the CAP – could better support extensive grazing. The initiative was funded through the EU's LIFE programme and carried out at the request of the European Commission.

As for the Rewilding Rhodopes team, they are determined to keep championing extensive grazing.

"We won't give up on this issue," says Andreana Trifonova. "Over the last 15 years there have been multiple meetings with the government, and we



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 "We do the best that we can with regard to nature, but I would love to see subsidies working here that actually help us."

will continue to lobby. We really need actions to be taken on a national level, which will better support extensive grazing, and maybe also explore opportunities within the market for extensive farmers to get a better price for their products, which would reduce the reliance on subsidies."

Hristo Hristov takes heart from the fact that many farmers engaged in extensive farming in the Rhodopes are very knowledgeable and still want to protect nature in their own way. Izetin Sali, for example, is a 59 year-old livestock breeder who owns around 70 Rhodope shorthorn cattle.

"My animals are free – there are no fences," he explains. "They know where to graze, where to find the best grass throughout the year, and the best water. They live alongside deer, wild horses, and European bison. I lose two or three cattle to wolves annually, but generally they know how to protect themselves.

"I take CAP subsidies for animals, which meant I had to build a stable, but the animals never go inside it. I don't accept subsidies for pastures, because I would have to clear them, which is bad for animals such as birds, tortoises and lizards. We do the best that we can with regard to nature, but I would love to see subsidies working here that actually help us."



A river runs through it

On the banks of Portugal's Côa River, a thriving connection between people, nature and business offers new hope for the future.

A new chapter

From high up on granite cliffs, the metallic blue ribbon of the Côa River snakes its way through an immense landscape. Overhead, groups of vultures navigate thermals on outstretched wings, while the sounds of restless Sor-

raia horses carry faintly on the warm breeze. While this sweeping panorama may be reminiscent of Arizona or Utah, this is, in fact, northeast Portugal – a place where the recovery of wild nature is now working to revitalise culture, communities and local commerce.

Stretching for around 140 kilometres from south to north, the Greater Côa Valley is a uniquely captivating place. The hilly landscape surrounding the Côa, which rises in the Malcata Mountains and eventually discharges into the Douro (one of the few Portuguese rivers to flow south-north), is painted from an amazing palette: glossy citrus groves, silvery olive trees, and neat rows of vines streaming like tresses of green hair, all bisected by the river's cleaving gorge. This dramatic environment is home to such iconic species as the griffon vulture and Iberian wolf, with long-term population support provided by the Rewilding Portugal team.

Yet the Côa River is as much about man as it is about fauna and flora. Rocks beside the river are decorated with engravings dating back thousands of

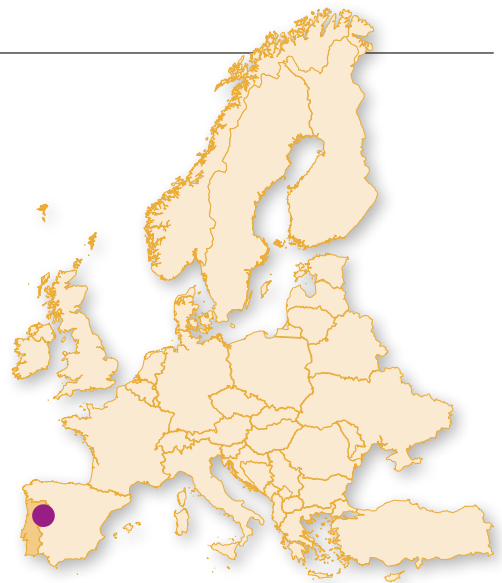


RICARDO FERREIRA

years, highlighting the importance of this waterway and its wildlife to people and livelihoods of old. And in more recent times, the silent waters of the Côa have witnessed many decades of rural depopulation and associated land abandonment, which have negatively impacted both the ecology and communities of the area.

“For thousands of years, the Côa River and its environs have been a place where nature and people coexisted – where history ebbed and flowed, just like the seasonal water levels in the river itself,” says Rewilding Portugal team leader Pedro Prata. “With rewilding now taking off and having a growing impact in the Greater Côa Valley, we might be on the verge of a new chapter in the never-ending story of the Côa River.”

- **Country**
 Portugal
- **Focal landscape**
 Greater Côa Valley
- **Size of landscape**
 120,000 ha
- **Work started in**
 2011
- **Larger landscape**
 Rugged landscape between Sierra de Gata in the south and Douro Valley in the north, northeast Portugal.
- **Main habitats**
 Oak forests, shrublands, montado, serra, rivers and canyons with cliffs.
- **Focal species**
 Griffon, cinereous and Egyptian vulture, Spanish imperial and Bonelli's eagle, Iberian wolf, Iberian lynx, rabbit, red deer, roe deer, Spanish ibex, wild horse, and Tauros.
- **Team leader**
 Pedro Prata



The network effect

The fact that land has been widely abandoned in the Greater Côa Valley has allowed some wildlife species to make a comeback and opens up exciting possibilities for rewilding. Yet as in other rewilding landscapes, it is critical that people living in the area benefit from the recovery of wild nature. In places such as the Greater Côa Valley, access to new jobs and livelihoods can breathe new life into local communities and prevent further social and cultural erosion.

Established in 2020 by the Rewilding Portugal team, the Wild Côa Network is an association of like-minded, Côa Valley-based enterprises (from guesthouses to handmade natural product sellers) who share a vision for a wilder and more sustainable future. The overall goal of the network – whose current membership now totals nearly 40 businesses – is to help develop a thriving nature-based economy in the area. In March 2022, the first face-to-face meeting between network members was held in the villages of Vilar Maior and Vale de Madeira.

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“For thousands of years, the Côa River and its environs have been a place where nature and people coexisted.”

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◀ Rewilding Portugal team leader Pedro Prata.

▶ Artwork by French artist Michèle Trotta was produced as part of the Festival CÕA – Corridor of Arts.

▼ Casa Villar Mayor.

▼ Ecological artist Antony Lyons.

an indoor garden of native Portuguese plants, and a courtyard with a barbecue. Rooms here are now bookable as private accommodation, allowing the Rewilding Portugal team to monetise the space and promote nature positive tourism in the region.

“The main idea behind the rewilding centre has always been for it to connect people with a new narrative for wilder nature, to serve as an asset for the local community, and to host various training, cultural and recreational activities,” explains Rewilding Portugal’s enterprise officer Joaquim Canotilho. “Ultimately, its real value has been to give new impetus to a small Portuguese village. With the centre playing a key role, we have shown that it is possible to create new, nature-based business and give the area an economic shot in the arm, while simultaneously allowing the population to be proud of their natural heritage once again.”



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 “Its real value has been to give new impetus to a small Portuguese village where only 20 people live.”

For Bárbara Cardoso, owner of Casa Villar Mayor, a country house situated in Vilar Maior, being part of a sustainable, nature-based tourism network has proven incredibly useful.

“By taking advantage of the complementary skills of all the partners, the network allows everyone involved to provide a more complete and innovative offering to customers. It has strengthened the appeal of the Greater Cõa Valley as a destination, boosted sales, and broadened everyone’s commitment to wild nature. In personal terms, it has also allowed me to meet

a large number of people from various sectors and to deepen my knowledge of rewilding.”

Centre stage

The Wild Cõa Network meet-up also saw members come together at Rewilding Portugal’s rewilding centre in Vale de Madeira, which opened in late 2021. The centre, which extends across three floors, acts as a multi-functional space – in addition to areas for exhibitions, photo displays, meetings and information about local rewilding efforts, there are also rooms for sleeping and dining,

The art of nature

With their history of rural depopulation, the communities around the Cõa River have long suffered from a loss of cultural heritage and tradition. Designed as a celebration of the Greater Cõa Valley’s fertile crossover between culture and nature, and to build new pride in it, the Rewilding Portugal team are organising the “CÕA – Corridor of Arts” Festival, which is set to take place in the summer of 2023. The event will see a range of local and international artists connect with communities in the valley to co-create works of art, using natural materials, respecting natural decay, and referencing the valley’s time-honoured artistic history.

“Today, rewilding efforts mean the Greater Cõa Valley is becoming an increasingly important wildlife corridor,” says Pedro Prata. “But the valley is also a corridor through time. Generation



after generation have contributed to and shared in artistic expression here. The CÕA Festival will celebrate this, reinforcing the special connection between local communities, art and wild nature, and offering new hope for the future.”

UK-based ecological artist Antony Lyons, who first visited the Greater Cõa Valley seven years ago, is co-creating an impressionistic video-sonic poem called the “Wild Cõa Symphony”, which has been commissioned by the Endangered Landscapes Programme. Premiering at the festival, this will weave together imagery, soundscapes and voices, inviting audiences to contemplate the changing landscape as a place of healing and repair for people and ecologies. Together with Portuguese archaeologist Bárbara Carvalho, Lyons has stayed in the valley for extended periods of time to produce the poem, engaging local communities and schools through workshops and artist-led walks.

“In the Greater Cõa Valley you really get a sense of what I call the ‘deep time’ story – of that longstanding connection between culture and nature here that is reflected in the archaeological sites of the area,” says Lyons. “It has been a real pleasure working with and taking inspiration from local people, and I hope the festival will enhance local pride and a sense of identity.”

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“The CÕA Festival will celebrate this, reinforcing the special connection between local communities, art and wild nature, and offering new hope for the future.”

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Lyons is also producing a land-art sculpture for the festival entitled “Habitat – A Treasure House”. This will be located in the Faia Brava Reserve.

Future focus

Today, the Rewilding Portugal team are working hard to rewild the Greater Cõa Valley, with the aim of creating a healthy, fully functioning and resilient natural landscape that supports an array of wildlife species. This, in turn, is enabling the development of a thriving nature-based economy and helping to restore and reinforce cultural values. The new narrative for this unique part of

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42

members currently in the Wild Cõa Network.

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Portugal is already becoming an inspirational example of what could happen at a larger scale across the country.

The efforts of the team and the diverse benefits of rewilding were widely discussed at Portugal’s first ever rewilding symposium, which took place in September, just outside Lisbon. With a range of thought leaders and rewilding experts present, it saw many productive discussions take place around the opportunities and challenges of rewilding in Portugal.

“Awareness of rewilding is now on the increase in Portugal,” says Rewilding Europe’s Head of Rewilding Raquel Filgueiras. “One of the biggest questions that came out of the symposium was: ‘why isn’t rewilding in Portugal carried out more widely?’. The rewilding experience in the Greater Cõa Valley, where restored nature, communities and businesses are working so well together, is definitely one that could and should be replicated elsewhere.”



Bison beyond

Thanks to a longstanding reintroduction programme, the European bison population in the Southern Carpathians of Romania is now growing rapidly. As it expands, rewilding efforts are shifting their focus towards coexistence and ecological impact.

A remarkable return

Rewilding often involves doing things that have never been attempted before. A good example of this can be found in the Southern Carpathians of Romania, where a partnership between Rewilding Europe and WWF Romania saw Europe's largest-ever bison reintroduction kick off in 2014. Over the following seven years, 105 bison were translocated to the Țarcu Mountains (part of the Southern Carpathians), an area where no wild bison had roamed free for at least 250 years.

With the story of the bison's return to the Southern Carpathians now moving on to a new chapter, the future

of this ecologically and socio-economically important species in the area looks bright. Despite a few setbacks along the way, the population now numbers at least 150 animals of various ages, with the focus of rewilding efforts now shifting more towards maintaining harmonious coexistence with local communities and analysing the behaviour, growth rate and ecological impact of the growing herd.

"We're almost half way towards the minimum viable population level of 150 mature individuals, as established by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN)," says

Marina Drugă, Executive Director of Rewilding Romania. "In fact, preliminary data shows that this may be the fastest growing free-roaming European bison population in Europe, although this will need to be confirmed. Either way, it's remarkable where we're at now, compared to the start of the reintroduction programme."

Despite this impressive growth, there will still be a need to further strengthen the Southern Carpathian bison population going forwards. In 2022, eight new animals were carefully selected and prepared by the Springe Bison Reserve and Dounaumoos Zweckverband in Germany – these will be released and join their free-roaming counterparts in the Țarcu Mountains in 2023.

Genetic analysis

In 2022, a second genetic study was carried out on the bison population in the Țarcu Mountains by the WWF Romania field team, involving the collection of 292 scat samples. Subsequent laboratory analysis was carried out by a team from Senckenberg Society for Nature Research at the Centre for Wildlife Genetics in the German town of Gelnhausen, in collaboration with an expert from WWF




DANIEL IMBILEA / REWILDING EUROPE

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“This may be the fastest growing free-roaming European bison population in Europe.”
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Romania. Adding these results to those of a first genetic study performed in 2021, the total number of bison individuals identified by unique DNA (genetic profile) was calculated to be 127, of which 30% were male and 70% were female.

“Based on this data we can estimate that the current bison population in the Țarcu Mountains numbers around 152 individuals,” explains Marina Drugă. “We estimate that only 77 of these animals were reintroduced between 2016 and 2021, so that means effectively half were born in the wild. In 2022–2023, we’re expecting the second generation of bison born in the wild, so this percentage will increase again.

If the population continues expanding at a similar rate, I would expect it to number between 350–450 individuals by 2030, but this is a very rough estimate.

- **Country**
 Romania
- **Focal landscape**
Southern Carpathians
- **Size of landscape**
100,000 ha
- **Work started in**
2011
- **Larger landscape**
Southern Carpathian mountain range including a connected series of national parks and protected areas ranging from Danube River valley in the south to Retezat NP in the north.
- **Main habitats**
Temperate forest, sub-alpine grasslands, cliffs, and steep river valleys.
- **Focal species**
European bison, red deer, wolf, brown bear, Eurasian lynx, griffon vulture.
- **Team leader**
Mariana Drugă

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152

Around 152 bison now roaming free in the Southern Carpathians. Around half of these animals are estimated to have been born in the wild. In 2022–2023, the second generation of wild bison will be born in the rewilding landscape.
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Record-breaking expansion

Romania’s Southern Carpathian Mountains, which rise to heights of 2500 metres, are one of Europe’s most spectacular wild areas. Bounded by the Balkan mountain range in eastern Serbia, they encompass the Țarcu Mountains Natura 2000 Site, as well as the adjoining Domogled-Valea Cernei and Retezat National Parks.

The landscape here comprises various ecosystems – alpine meadows, old-growth forests, dramatic cliffs and canyons. Above the tree line, the meadows once supported large flocks of sheep, with abandoned sheep pens and stock trails still marking the landscape. The area currently inhabited by free-roaming bison population, which consists mostly of half-open beech and spruce forest, is home to a wide range of other wildlife, including brown bears, grey wolves, Eurasian lynx and wild boar.

While rural depopulation and land abandonment have had a long-term impact on the Țarcu Mountains, there is still significant evidence of man in the landscape, with around 22,000 people in 8,500 households living in the area. Despite the fact that more and more land is now left unused, many residents still rely on subsistence farming.



Against this backdrop, the range of the growing bison population is becoming larger and larger, and is now estimated to be around 230 square kilometres. This is the largest range expansion of any reintroduced European bison herd, which can be partly attributed to the fact that the animals receive no supplementary feeding (as is the case with a number of other free-roaming bison populations in Europe). Some animals, which are tracked using GPS collars, have been seen to reach elevations as high as 2100 metres, which is also a record for free-roaming European bison.

“The movement of the herds is typically influenced by meteorological conditions,” explains Marina Drugă. “In cold weather, when there is a lot of snow, the bison tend to gather in big groups of 20 to 40 individuals and use small areas where the most food is available. In warm weather, they stay in smaller groups of around five to 10 animals and move extensively in search of food.”

In the near future further studies on the reintroduced bison are planned. These will examine variables such as the impact of the bison on local habitats, with the interaction between bison, vegetation and dynamic ecological processes central to the rewilding of the

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“We now have a unique opportunity to examine how a rapidly growing, free-roaming herd of European bison interacts with the landscape.”

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overall landscape. Other studies to be carried out in the near future will look at variables such as DNA (genetic viability and dynamics of the herds within their home range), diet (through a DNA-based technique of plant and animal identification called metabarcoding), parasitology, and the carrying capacity of the landscape (both ecological and sociological).

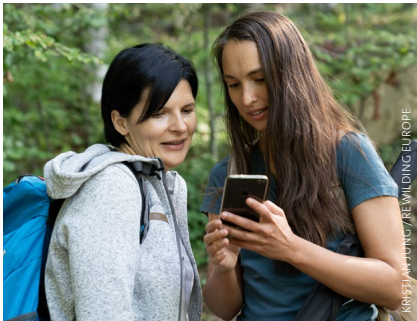
“We now have a unique opportunity to examine in detail how a rapidly growing, free-roaming herd of European bison interacts with the landscape,” says Marina Drugă. “What we learn will hopefully have a beneficial impact on other European bison reintroduction initiatives and help to scale up the overall recovery of this majestic and ecologically important animal.”

Promoting coexistence

As the bison population in the Țarcu Mountains grows and its range expands, so does the potential for challenges around human-wildlife

coexistence. From the very outset of the reintroduction programme, Rewilding Europe’s goal has always been to use the presence of the iconic bison as a drawcard for building a nature-based local economy, while ensuring bison and local residents live harmoniously alongside one another.

Moving forwards, Rewilding Romania and WWF Romania rangers will continue to patrol areas which have the highest opportunity for encounters between bison, people and their property, particularly during the winter and spring, when many animals move to lower elevations in search of food, and in the late summer, when they are attracted to orchards. These areas will be mapped, while electric fences will continue to be installed to protect orchards, agricultural land and villages. The rewilding team will also continue its longstanding efforts to engage with local communities to raise awareness of the bison and how best to behave around them.



▲ Marina Drugă, Director of Rewilding Romania and Team Leader of Southern Carpathians with Administration & Operations Officer Alexandra Stancu.

◀ Summer landscape in the Southern Carpathians.

▶ The newly built WeWilder Campus will drive nature-based tourism and spark entrepreneurial innovation.



The rewilding team have also taken steps during the release of the bison to ensure that coexistence problems are minimised.

“The distribution of bison during their first year in the wild is particularly critical, since they tend to use areas visited during this time more often,” says Marina Drugă. “This means that bison released close to human habitation are more prone to create such problems.”

To minimise the likelihood of bison coming close to villages in the Țarcu Mountains as they move through the landscape, the enclosure where translocated animals are unloaded and allowed to acclimatise to their new surroundings is situated 14 kilometres from human habitation.

Feeling the benefits

Before bison were reintroduced into the Țarcu Mountains, tourism was almost non-existent in local villages such as Armeniș. With the giant herbivores acting as an increasingly potent tourism drawcard, more and more locals are now able to make an additional income from activities such as guiding, driving, the provision of meals and local products, and hosting visitors. This helps to increase local appreciation for the animals, and to wild nature in the area generally.

In 2022, WWF Romania opened a new green complex close to Armeniș – called the “WeWilder Campus” – comprising a collection of sustainably built wooden accommodation. It will help to drive nature-based tourism forward in the area and spark entrepreneurial innovation around rewilding, the recovery of local nature, and regenerative economics. WeWilder was supported by a loan from Rewilding Europe Capital, and is a social enterprise arm of WWF Romania.

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 “Looking ahead, I feel that having the bison here will be good for our community. Now they are part of us.”

Iconia Miculescu is the headmistress of Armeniș General School

“The impact of the bison has been beneficial because they have attracted attention to the area and allowed tourism to develop. Because visitors are curious, they come to see the animals, but they want to know about local culture too. We are good people, welcoming, and are glad to have people visit us. We laughed about the fact that the bison kept appearing near our village in the beginning, but now they are more wild and we don’t see them that much.”



Miculescu understands that the benefits of the bison aren’t simply limited to economics.

“My son was out camping with his friends and in the morning when they woke up the meadow close by was full of bison. For him and for me, knowing

that you can meet these animals in the wild is a unique and special feeling. Looking ahead, I feel that having the bison here will be good for our community. Now they are part of us.”



The town that went wild

In Pettorano sul Gizio, residents are benefitting from lives that are increasingly entwined with local nature.

Star turn
From the vantage point of Piazza Rosario Zannelli, the ochre-tiled rooftops of Pettorano sul Gizio are surrounded by a sea of green, the forested slopes of nearby hills covered in a verdant blanket of pine, beech, oak and ash. Today, this captivating panorama is enjoyed by growing numbers of visitors, who are

drawn to this charming town in Italy's Central Apennine Mountains to enjoy the culture, cuisine and – increasingly – the local wild nature.

Officially listed as one of Italy's "borghi piu belli" (most beautiful small towns), tiny Pettorano is the unlikely yet hugely appealing star of Central Apennine rewilding. Perched on a





- **Country**
 Italy
- **Focal landscape**
 Central Apennines
- **Size of landscape**
 100,000 ha
- **Work started in**
 2013
- **Larger landscape**
 Apennines mountain range throughout Italy, connected network of protected areas with major national parks.
- **Main habitats**
 High alpine mountains, alpine grasslands and valleys, small rivers, and temperate forests.
- **Focal species**
 Marsican brown bear, Apennine wolf, Apennine chamois, griffon vulture, red deer.
- **Team leader**
 Mario Cipollone



▲ Rewilding Apennines team leader Mario Cipollone sets up a camera trap in a wildlife corridor between Abruzzo, Lazio and Molise National Park and Majella National Park.

◀ The village of Pettorano sul Gizio.

An ongoing recovery

While nature is always dynamic, man’s interference in the landscape often leads to rapid and dramatic change. If we could jump inside a time machine and travel back 120 years, the view from Pettorano’s Piazza Rosario Zannelli would be significantly less picturesque. A sepia photo taken from the square in around 1905 reveals hillsides almost completely stripped bare by a combination of livestock overgrazing, clearance for agriculture, and the efforts of local “carbonari” (charcoal makers).

“At this point, nature was by and large seen as something to be controlled and exploited,” says Mario Cipollone.

Fast forward 40 years and Pettorano’s natural recovery began after the conclusion of the Second World War, as Italy entered a period of unprecedented economic growth and high population mobility. The disparity of wealth and of employment between urban and countryside areas triggered a period of intense rural depopulation across the Central Apennine region.

hilltop above the Gizio River, it is neatly sandwiched between two of the most important protected natural areas in the country – the Abruzzo, Lazio and Molise and Maiella National Parks. Both are home to a range of iconic wildlife – such as wolves, wild boar, Apennine chamois, red and roe deer, golden eagles, and griffon vultures – while the flagship species is the endemic and endangered Marsican brown bear, which boasts a small but slowly increasing population of around 60 individuals.

Flanking Pettorano is the Monte Genzana Alto Gizio Regional Nature Reserve, one of five areas that are being identified by the Rewilding Apennines team as coexistence corridors between these national parks and other important natural areas. By rewilding these corridors, and enabling and encouraging local communities to live harmoniously (and profitably) alongside wildlife, the aim is

to expand the territory into which animals can safely disperse and thrive.

“I like to think of it as a positive feedback loop,” says Rewilding Apennines team leader Mario Cipollone. “As more people here get behind rewilding, the more quickly nature can recover, which enhances the benefits it can provide to local communities. People in those communities then become even more supportive of rewilding and passionate about and proud of the nature around them. Pettorano sul Gizio is a prime example of how this cyclical process can work.”

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“As more people here get behind rewilding, the more quickly nature can recover, which enhances the benefits it can provide to local communities.”

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► Bruno D'Amicis talks about his work as a photographer at the ERN gathering in Pettorano Sul Gizio.

▼ Milena Ciccolella, owner of the Il Torchio restaurant.

“There was a mass exodus of people to large cities, which left behind a vast expanse of unattended land,” says 43-year-old wildlife photographer and videographer Bruno D'Amicis, who moved to Pettorano with his family two years ago, drawn to the area's wild nature. “This was the beginning of the rewilding process, as human pressure on the landscape around the town declined and nature started to bounce back.”

“Having known this area since childhood, I've witnessed the return of wild nature really start to accelerate over the last two or three decades. Larger animals have come back of their own accord, particularly ungulates (such as red deer) and wolves.”

Eugenio Vitto Massei, who was also attracted to Pettorano's increasingly wild surroundings, moved to the town from Parma in 2019.

“My father's ancestors came from Pettorano, and I spent many summers here as a child,” he explains. “I've seen many changes in local nature since this time. These days I can even hear animals moving around in the evening from my balcony, which is unprecedented. Nature is taking over many of the spaces that humans used in the past.”

A socio-economic engine of change

Pettorano sul Gizio is typical of many small settlements nestled in the folds of the dramatic Central Apennine landscape, which have long suffered from a challenging socio-economic outlook brought on by rural depopulation. In this regard they are no different to towns and villages across Europe: while rural regions currently account for nearly half of the EU's total land area, they only contain around 20% of its population.

Ensuring communities benefit economically from wildlife comeback has always been an integral part of the rewilding process, as it helps to further



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 “These days I can even hear animals moving around in the evening from my balcony, which is unprecedented.”

promote coexistence and generate additional support. In this way, the recovery of wild nature around Pettorano is now offering unique and burgeoning opportunities to many of its residents, just as rewilding is acting as an engine of positive socio-economic change in every other landscape where Rewilding Europe and its partners operate.

“Thanks to the efforts of the Rewilding Apennines team, and partner NGOs such as Salviamo l’Orso (Save the Bear), Pettorano has become a real hotspot for rewilding and conservation enthusiasts,” says Bruno D'Amicis. “It's been great to see increasing numbers of these people visit Pettorano, and even relocate here. It's been an economic and social shot in the arm for the town.”

Located in one corner of Piazza Rosario Zannelli, Il Torchio is one of the most popular restaurants in Pettorano.

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30%
 Between 1975 and 2015 the population of Pettorano increased by 30%.

► Pettorano sul Gizio in 1905 and 2022. Contrast the bare mountains of the earlier photo with the lush young beech forest that now surrounds the town.

“We are now hosting many rewilding events,” says owner Milena Ciccolella. “These have been a real-life saver in economic terms, and have stimulated us creatively, as we now offer vegetarian dishes on our daily menu. We are also planning to offer cooking courses to ‘rewilding guests’. The recovery of nature is slowly but surely adding value to the Pettorano economy.”

“The fact that rewilding is now attracting people to come to Pettorano to stay for weeks and months – not just a few days – is really important,” adds Eugenio Vitto Massei, who rents out apartments in the town, as well as the office space used by Rewilding Apennines. “Not just economically, but also because these people form strong relationships with local residents. They are breathing new life and ideas into the community.”

Connecting with the wild

Across Pettorano’s social spectrum, rewilding is enabling and encouraging both residents and visitors to forge and reforge connections with nature. With iconic species such as the Marsican brown bear and Apennine chamois acting as ambassadors for the landscape, growing numbers of people are now exploring the town’s wild surroundings.

“As Pettorano becomes wilder the number of nature lovers visiting and staying in Pettorano is increasing,” says Julien Leboucher, who works as a Bear Ambassador for Rewilding Apennines, and also as a hiking guide with his partner Stefania Toppi. “We are collaborating with the town’s Valleluna Cooperative to develop and promote nature-based tourism in the Monte Genzana Alto Gizio Regional Nature Reserve, and plan to create environmental education programmes and outdoor activities for local schoolchildren in the reserve in 2023.”

“The Covid-19 pandemic inspired me to start hiking in the mountains around



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“I walk in nature once a week – it’s a kind of therapy for me, a time where I can relax and clear my head.”

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Pettorano again,” says 55-year-old architect Massimo Ricciotti, a long-term resident of the town. “I’m so happy that bears have returned to this area. Usually, I walk in nature once a week – it’s a kind of therapy for me, a time where I can relax and clear my head. I know many other people who benefit in the same way.”

Even many of those in Pettorano’s youngest generation are excited at the thriving wildlife populations that now surround them.

“I love it that we can see animals every day here,” says Bruno D’Amicis’s youngest son Nils, aged seven. “We can hike or play next to the river and go searching for animal tracks. I often spot roe deer and foxes from my school window or the schoolbus. In Pettorano I feel like I’m in nature, and that’s a good feeling.”



PER GUNNARSSON

Go with the flow

Rivers are the lifeblood of Swedish Lapland. We caught up with Henrik Persson, Rewilding Sweden team leader, to discuss how rewilding is restoring these vital waterways – and their catchments – to health.

Extending across the top of Sweden and bisected by the Arctic Circle, Swedish Lapland is defined as much by its myriad rivers and lakes as it is by its huge swathes of forest. While many of these rivers have been harnessed for hydroelectricity, those that remain undammed are home to a range of wild fish species, including salmon, sea trout, lamprey, whitefish, ide, and grayling. Yet even these waterways and their catchment areas have suffered from the long-term

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In 2023–2024, five km of river is being rewilded by the Rewilding Sweden team.

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impacts of the forestry industry, which means they – and the landscapes of which they are part – could be healthier and far more natural.

Can you tell us about the rivers in the Swedish Lapland rewilding landscape?

The landscapes in which Rewilding Sweden operate are very large – far larger than Rewilding Europe’s other rewilding landscapes. Bear in mind that greater Lapland, if we take this to include the two northernmost Swedish counties of Norrbotten and Västerbotten, is almost four times the size of the Netherlands. Within this expanse, we are trying to focus our rewilding efforts on specific priority areas. By that we mean a chosen set of catchments, or sub-catchments,

in which the main rivers are either unaffected by hydropower, or where hydropower is about to be removed, and where the surrounding landscapes have rewilding potential.

Rewilding is currently being carried out in three main catchments – the Vindel River catchment, the Råne River catchment, and parts of the enormous Torne River catchment. There are also neighbouring catchments where rewilding may take place – such as the Rickleå catchment (bordering the Vindel), the Vitå catchment (bordering the Råne), and parts of the Kalix river catchment (bordering the Torne) – because a corridor, nature reserve, or another area with rewilding potential in which we work may cross the borders of one catchment into another.

Can you explain the relationship between a river and its catchment?

A catchment is an area of land where water collects when it rains, often bounded by hills. As the water trickles through the landscape it finds its way



○ **Country**



Sweden

○ **Focal landscape**

Swedish Lapland

○ **Size of Landscape**

1,200,000 ha

○ **Work started in**

2015

○ **Larger landscape**

The greater Nordic landscape between Norway and Sweden.

○ **Main habitats**

Taiga forest, high tundra and alpine grasslands, free-flowing rivers, lakes, and peat marshes.

○ **Focal species**

Reindeer, beaver, sea trout, grayling, salmon, lamprey, whitefish, freshwater pearl mussel, deciduous tree species (e.g. birch, willow, aspen).

○ **Programme Developer**

Henrik Persson

down into the soils and into streams, which eventually feed rivers. When you are restoring rivers, this means you have to consider the entire riverscape, because the health of any surface water is governed by the area that drains into it. In fact, the rewilding of rivers often starts with actions on land.

Despite the large size of some rewilding sites, our riverscape approach to river restoration, with its focus on hydrological pathways as opposed to just waterways themselves, ties together processes and functions in a coherent way.



Why do the rivers in the rewilding landscape need restoring?

Despite the absence of hydropower stations, these main rivers and their many tributaries have been and continue to be heavily impacted by forestry. Historical logging and timber floating activities saw coarse river sediment extensively cleared from riverbeds – which was done to enable timber to float freely – meaning that many hundreds of kilometres of northern Swedish rivers ended up effectively becoming straightened canals, with walls of boulders and blocks lining their sides. This significantly reduced the diversity of in-stream habitats, natural erosion and sedimentation processes, and severed all ecological, biogeochemical, and hydrological connections between land and water.

Additionally, thousands of small wooden dams were constructed in small tributaries, many to facilitate timber floating. Together with road culverts, these now impede the movement of aquatic species and natural processes.

After the logging came intensive landscape draining. This saw a huge number of ditches dug in the forest to make it drier, in order to maximise the growth of commercial plantations. However, this has resulted in a drained landscape incapable of storing water

after precipitation. It also changes the hydrological regime of the entire downstream river system, because greater quantities of water run through the system over shorter timescales. Peatlands were also ditched to enhance tree growth, which drastically decreased their carbon storage capacity.

And today we have monoculture forestry, with the widespread practice of clear-cutting and expansion of forest road networks. In many of our catchments, the main problem relates to turbidity (the cloudiness of the water), as clay particles from clear-cut forest areas and forest roads enter the water column and clog stream beds.

What measures does your river restoration involve?

Today, sections of many rivers in Swedish Lapland have already undergone restoration to reverse the impact of activities associated with the timber floating activities – these stretches typically have rocky beds, with turbulent water flow and a long association with salmonid species. We see great potential in focusing our efforts on slow-flowing, “forgotten” stretches of river in northern Sweden that run over finer sediment, because this is where nature’s own processes, if kickstarted, can reshape landscapes if we let them. Pure rewilding, in other words.



PETER CAIRNS / WILD WONDERS OF EUROPE



◀ Swedish Lapland has many wild and free-flowing rivers that are important for migratory fish.

▶ A healthy, meandering river flows over sandy soil in Swedish Lapland.

Can you tell us more about the dams and dam removal?

While past initiatives have already focused on the removal of non-hydro-power-related barriers in local rivers here, there are still hundreds remaining. A quick scan of the catchment of the Vindel River – one of the most restored in northern Sweden – shows 210 artificial barriers, of which at least 57 (many related to logging) are considered to be preventing the free passage of fish, invertebrates, seeds, sediments, nutrients, and so on. Large landscapes are connected by intact hydrology, which means a rewilding approach must include the removal of as many of these unnatural obstacles as possible.

What measures are being taken to scale up barrier removal?

In 2023 we will start looking into the ownership, cultural and ecological aspects of these 57 dams, plus 19 in another catchment (many are ownerless). This often requires some true detective work!

In 2024, we aim to move into the next phase and hopefully get some of these dams physically removed. We will also start identifying barriers in another catchment where we are active.

How will river restoration in Swedish Lapland benefit people?

In the past, river restoration here has typically been aimed at improving sport fishing. But I think this is the wrong approach, because it means restoration efforts have focused solely on sections with enough elevation to create riffles (shallow landforms in a stream or river which are important for fish feeding and spawning). But in many cases it will take a long time for fish

In addition to restoring these sandy stretches, removing barriers and plugging ditches, a significant part of Rewilding Sweden's river restoration work is forest-related.

Commercial forestry means there is a lack of deciduous trees such as birch, willow and aspen in the landscape, which has a huge impact on rivers. The leaves of deciduous trees constitute the main energy source for riverine ecosystems in boreal landscapes, where algal production (the only other basal energy source for aquatic ecosystems) is limited due to low temperatures and a lack of sunlight. These leaves are fed on by bacteria and fungi, which in turn get eaten by insect larvae, which are then fed on by fish – there is a direct link between leaf abundance and trout biomass. So landscapes with more deciduous trees are better for healthy fish populations.

In their natural state, sections of rivers flowing across finer soils in Swedish Lapland should be meandering and braided, with floodplains, swamp forests, and thriving riparian areas. One way of restoring this state is to support and enhance beaver populations, which means we need to work with local communities to increase their acceptance of beavers and their dams.

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 “A quick scan of the catchment of the Vindel River – one of the most restored in northern Sweden – shows 210 artificial barriers.”

What measures were taken to restore rivers in 2022 and what are your plans going forward?

In 2022 and early 2023 we laid down many of the plans and much of the strategy for our road ahead. We now have a significant amount of restoration work lined up – not only within rivers, but also in drained wetland and peatland areas adjacent to these river systems, as well as in riverside forests. This means there will be significant synergy between our rewilding efforts as these interventions are strongly related.

In addition to a two-year initiative to restore a canalised river in the Råne River catchment, we are also looking to remove 76 small dams across two of our catchment areas and to restore forests to improve reindeer winter migration.

populations to return, if they return at all, because they may be locally extinct. There is nothing wrong with sport fishing, but such a narrow focus generally ignores the vital connection between rivers and the surrounding landscape, which can play a critical role in the health of riverine fish populations.

Rewilding, which represents a far more holistic approach to river restoration, results in more attractive, well-connected and ecologically functional riverscapes, which provide a far more comprehensive array of benefits to both nature and people. Healthier, more biodiverse rivers, embedded in naturally forested landscapes, can support thriving nature-based economies, through activities such as recreation and tourism, provide cleaner water, and help to reduce downstream flooding. Although rivers themselves are often natural carbon emitters, more ecologically functional catchments have higher water saturation and are therefore better at absorbing and locking up atmospheric carbon. Natural river catchments are also more climate resilient than impacted ones, enabling the species they host to adapt to changing conditions more easily.

Last but not least, an important restoration goal for the rivers we are rewilding is to enable them to start functioning as reindeer migration corridors. The semi-wild reindeers that roam the landscape here are an important keystone species because of their natural grazing. Intensive monoculture forestry makes it hard for the reindeer to feed and migrate, which means the landscape loses their beneficial impact. Our approach to river restoration will help Sweden's indigenous Sámi people continue practicing their traditional way of living.



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“Rewilding, which represents a more holistic approach to river restoration, results in more attractive and ecologically functional rivers and catchments.”

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What are the implications of the EU Nature Restoration Law on your river restoration efforts?

In June 2022, the European Commission tabled a new Nature Restoration Law, which for the first time introduces legally-binding targets for EU Member States to restore degraded land and reverse biodiversity loss, including the restoration of 25,000 kilometres of EU rivers. At the moment it's hard to say whether the law will help to speed up Swedish river restoration or not, because there has been ambition to carry out such restoration here for decades. Yet an overeagerness and impatience to reverse degradation has seen many res-

toration efforts leave rivers in an even worse condition, and some initiatives have not been underpinned by sound ecological science. If the restoration law means Swedish forestry companies afford greater respect to riverside forests (and forests in general) this will have a positive impact on river restoration outcomes.

These days I am happy that rewilding – as a holistic, landscape-scale approach to river restoration – is being considered far more at a practical level. For example, both hydrological (how water circulates through the landscape) and geomorphological processes (which relate to soil and landforms) are now being discussed in restoration initiatives, as is the restoration of land as a precursor to river restoration. So, the rewilding philosophy that is going to be applied to meet the obligations of the Restoration Law looks like it is finally mature and ready to do some real good, both in Swedish Lapland and further afield.

76

The Rewilding Sweden team is working towards the removal of 76 dams.

.....



JELLE THAMMS / REWILDING EUROPE



From guns to cameras

In the Velebit Mountains of Croatia, the recovery of nature is enabling a transition from traditional hunting practice to a wildlife watching economy.



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1530

1530 different animal sightings over 140 days in the rewilding landscape in 2022.

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Paradigm shift

How many times can you profit from the life of a beautiful animal, such as a brown bear or a Eurasian lynx? If you sell a permit to shoot it, just once. But imagine, instead, letting that animal live and breed, and people paying to observe it, to capture it on film, and to revel in its very existence as part of a thrilling and increasingly wild landscape, over and over again. From an economic perspective, as well as an ecological and ethical one, the latter option would appear to be a hands-down winner.

In the Velebit Mountains of Croatia, a dramatic and nature-rich 150-kilometre

long massif that runs parallel to the country's Adriatic coast, this is what the local rewilding team is now proving through practical action on the ground. By showcasing a new way of managing wildlife – within a collection of hunting concessions – they are working to scale up the transition from traditional hunting operations to wildlife watching across the landscape. This, in turn, will ensure that a growing number of people and communities benefit from the wildlife comeback that rewilding is bringing about.

For Nino Salkić, a rewilding officer attached to the Rewilding Velebit team, it's all about treading a new path.

○ Country



Croatia

○ Focal landscape

Velebit Mountains

○ Size of landscape

220,000 ha

○ Work started in

2012

○ Larger landscape

Velebit Mountain range, connected with Slovenia in the north and Dalmatia in the south; including the marine coast and islands.

○ Main habitats

Temperate and Mediterranean forest, sub-alpine grasslands, coastal marine, cliffs, and canyons.

○ Focal species

Grey wolf, brown bear, red deer, Balkan chamois, Eurasian lynx, wild horse, Tauros, and griffon vulture.

○ Team leader

Marija Krnjajić

"When you mention the words 'hunting concession', everyone naturally thinks about the commercial hunting of wildlife. But we want to show people, in Croatia and beyond, that it's possible to do things differently. We want to turn the hunting concession model on its head and show that you can earn significant, reliable, long-term income through tourism based on wildlife watching."

Resurgent wildlife

If there was a symbol for Croatian nature, it would surely be the Velebit Mountains. Extending from sea level to peaks of 1750 metres, and studded with beech and pine forests, underground canyons, alpine meadows, caves, and waterfalls, the region's eclectic mix of habitats are home to some of Europe's most rare and elusive wildlife, such as Balkan chamois, brown bear, grey wolf, and Eurasian lynx. There are over 100 bird species here too, including the golden eagle, peregrine falcon, Ural owl, and white-backed woodpecker.



▲ Rewilding Officer Nino Salkić and Rewilding Europe Head of Landscapes Deli Saavedra set up a camera trap to monitor wildlife.

"We want to show people that it's possible to do things differently. We want to turn the hunting concession model on its head."

Rewilding Europe's work in the Velebit Mountains is focused on transforming the management of four hunting concessions totalling 29,905 hectares, situated in the heart of the 2200 square-kilometre Velebit Nature Park, Croatia's largest protected area. These are flanked by two national parks – the Northern Velebit and Paklenica National Parks (which are themselves part of the nature park). A number of ponds in the area have been restored by the Rewilding Velebit team, with access to water critically important for local wildlife populations.

"As a corridor between the two parks, the rewilding landscape is a natural paradise," says Nino Salkić. "Apart from the beautiful landscapes, visitors could

encounter anything from lynx and wild boar to brown bear and red deer. Wildlife being wildlife there are no guarantees, but I've never known anybody to come away disappointed."

The thriving condition of wildlife in the Velebit Mountains rewilding landscape was confirmed by a camera trap survey carried out in 2022.

"Over the course of 140 days, we recorded 1530 different animal sightings from five wildlife watching hides, with bears recorded many times," says Rewilding Velebit enterprise officer Marin Rončević. "That averages over two sightings per day at each hide. Nearly a third of the sightings were recorded during the day, which is remarkable. When you take into account the fact that work was being carried out in the forest, and that some cameras occasionally failed to operate, the results are even more impressive."

Close encounters

The development of wildlife watching as a business frequently depends on the construction of suitable infrastructure. Over the course of 2022, the Rewilding Velebit team constructed five new wildlife watching hides in the Ramino Korito hunting concession. While these are primarily designed with bears and



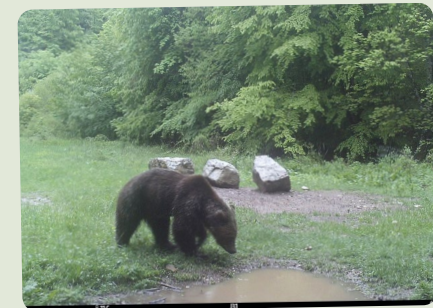
◀ Camera trap images demonstrate the diverse wildlife of the Velebit Mountains.



birds in mind, photographers lucky enough to hunker down in them stand a good chance of spotting a host of other species, including the elusive Eurasian lynx, wildcat, wolf, wild boar, golden jackal, roe deer and pine marten.



In-depth field surveys were undertaken in the mountains and plains of the rewilding landscape to pinpoint the best locations for each hide. They were then designed by SKUA Nature – one of Europe's leading wildlife photography organisations dedicated to promoting sustainable nature tourism – with a focus on natural materials and blending in to the landscape. Accessibility was an important consideration, with two of the hides usable all year round, and all are equipped for overnight stays.



Max Biasioli, general director and founder of the SKUA Nature Group, is excited about the potential viewings the new hides will offer.

"The experience of being able to observe a bear a few metres away while sitting comfortably in a structure equipped with mirrored glass is simply incredible. Everyone, not just experienced photographers, is awed by this kind of close encounter.



"While bears are undoubtedly the primary attraction for now, wildlife watching in Velebit is just starting out. I'm convinced that in the coming years we will be able to offer various other locations, species and experiences. We want local communities to benefit from and be proud of the growing number of tourists drawn here to see the animals

that are thriving here as a result of rewilding and the different approach to management."

Tourism based on the new, fully operational hides has kicked off in the spring of 2023, with a growing number of booking made through Rewilding Europe Travel – Rewilding Europe's exclusive travel partner – and local travel agencies. SKUA Nature will begin selling photo safaris when wildlife abundance has reached a certain threshold.

"The hides are already starting to have a positive socio-economic impact," says Marin Rončević. "Last year Nino helped to train up two guides from the local area – Ilija Vukelić and Hrvoje Škrlin Vučina – and they are now taking visitors on various hiking tours and photo safaris. In addition, we pay local people to clean and maintain the hides. On top of this, wildlife watching visitors generate income for the local community through things such as food, accommodation and transport. We estimate that revenue created from the direct use of the hides (which contributes to the rewilding efforts), will, at the very least, be matched by income received by local people."

Scaling up

The Velebit Mountains rewilding landscape is surrounded by many other hunting concessions, all of whom currently follow the traditional commercial wildlife hunting model. Ensuring that wildlife comeback continues at scale



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"The experience of being able to observe a bear a few metres away while sitting comfortably in a structure equipped with mirrored glass is simply incredible."
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means showing the managers of these concessions that the transition towards wildlife watching, away from hunting, makes economic as well as ecological sense.

"Tourism is one business activity open to the owners of all Croatian hunting concessions," explains Rewilding Velebit team leader Marija Krnjajić. "Yet nobody has attempted to do what we're doing before. We want others to adopt our model, which means they need to see the benefits of making the transition and want to follow in our footsteps."

In December 2022, Rewilding Velebit signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with several neighbouring hunting concessions, as a first step in establishing good relations and best practice on issues such as respecting borders, poaching prevention, wildlife management, and informing others about plans to establish activities such as photo safaris.

"Maybe the second step will involve suggesting the establishment of wildlife watching operations," says Marija Krnjajić.

Regardless, the MoU is already starting to bear fruit. In January 2023, the Rewilding Velebit team helped Mišo Zalović, an MoU signee and owner of the Vrebac hunting concession – which is located adjacent to the Velebit Mountains rewilding landscape – to construct his first wildlife watching hide. Nearly 2000 hectares of Zalović's 12,640-hectare concession will be put aside as a protected area for wildlife.

"Velebit's wealth is its biodiversity", says Zalović. "There must always be enough food and peace for predators, such as bear, wolf and lynx, and also for roe deer, red deer and chamois. I have been a hunting concession owner here for 26 years and I support the option of tourism without hunting because I can see it has a bright future."



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"I have been a hunting concession owner here for 26 years and I support tourism without hunting because I can see it has a bright future."

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The path ahead

Building momentum behind the new, regenerative approach to wildlife management in the Velebit Mountains is about showing as well as doing. Moving forwards, getting as many people on board and supportive of the transition will be critical – this includes not only hunting concessionaires, but members of the public and politicians too.

In March 2023, "A New Path for the Velebit Mountains", a beautiful

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29,950

hectares of hunting concessions managed by Rewilding Velebit within the 2200 square-kilometre Velebit Nature Park.

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15-minute documentary by Emmanuel Rondeau (with financial support from international law firm Hogan Lovells), drew a large and diverse audience when it premiered in the local town of Gospić. Featuring a range of inspirational interviews, it showcased the work of the Rewilding Velebit team in enabling the transition, as well as their efforts to reach out to the local community to raise awareness, foster dialogue, and build engagement.

"In Croatia our efforts mean we are moving away from a decades-old model and attempting to change entrenched mindsets," says Marija Krnjajić. "This is undoubtedly a challenge, but we're moving in the right direction. Ideally, we would like the Croatian government to appreciate what we are doing and provide legislative support. But these things take time."

"My personal view is that more and more people will see the value of what we are doing and accept this new approach," adds Nino Salkić. "You can only shoot an animal with a gun once, but you can shoot it with a camera a thousand times – plenty of protected areas in Africa have demonstrated this concept, and the wide-ranging benefits it can deliver. If the shift from guns to cameras can happen in Velebit, then it can happen everywhere in Europe."



CAJIN STAN / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Resilient rewilding

Despite the ongoing impact of the Russian invasion, rewilding in the Danube Delta continues to have a positive impact on terrestrial and freshwater ecosystems – a testament to the resilience of nature and local rewilding teams.

Overcoming adversity

Nature has long been a silent casualty of war. From pollution and habitat destruction to the collapse of entire management systems, the environmental impact of armed conflict can be devastating, wide-reaching, and hugely difficult to reverse.

In Ukraine, where fierce fighting has now raged for over a year following the Russian invasion in February 2022, the full environmental impact of war remains unclear. Yet with one-third of the country's protected areas and sites – including two biosphere reserves – currently located in zones of active hostility, occupation, and humanitarian crisis, it's clear that Ukrainian nature is suffering on a daily basis.

While Rewilding Europe's cross-border Danube Delta rewilding landscape, which is located partly in southwest Ukraine, is situated well away from the main areas of fighting, the ongoing conflict has thrown up a whole range of logistical, human resource and access issues. With the support of a 2.1 million euro grant – awarded to Rewilding

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“In spite of this, we concentrated our efforts on the things we and our partners could do.”

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Europe by the UK-based Endangered Landscapes Programme at the end of 2018 – the Rewilding Ukraine team and partners are working determinedly to overcome these as they continue efforts to recover 40,000 hectares of wetland and steppe. In 2022, the main focus was on the restoration of key natural processes, such as flooding and natural grazing.

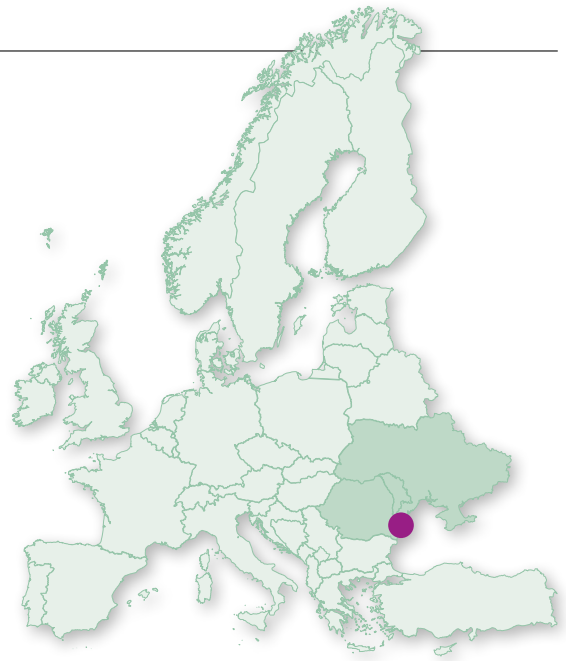
“Following the war, half the Rewilding Ukraine team relocated overseas, while much of the outer Ukrainian Danube Delta, where we have released animals, is currently off limits,” explains Oleg Dyakov, a rewilding officer attached to the Rewilding Ukraine team. “In spite of this, we concentrated our efforts on the things we and our partners could do.”

A choked ecosystem

The 600,000-hectare Danube Delta is a complex, ever-shifting mosaic of channels, islands, forest, marshes and reedbeds that collectively represent Europe's greatest natural wetland. Yet large-scale



**DANUBE
DELTA**
UKRAINE
ROMANIA
MOLDOVA



hydro-engineering work carried out in the twentieth century – which primarily involved the creation of an extensive network of canals and dykes – has had a hugely negative impact, altering natural water flow and sedimentation patterns, and diminishing the ability of the delta to recycle nutrients. Polders and many fish farms have failed, leaving behind altered landscapes that are desperate for restoration and rewilding. Water bodies have stagnated, fish diversity and stocks have plummeted (according to some estimates by over 60%), and populations of other wildlife have declined, adversely affecting many local economies.

Ongoing work carried out by the Rewilding Ukraine team is now breathing new life into the delta’s former polders, lakes and communities by restoring connectivity and water flow. In 2022, such efforts focused on Ermakiv Island (where 300 metres of dyke were removed), on the area around Lake Katlabuh, and also on Lake Kartal. On Ermakiv, where the Rewilding Ukraine team have reintroduced water buffalo, Konik horses, red deer and fallow deer in recent years, this is already enhancing biodiversity and will further boost the island’s tourism appeal when the war is over.

Towards a dynamic delta

The 68 square-kilometre Lake Katlabuh, which is located upriver from Ermakiv Island, is one of many “limans” found in the Danube Delta. These lakes and marshes form in river deltas and are typically separated from open or fast-flowing water by barriers or spits of land.

Before the 1960s, when the water regime of Katlabuh was completely natural, the lake was home to a wide range of fish species and thriving populations of birds, including rare species such

○ Countries

-  Ukraine
-  Romania
-  Moldova

○ Focal landscape

Danube Delta

○ Size of landscape

180,000 ha

○ Work started in

2013

○ Larger landscape

Overall Danube Delta system consisting of major river branches in Romania, Ukraine and Moldova.

○ Main habitats

River delta, reed beds, marshes, riverine forests, coastal grasslands, dune systems, coastal lagoons, and dry forest.

○ Focal species

White and Dalmatian pelican, red deer, Tauros, wild horse, beaver, water buffalo, kulan, demoiselle crane.

○ Team leader

Mykhailo Nesterenko

as the pygmy cormorant, glossy ibis, squacco heron and white-tailed eagle. Then a dyke and a series of sluices were constructed, effectively isolating the lake and turning it into a reservoir. Over the years the level of water dropped, the water gradually stagnated, and fish productivity and biodiversity both markedly declined.

In 2022, the Rewilding Ukraine team continued work to reconnect Lake Katlabuh with the Danube River and surrounding area, via the Lake Lung system – a smaller, transit lake and reedbed system that acts as an intermediary between the main lake and the river itself. In addition to enhancing biodiversity, this will benefit local communities in a number of ways.

“Restoring connectivity will guarantee regular water flows in and out of Lake Katlabuh,” explains Rewilding Ukraine Executive Director Mykhailo Nesterenko. “This will make the lake water less salty, which means it can be used for irrigation. It will also diversify and boost fish stocks, which will help local fishermen.”

In 2022 more work was carried out to restore connectivity on Lake Kartal too, which is located farther upstream than Lake Katlabuh. These efforts have already had a noticeably positive impact.

“With the assistance and support of the Reni and Safiany communities,

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300

metres of dyke were removed on Ermakiv Island in 2022.

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- ▲ Educational activities are part of the Pelican Way of LIFE – a school visit in Svishtov, Bulgaria.
- ▶ The first Festival of the Dalmatian Pelican is held in Persina Nature Park, Bulgaria.
- ▶▶ Channels are cleaned between the Danube River and Katlabuh Lake, restoring a vital connection between the two water bodies.



rewilding efforts have now seen the most important canals connecting Lake Kartal and surrounding wetlands with the Danube,” says Panas Zhechkov, Director of the Izmail Department of Water Resources. “This has seen various water bodies refilled with water and improved the health of their ecosystems, as well as providing water resources to the local population.”

“We have already seen fish species migrating into Kartal from the Danube,” adds Mykhailo Nesterenko. “Eventually the dynamics of all of these reconnected lakes should more or less follow the dynamics of the Danube itself. There will be periods of flooding and periods of drought – this is completely natural. A thriving, wilder Danube Delta shaped by natural processes is the ultimate objective.”

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“A thriving, wilder Danube Delta shaped by natural processes is the ultimate objective.”

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Pelican progress
 Efforts by the Rewilding Ukraine team to restore natural water flow are particularly good news for Dalmatian pelicans. As one of the delta’s most iconic indicator species, these majestic birds require access to still, fish-filled waters undisturbed by human activity, with extensive flooded and shallow water areas.

Coordinated by Rewilding Europe, the Pelican way of LIFE initiative kicked off in late 2019, funded by the European Commission and Arcadia Fund. Its aim is to enhance populations of the Dalmatian pelican in southwest Europe – including in the Danube Delta, one of the strongholds of the species. Over the last few years, as part of the initiative, the Rewilding Ukraine team have constructed a number of artificial nesting platforms in different locations to encourage the birds to breed and support the comeback of these gentle giants. Efforts to restore water flow in many of the water bodies on the Ukrainian side will significantly improve the chances of this happening.

A steppe in the right direction
 As part of the extended Danube Delta rewilding landscape, the 5200-hectare Tarutino Steppe is one of the very few remaining areas of steppe in Ukraine and Europe. Characterised by its expansive grassy plains, it is home to a wide range of rare flora and fauna. Since 2019, the Rewilding Ukraine team have been working to preserve and enhance the steppe, as they realise a vision of a wilder landscape governed more by natural processes, such as natural grazing.

Despite their many operational difficulties, the Rewilding Ukraine team were greatly cheered by a number of exciting new arrivals on the Tarutino Steppe in 2022. Herds of fallow deer and kulan (the wild Eurasian donkey) were released during the year, while a foal was born in the early spring to a herd of kulan that were released into the wild in 2021 – almost certainly the first free-roaming kulan born in Ukraine in over 200 years.

Oblivious to events taking place elsewhere in the country, a group of steppe marmots released by the Rewilding Ukraine team in 2021 also found the Tarutino Steppe to their liking, with

at least six pups born in 2022. And in December, a family of three European hamsters were released onto the steppe – both these and the marmots are an ecologically important part of local food chains, and further releases are planned.

Last but not least, a collaboration between Rewilding Ukraine and a team of scientists saw a study on the carbon uptake and storage potential of dry grassland ecosystems kick off in September, with a focus on Tarutino and the Askania Nova Biosphere Reserve. Although further work and analysis will be conducted to complete the study in 2023, samples have now been taken at multiple points across the steppe.

“It’s already safe to say that the sampling points with lowest carbon storage and storage potential were located in areas of the steppe that suffer from overgrazing and regular burning, which is actually prohibited but still carried out close to local settlements,” says Oleg Dyakov.

When completed, the study should provide a scientific basis for the inclusion of steppe ecosystems in the system of carbon credits, which will improve opportunities to attract financing for the restoration of steppe landscapes.

Looking to the future

There is still no sign of the brutal and unjustified Russian invasion of Ukraine coming to an end. Yet despite the challenges arising from the conflict, the rewilding agenda in the Danube Delta is moving forwards, to the huge credit of the Rewilding Ukraine team and partners. In 2022, the Danube Delta rewilding landscape was recognised by the United Nations as a European nature restoration showcase – a fine testament to the team’s efforts.

And nature is finding a way to survive and thrive too. The Konik horses released in the outer part of the



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 “As our own rewilding efforts in the delta have shown, Ukrainian nature is as resilient as the people of Ukraine...”

Ukrainian Danube Delta are doing well, for example.

“The whole of the Danube Biosphere Reserve remains inaccessible to us and I have only been able to visit it once since the war began,” says Oleksandr Voloshkevich, director of the reserve, which encompasses much of the delta on the Ukrainian side. “There are traces of fires, shell craters and burnt out houses everywhere. But it was very touching to see herds of wild horses with recently born foals, which have survived and show that life continues.”

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22

offspring of various species were born in the Danube Delta rewilding landscape in 2022.

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Fallow deer released by the Rewilding Ukraine team on Ermakiv Island are also doing well. A number of individuals have been observed on the Romanian side of the delta, recolonising territory as they acclimatise to their new home.

With regard to the Romanian side, steps were taken in 2022 to identify and reach out to agricultural and fishing concession holders, with the aim of scaling up rewilding work. The hope is that a herd of nearly 40 water buffalo can be brought to one of these concessions in 2023 to boost natural grazing.

While there are concerns about how Ukraine will rebuild itself after the war is over, and whether environmental regulations will be respected, Mykhailo Nesterenko remains positive about the recovery of Ukrainian nature, both in the delta and beyond.

“Ukraine is dealing with a very difficult humanitarian situation right now, but nature is fundamental to people: you cannot separate us from nature. It directly affects us when water is polluted, or when villages are flooded because of destroyed dykes.

“As our own rewilding efforts in the delta have shown, Ukrainian nature is as resilient as the people of Ukraine, and they both depend on each other. Once the war is over, I am confident they will both recover.”



FLORIAN MÖLLERS / REWILDING EUROPE

Peat power

From climate change mitigation to biodiversity enhancement, peatland rewilding offers a wide range of benefits.

The rewilding of peatland can mitigate climate change and benefit people and nature in myriad other ways. In 2022, a grant from the US-based Grantham Foundation saw Rewilding Europe begin work to fund landscape-scale peatland rewilding through the sale of nature-based carbon credits, with an

initial focus on the Oder Delta rewilding landscape on the German-Polish border, as well as Swedish Lapland.

We caught up with Peter Torkler, Rewilding Oder Delta team leader (Poland), to discuss peatland restoration on the Polish side of the Oder Delta.

Why is the Oder Delta such a good place for peatland restoration?

The Oder Delta, straddling the border between Poland and Germany, is a unique region, with a rich mosaic of terrestrial, marine and freshwater ecosystems. The landscape was shaped by the withdrawal of glaciers around 10,000 years ago, leaving huge expanses of peatland. So far, the Rewilding Oder Delta team have identified around 20,000 hectares of peatland that could be restored, rewetted or regenerated. Most of these areas are located on the Polish side of the delta, and many are being used for extensive agriculture. The land is often drained and used only because of subsidies from the European Union.

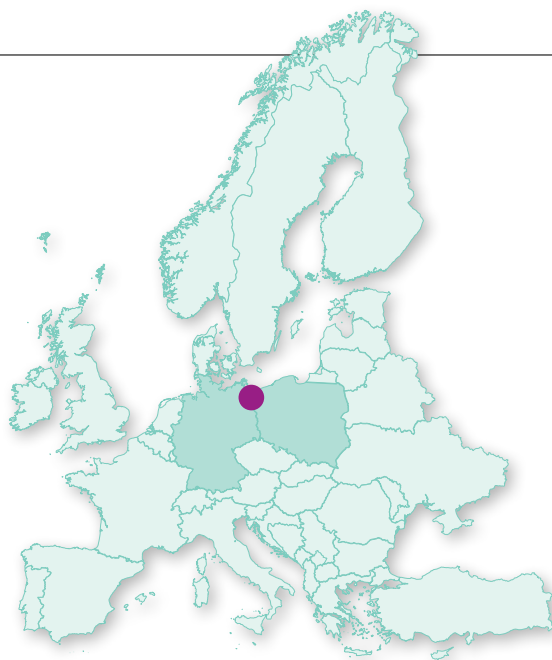
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 “This makes rewilding the peatlands of the Oder Delta a very attractive climate solution.”

How will people and nature benefit from such restoration?

Everywhere in the Oder Delta landscape – especially in forested areas – we see an increasing lack of water caused by more irregular rainfall and excessive agricultural demand putting pressure on flora and fauna. Areas of forest that are normally wet have become dry by the spring, forest ponds are drying out, and even small rivers dry out and look more like desert wadis. Healthy peatlands can counteract this by helping to balance landscape hydrology – they are the perfect buffer against extreme weather events, whether there is too much rain in winter or too little in summer.

Peatlands also support populations of many wild animals, providing shelter and the possibility of retreating from human pressure. Moose (Eurasian elk), for example, can be often seen in such landscapes – we see them making a comeback in the Oder Delta, with around 30 individuals currently present.

Last but not least, when peatlands are restored through rewetting, they change from carbon sources to carbon sinks. This means that instead of emitting carbon dioxide (CO₂) into the atmosphere, they start to absorb and lock up atmospheric carbon. Peatlands cover only 3% of the world’s land surface, but contain 500 gigatonnes (5 x 10¹¹ tonnes) of carbon within their peat – twice as much as all the biomass



○ Countries



Germany



Poland

○ Focal landscape

Oder Delta

○ Size of landscape

250,000 ha

○ Work started in

2015

○ Larger landscape

A network of rivers, forests, wetlands, and the Baltic Coast on the border between Germany and Poland.

○ Main habitats

Baltic coast with wetlands, tidal zones, reed marshes, sand dunes, alluvial and coastal forests, peat systems, and wet grasslands.

○ Focal species

White-tailed eagle, European bison, beaver, elk, wolf, Atlantic sturgeon, and grey seal.

○ Team Leaders

Ulrich Stöcker (Germany)
 Peter Torkler (Poland)

of the world’s forests. In Europe, where peatlands of various types cover an estimated 265,000 square kilometres, they lock up about five times more carbon than forests, but there is an overall trend towards drying. This makes rewilding the peatlands of the Oder Delta a very attractive climate solution.

How is peatland in the Oder Delta typically restored?

Most peatland in the Oder Delta is linked to the river system draining into the Oder River, Stettin Lagoon or Baltic Sea (see map). Peatland restoration essentially involves “rewetting”, which means closing ditches that were created to drain the land for agriculture, and thereby retaining water in the landscape.

In Germany the authorities are increasingly aware of the climate-related importance of peatlands. On the German side of the delta, this means 20,000 hectares of peatland have been restored along the Peene River since the 1990s (representing one of the largest peatland complexes in Germany). Many of these are managed by private foundations – such as the 1500-hectare Anklamer Stadtbruch Nature Reserve – which is owned and managed by the NABU Foundation.

On the Polish side, we have huge nature reserves and Natura 2000 sites that are usually state-owned and well protected. But agricultural intensifica-

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5,000

By 2028, the Rewilding Oder Delta team are aiming to have rewilded 5,000 hectares of peatland on the Polish side.



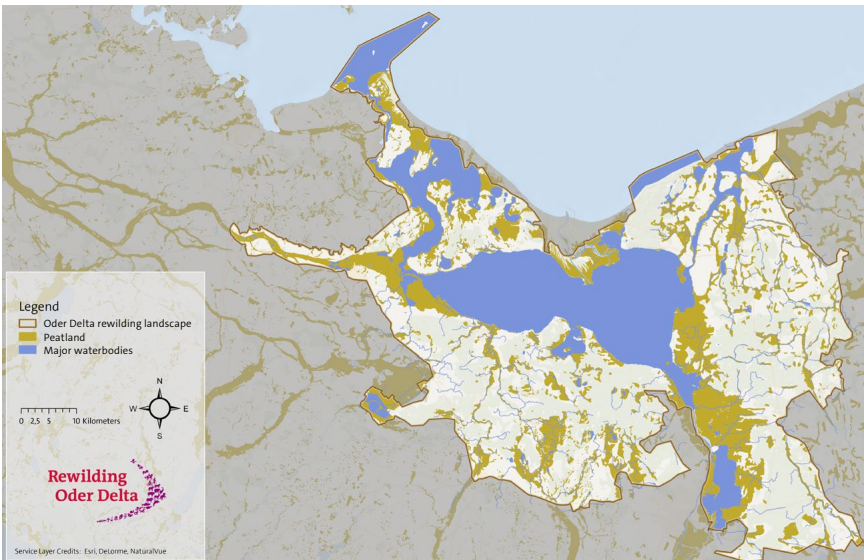
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 “A rewilding-oriented business model can prove attractive for landowners, since carbon credits aim to provide secured funding for at least 30 years.”

tion is putting pressure on remaining wetlands along the lagoon and there are still not many positive examples of where farmers have a stake in keeping peatlands wet. This is, for example, the case in the Rozwarowo Marshes – a stronghold of the globally threatened aquatic warbler – where traditional reed cutting is still a good business.

How can you make peatland rewilding commercially attractive for landowners?

The challenge for nature-based carbon credits is to make them competitive with subsidies offered through the European Union’s Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). As such subsidies are usually paid over a five-year period – and there is a lot of uncertainty as to whether they will remain – we are now seeing more and more farmers looking to secure more stable, long-term funding. This is where a rewilding-oriented business model can prove attractive for landowners, since carbon credits aim to provide secured funding for at least 30 years. It’s good for nature and good for business.

We established a Polish field team in November 2022 focused on the legal aspects of land acquisition and to conduct a search for land purchase opportunities in the area. We are now negotiating with a farmer based in the delta who owns large areas of peatland



▲ Distribution of peatland in the Oder Delta rewilding landscape.
 ▲▲ Peter Torkler examines a fresh beaver feeding site.



FLORIAN MÖLLERS / REWILDING EUROPE

- ▲ Aerial view of rewetted peat bogs and the Peene River in fall colours at sunrise, just outside the city of Anklam, Germany.
- ▶ An aquatic warbler perches on reeds.
- ▶▶ Fen woodland at a former peat extraction site, close to the village of Święta, Poland.



TOMASZ KUBIS / ISTOCKPHOTO



FLORIAN MÖLLERS / REWILDING EUROPE

and have just signed an agreement to calculate the carbon potential of around 500 hectares. In due course this land will be rewetted, representing a major step forward in our peatland work in the Polish part of the delta.

As to the credits, we currently employ a Polish-wide certified system. It is important that sales are verified and carried out through an independent, scientific and rigorously audited system, and are now waiting on external partners to finalise the process. We are hopeful that the first credits can be sold by end of 2023.

What's the upscaling potential of your efforts?

Peatland restoration work in Germany is more advanced and there are very experienced German organisations in this field. On the Polish side, how-

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 “The rewilding of this peatland will act as an inspirational role model for the restoration of this important ecosystem.”

ever, we can act as a role model for the whole of Poland and are working with the Polish CMOK Centre for Peatland Protection. We also have a long-term relationship with the German Greifswald Mire Centre – a world-renowned, peatland-focused foundation located in the middle of the Oder Delta rewilding landscape – and are in touch with

various peatland restoration initiatives across Europe. Working within our transboundary rewilding landscape we aim to aggregate existing know-how and scale up synergies between Poland and Germany.

Where would you like peatland restoration in the Oder Delta to be five years from now?

We would like to see 5,000 hectares of peatland rewilded through the removal of dykes and closure of artificial ditches. This would see former non-productive farmland become a paradise for a wide range of plant and animal species, with landowners earning money from carbon credits that help to mitigate climate change and enhance biodiversity. The rewilding of this peatland will act as an inspirational role model for the restoration of this important ecosystem.



JAMES SHOOTER



All for one and one for all

In the Affric Highlands of Scotland, co-ownership of rewilding is ensuring everyone benefits from nature recovery.



.....

4,690

Official Affric Highlands partners now covering 4,690 ha (secured) and 16,688 ha (pending), with discussions ongoing for 42,727 ha in four additional private estates.

.....

A broad coalition

In September 2021, Rewilding Europe welcomed the Affric Highlands in Scotland as the ninth rewilding landscape in its expanding portfolio. Together with local partner Trees for Life, which has been rewilding the Scottish Highlands for over 30 years, we are now working to upscale and amplify rewilding efforts across 200,000 hectares – from Loch Ness in the east to Glen Shiel in the west.

“Our vision is to create a rewilding landscape with a long-term difference,” explains Affric Highlands team leader Stephanie Kiel. “To bring about lasting change, we need to involve people.

This is why we are working to form a broad coalition of partners – from landowners and entrepreneurs right through to students and community members. We want to use the common interests of people in the Affric Highlands as the basis for a progressive and shared agenda. An agenda that not only enhances nature, but strengthens local economies and enriches lives too.”

Invaluable remnants

Today, efforts to recover nature in the Affric Highlands are primarily focused on woodland, peatland and riparian restoration. In 2022, much of the work carried out by the Affric Highlands

○ **Country**



Scotland

○ **Focal landscape**

Affric Highlands

○ **Size of landscape**

200,000 ha

○ **Work started in**

2021

○ **Larger landscape**

Scottish highlands west of Loch Ness, from Glen Affric in the east to Glen Shield in the west.

○ **Main habitats**

Caledonian forests, peatlands, grasslands, rivers, lakes and mountain hill sides.

○ **Focal species**

Red deer, roe deer, Scottish wildcat, red squirrel, pine marten, Atlantic salmon, Eurasian lynx, Tauros.

○ **Team Leader**

Stephanie Kiel



“Supporting and enabling nature recovery will always lie at the heart of what we do. To bring about lasting change, we need to involve people.”

rewilding team involved identifying wild trees that already exist in the landscape – fragments of the ancient Caledonian Forest, which once extended across most of Scotland.

As a result of widespread clearance, the planting of non-native tree species, and grazing pressure from unnaturally high deer populations, the Caledonian Forest now covers less than 20,000 hectares, but is still home to some of the UK’s most threatened wildlife, such as the capercaillie, red squirrel and Scottish wildcat. Many of the trees in remnant patches, which include Scots pine, juniper, birch, willow, rowan and aspen, have naturally evolved in the landscape over thousands of years.

“There is very little of the forest left, but what remains is incredibly valuable,” explains Affric Highlands enterprise manager Marian Bruce. “Our focus is to ensure those trees survive, and

that we protect them against overgrazing by deer, so that natural regeneration can take place. This helps to maximise genetic and natural diversity, and the resilience of trees in the landscape to variables such as climate change.”

Engaging estates

Carrying out ecological surveys has allowed the Affric Highlands rewilding team to engage many estates across the rewilding landscape. This has seen agreements drafted with some, while discussions are ongoing with a number of others.

“We bring in ecologists for free, conduct wild tree and peatland surveys, and make a general ecological assessment of the estate,” explains Bruce. “We then make recommendations as to how the owner of the land could move forward with nature recovery, which includes looking at potential funding

sources. There are various schemes and grant funding mechanisms available.”

Protecting trees and supporting forest regeneration in the Scottish Highlands typically means putting up fences. It may also mean controlling deer numbers. Every landowner is different, which means discussions about rewilding are a very bespoke process.

“We encourage owners of estates to think about the future,” says Stephanie Kiel. “Do they want to continue with lots of deer, for example, or can they visualise moving towards a healthier, naturally regenerating landscape with lower numbers of deer. This is the journey we are trying to take them on.

“Traditional ways of managing land are embedded here, so for some people taking the decision to do things differently is incredibly difficult. But we want to show landowners new options – options that will add socio-economic as



◀ The Attadale Estate.

▶ Glen Affric’s recovering landscape boasts a stunning mix of pinewoods, lochs, rivers and mountains.

.....
 “We want to show landowners new options that will add socio-economic as well as ecological value to their land and the surrounding landscape.”

well as ecological value to their land and the surrounding landscape.”

The 12,000-hectare Attadale Estate is typical of many estates in the Affric Highlands. There is already a focus on the recovery of natural forest here – all of the non-native conifer woodlands have been felled and are being replaced with a mixture of Scots pine, birch, hazel, aspen and willow. A collaboration with Trees for Life has seen red squirrels reintroduced, while the estate is part of a deer management group, which sees deer culled to control their impact on the landscape.

“We want to do the best we can for the environment,” says Joanna Macpherson, who runs Attadale on behalf of her family, together with her husband Alec. “Supporting nature recovery makes sense on many levels.”

Generating community wealth

Scotland is a wealthy country, with abundant natural and human resources. Yet it is also characterised by highly aggregated land ownership, which means around 400 individuals own 50% of the country’s privately-owned land. Zeroing in on the Affric Highlands, there are around 40 privately owned estates across 200,000 hectares of the landscape. Other landowners include the Scottish government, environmen-

tal NGOs such as Trees for Life, The National Trust for Scotland (NTS) and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), while there is also some community-owned land.

One of the key objectives of rewilding in the Affric Highlands is to generate sustainable community wealth, using the recovery of nature and natural assets to create economic and social value for the broadest spectrum of people living in the landscape.

One pioneering way of enabling communities to benefit from rewilding is to disburse revenue generated from the sale of carbon credits.

In 2022, two community groups in the Affric Highlands rewilding landscape shared funding of more than 26,000 euros. This was generated from sales of carbon credits or ‘units’, based on the restoration of native woodland in the 4000-hectare Dundreggan Estate, which is owned and managed by Trees for Life. This sum represents one-third of the money generated from sales – the other two-thirds will be reinvested in rewilding.

Each unit represents a tonne of atmospheric carbon absorbed and stored by the Allt Ruadh woodland, where Trees for Life has planted more than 250,000 native trees. They are being sold to organisations already taking action to reduce their carbon footprints to as close to zero as possible, but which want to offset unavoidable emissions as they work towards this goal. Trees for Life estimates that further sales of carbon units from the woodland could generate further funds of around 20,000 euros for the local community.

“This is the model we want to pursue across the whole Affric Highlands landscape,” explains Marian Bruce. “How development of the model plays out in practice is yet to be seen, but sharing

.....
18

people employed in the Dundreggan Rewilding Centre, of which six are under 30.



JAMES SHOOTER

nature-based revenue in this way will enable us to create a kind of social permanence based on landscape recovery.”

In 2022, Rewilding Europe received a grant of 365,000 euros (400,000 dollars) from multinational delivery services company FedEx. In addition to directly funding rewilding efforts in the Affric Highlands, the grant will also support the development of a carbon credit standard for rewilding across Europe, with the Affric Highlands acting as a main pilot area.

A sense of belonging

Young people are the future of rewilding, which means engaging them and harnessing their energy, ideas, skills and passion is incredibly important. They often feel the need for change more urgently too, especially in Scotland’s shrinking rural communities, where affordable housing is often in short supply and job opportunities are frequently limited.

Launched in December 2022, Change Makers is a youth empowerment programme designed and run by Trees for Life and the Affric Highlands rewilding team. In the years ahead, it will give young people living in and around the Affric Highlands rewilding landscape (aged 14-26) the opportunity to develop their own nature and community-based

businesses and livelihoods, ensuring local rewilding efforts not only deliver an ecological impact, but a socio-economic one too.

For Mollie Saunders, the Affric Highlands Change Makers Project Officer, the programme is all about giving young people ownership. This can then lead to the delivery of a wide range of benefits.

“At the moment if you ask a young person here what would make them stay in the area, or return here after university, many don’t really know. This is mainly because they’ve never been asked the question before. Change Makers is a space and opportunity for young people to come to us and say that they want to do something positive. It’s about giving them responsibility for a valuable project, equipping them with skills, confidence and experience, and making them feel they belong.”

(Read more about the Change Makers programme in the boxout on page 80).

Future focus

In 2023, the efforts of the Affric Highlands rewilding team will continue to put people at the heart of restoration in the landscape.

With visitor numbers on the increase, there are plans to establish a network of nature-based businesses in the Affric Highlands. This will bring

together existing businesses to help them become nature positive and generate more nature-based income. As the year progresses, a growing number of landowners within the landscape will start to receive public and private investment to help fund woodland and river restoration efforts.

“Nature, people and enterprise are the three pillars of rewilding in the Affric Highlands,” says Stephanie Kiel. “There’s a long way to go, but I feel like we’re making progress across the board.”



▲ A volunteer in the Affric Highlands. More and more young people want to be involved in rewilding.

TREES FOR LIFE



Main achievements in 2022

This section provides a coherent overview of the progress we made on the four main components of our work, across the entire European initiative.

Nature for people

Demonstrating that rewilding generates new business opportunities, jobs, and income for local people, and providing new perspectives for local culture, identity, pride and social cohesion.

Scaling up rewilding

Engaging, inspiring and empowering others to adopt and apply rewilding principles, models tools to scale up rewilding as a mainstream approach to recover nature at scale.

1

Wilder nature

Increasing the amount of land where natural ecosystem processes function freely, and supporting the comeback of keystone wildlife populations, while enhancing human-wildlife coexistence.

2

3

Building engagement

Reaching out to people and capturing hearts and minds, showcasing the impact of rewilding in our flagship landscapes, and influencing target groups that are key to scaling up across Europe.

4

1 Wilder Nature




Functioning ecosystems

Natural grazing, dam removal, dyke removal from former polders and wetlands, steppe restoration, and the rewetting of peatlands received our full attention in 2022, demonstrating how the revival of natural processes lies at the heart of nature recovery and more naturally functioning ecosystems.

Increasing land access

Restoring functional ecosystems is a top priority in our landscapes and critical for demonstrating the benefits of rewilding. To accelerate land access, we have established a Land Task Force that brings the necessary expertise, knowledge, and capacity for concerted action. The main goal of this task force is to ensure we work towards a target of 500,000 ha of land under rewilding management by 2030 within our landscapes (the target for 2025 is 160,000 ha, the situation at the end of 2022 nearly 40,000 ha). Our focus is on peatlands, grasslands, rivers, wetlands and woodlands.

Land under rewilding management is being secured through purchase of ownership, concessions, or specific rights (such as management, grazing, hunting, or tourism rights). With support from external partners, we are working to establish a Land Fund, provide necessary legal expertise, and to continue fundraising for the purchase of land rights. The Land Fund and the establishment of Rewilding Climate Solutions are expected to speed up delivery in this important area. To date, we have built a pipeline of possible properties of around 64,000 ha, which will require financing of around

30 million euros. We have started engaging with different potential partners to find the financial means to move forward.

Latest expansions

Land access was increased by the purchase of a new property called Quinta da Azilheira (287 ha), leased by Rewilding Portugal in line with their “stepping stone” strategy in the Greater Côa Valley. A new touristic hunting zone (624 ha) was declared in Ermo das Águias, giving Rewilding Portugal full control over wildlife management inside the property. For Quinta Santa Margarida / Paul dos Toirões, a former mining area (293 ha), Rewilding Portugal signed a Stewardship Agreement.

In the Velebit Mountains, a new hunting concession called Crna Duliba Metla (7,300 ha) was purchased. Following the purchase, dangerous water wells where animals had previously drowned (including brown bears and wolves) were identified and made safe. Furthermore, MoUs were signed with neighbouring concessions to change key



PETER CAIRNS

wildlife management practices such as artificial feeding, the setting of hunting quotas, wildlife population enhancement, and tourism development. In 2022, three MoUs were signed with the hunting concessions Vrebac (12,640 ha), Markovic Rudine (10,734 ha), and North Velebit (29,421 ha). With this land, as well as the land directly managed by Rewilding Velebit (approximately 30,000 hectares), and the additional 20,400 hectares in the two neighbouring national parks of North Velebit and Paklenica, the management of wildlife is improving over a total surface area of 103,400 hectares (see feature story pages 44–47).

In the Central Apennines, an agreement was signed to manage Bosco della Selva (332 ha) with other opportunities (600+ ha) under review, while in the Affric Highlands rewilding agreements were drafted for first movers among the area's estates. Official Affric Highlands partners now cover 4,690 ha (secured) and 16,688 ha (pending), with discussions ongoing for 42,727 ha in four additional private estates.

▲ River Cannich in the Affric Highlands, Scotland.



14 kulan released into the wild on the 6,323-ha Tarutino Steppe in Ukraine

10+ km of river and lakes planned for restoration along the Åbramson River in Sweden

40,000

hectares of land being rewilded by the end of 2022

277,000 hectares of land being rewilded through over 40 agreements with third parties

New, 7,300-ha hunting concession purchased in the Velebit Mountains

First portion of 4,690 ha of land in the Affric Highlands under rewilding agreement

19

Sorraia horses released in the Greater Côa Valley, with 378 ha now under natural grazing



11 Tauros and **82 horses** grazing the Lika Plains in Croatia, and **24 Tauros** grazing near Frias de Albarracin in Spain



84 dams in four rewilding landscapes being prepared for removal, freeing up at least **500 km** of river

11 Serrano horses released in a new natural grazing site of 1,515 ha in the Iberian Highlands



26 participants from nine landscapes took part in natural grazing training in the Netherlands



EVGENY MELNIKOV

◀ A young steppe marmot.

▶ Klepina Duliba primeval forest in the Velebit Mountains, Croatia.

In the Velebit Mountains, a three-year partnership has been signed with our partners that own the grazing rights on the Lika Plains (1,546 ha), where there are now 110 Tauros and 82 horses.

On the Tarutino Steppe (6,323 ha), in the Ukrainian part of the Danube Delta rewilding landscape, 14 kulan were released into the wild, while six more individuals remain in the pre-release area. In addition, a new translocation of 15 fallow deer was carried out here. Despite the war, our local rangers continue to monitor the kulan herds, which have so far mostly stayed inside the steppe area. At least six marmots have been born in the translocated population in 2022, marking the start of the return of this small herbivore species on the steppe. A barge for the transport of large herbivores has been built, making the translocation of these animals to the islands and outer part of the Danube Delta feasible, with releases of fallow and red deer scheduled for early 2023.

A natural grazing training event organised in the Netherlands was attended by a total of 26 staff and nine partners from eight different rewilding landscapes. They visited several sites with over 30 years of history in natural grazing. The Greater Cõa Valley field team also received a week of training on how to handle Tauros, allowing them to prepare properties where the animals will be released in 2023.

Restoring wetlands and rivers

Our work on wetlands and rivers is scaling up rapidly, encompassing several rewilding landscapes. In Swedish Lapland, the new team now boasts experienced experts in river restoration, leading to significant progress in this area (see feature story on page 40–43). A permit for river restoration of a 10.5-km stretch of the Åbramson River (Norrbotten County) was obtained. A non-repayable grant from Rewilding Europe Capital to the Swedish Sportfishing and

Natural grazing

Last year saw significant action to increase land under natural grazing, bringing back a key natural process that is so critical for Europe’s biodiversity.

In the Iberian Highlands we started a natural grazing site in Solanillos (1,515 ha) with Serrano horses, starting with five females and four males – and two foals born right after arrival. Another 17 Serrano horses have been identified to further increase the herd. The existing Tauros herd of 24 animals based at a grazing site near Albarracin (511 ha) has adapted well; after the Velebit Mountains, the Iberian Highlands have become the second landscape to take part in the Tauros programme (the third will be the Greater Cõa Valley).

.....
 Our work on wetlands and rivers is scaling up rapidly, encompassing several rewilding landscapes.

Fishery Conservation Association was approved to remove at least one dam, while we supported the association in obtaining funding to remove all other dams on this river. Furthermore, funding was secured from the Swedish Postcode Foundation to rewild forests in the Vindel River catchment (Västerbotten County). The Rewilding Sweden team accelerated stakeholder dialogue on peatland restoration in Norrbotten County.

Working under wartime conditions has proven challenging for the Rewilding Ukraine team, but they have continued to oversee efforts to reconnect the Danube River and Katlabuh Lake through the Lung system. A section of the dyke has been removed and a water channel constructed, thanks to a collaboration with the local water management authority.

In the Affric Highlands, concrete discussions were initiated with several landowners (including The Attadale and Shiel Estates) to restore around 20km of river. Finally, in the Greater Côa Valley, restoration work started in the Paul de Toirões Reserve to create small naturally functioning wetlands in this former mining area.

In the Oder Delta practical steps for the removal of three dams on tributaries of the Ina River (Poland) have begun and funding was secured to map further opportunities. Rewilding Oder Delta is now managing a stretch of the Uecke River and is in discussions with neighbouring landowners to scale-up river restoration efforts in different places across the Ueckermünder Heide nature reserve. Peatland rewetting opportunities on the Polish side are being explored (see feature story on pages 52–55).

In total, we are planning the removal of dams in the Central Apennines (2), Greater Côa Valley (3), Oder Delta (3) and Swedish Lapland (up to 76), which would free up well over 500 kilometres of river in these landscapes.



.....

We are exploring the possibility of protecting 1,000 hectares of old-growth forest with funds generated by carbon credit development.

.....

Rewilding and protection of forests

The planning phase to convert a commercial forest plantation into natural forest is underway for a large, forested property (1,700 hectares) in the Greater Côa Valley. The idea is to fund the conversion from commercial forestry to rewilding land with the removal of the existing plantation forest. In the Iberian Highlands, an existing old-growth forest map has been used to discuss initial agreements with two municipalities with regard to changing forestry management and protecting these important swathes of forest. In one particular case we are exploring the possibility of protecting 1,000 hectares of old-growth forest with funds generated by carbon credit development.

In the Velebit Mountains, thanks to the advocacy efforts of Rewilding Velebit, Croatian Forests (the state-owned company in charge of forest management) declared the Ramino Korito Old Growth Forest a 'Special Purpose Forest',

thereby giving it specific forestry protection. This forest falls within a hunting concession owned by Rewilding Velebit and therefore complements the efforts of the local rewilding team to support nature recovery.

In Swedish Lapland, a partnership was established with the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences and a local NGO to plan the restoration of forests in parts of the Vindel River catchment. A grant of 260,000 euros from the Postcode Foundation in Sweden is set to advance forest rewilding in the north of the country. Rewilding efforts, which began in June, will focus primarily on the Vindelälven-Juhttätahkka Biosphere Reserve in the county of Västerbotten, to the northwest of the city of Umeå. This is the first time that NGOs have undertaken such restoration work in Sweden. With Rewilding Sweden playing a key role, the idea is to showcase what we really mean by rewilding forests, and to demonstrate the benefits more natural forests can deliver to both nature and people. Allowing existing forests to reach their ecological potential is an effective, immediate, and low-cost approach for the long-term removal and storage of greenhouse gases, and also offers great biodiversity benefits. In Sweden there is a growing realisation that closer-to-nature forestry, involving continuous tree cover and natural regeneration, is a far better alternative to intensive forestry involving clear-cutting, plantations, and non-native tree species.



IVODANICHEV / REWILDING EUROPE

Wildlife comeback

In addition to enabling the natural recolonisation of species, efforts to support wildlife comeback included the active release of a range of animals. These efforts worked to restore the natural dynamics between wildlife species and enhance their beneficial impact on the landscape.

Vulture comeback

In the Rhodope Mountains, the team completed an adaptation aviary near the village of Chernichino, where 17 cinereous vultures from Spain were accommodated in May. Two birds were intended for captive breeding, as they had injuries that prevented their release into the wild, and to attract other birds around the aviary. Ten artificial oak nests and one rock nest were installed close to the aviary to attract and settle the released birds in the area.

In October, 16 birds were fitted with GPS transmitters, tagged with

ornithological rings and examined by a veterinarian. In November the cage was opened, and all birds successfully left within a few hours. During the following weeks most of the released birds remained in the vicinity of the cage, except for four birds, which settled in nearby areas, including the Halkidiki Peninsula (near Komotini in Greece), and the eastern part of the Balkan Mountains (Stara Planina). By the end of 2022 there were two losses – one bird died in the aviary before the release, and one bird was killed by poachers 70 kilometres to the northeast. Investiga-

tion by the responsible authorities is still underway. Until now, a hierarchy between the birds has been established and their movement is monitored hourly through GPS transmitters.

In the Iberian Highlands, seven cinereous vultures were released from an adaptation aviary near the village of Peralejos de las Truchas in September. Six of them were carrying GPS transmitters and have been doing well since. One female that lost its transmitter has yet to be resighted. In October, six new cinereous vultures were brought to the aviary, including one bird from a rescue center in Cuenca. These birds will be released in 2023 and will hopefully stay in the area, attracted by artificial nests with decoys in the surrounding hills. An immature bearded vulture originating from Castellon (Valencia) frequented the area and has been monitored since October. Unfortunately, it was found dead later in the year as a result of electrocution by power lines.

Efforts by the Rewilding Apennines team and the Reparto Carabinieri

◀ Cinereous vulture acclimatisation aviary in the Rhodope Mountains, Bulgaria.

Biodiversità Castel di Sangro have led to an increase in the number of griffon vultures residing in the Central Apennines. A total of 105 griffon vultures were captured (two after being rescued) and equipped with 24 GPS transmitters (52 vultures have been equipped with GPS transmitters since 2020) to monitor their behaviour, which will enable better protection. A roadmap for alternative carcass management was completed, aimed at further supporting these scavenging birds. In addition, permits were sought (but not yet obtained) for a vulture feeding station in Massa d'Albe. The cinereous vulture population in Malcata Nature Reserve in the Greater Cõa Valley continues to thrive and expand, according to recent monitoring results from 2022 (four breeding pairs) and 2023 (10 breeding pairs). However, there have been challenges with licensing free carcass deposition sites and legal support was sought to understand the reasons behind the delay.

European bison

With the help of the European Bison Friends Society, three female European bison were moved from a wild population in the Bieszczady Mountains (Poland) to the Rhodope Mountains in 2022. The bison were captured by Forest District Lutowska, checked by a veterinarian, and transported in wooden boxes by a specialised wildlife transport company. The bison spent three months in a fenced acclimatisation area, with volunteers helping to prepare infrastructure (such as fences, water sources and feeding sites). Following a quarantine period of 45 days, the bison were released into a larger acclimatisation enclosure and adapted well to local conditions, with one of the females giving birth to a calf in May. On July 1, the gate to the enclosure was finally opened and the new bison joined the existing herd. By the end of 2022, the entire herd totalled 14 animals; they have adapted



▲ Preparing Dalmatian pelican breeding platforms in the Danube Delta.

Conservation of Dalmatian pelican

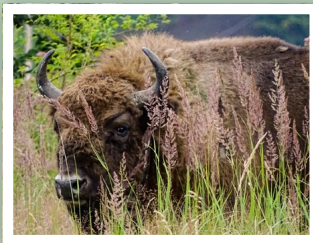
The eastern European population of the Dalmatian pelican population was closely monitored during the International Waterbird Census in January, with a winter monitoring census conducted in Western Greece, Albania, and Montenegro. Unfortunately, 2022 turned out to be an unkind year for the Dalmatian pelicans of the Balkan Peninsula. In spring, more than 2,000 adults from breeding colonies in Greece and the Danube Delta in Romania died as a result of avian influenza (bird flu), which resulted in a nearly 40% decrease of the population in the area! Breeding success was also negatively impacted by low water levels.

To better understand the attitudes of stakeholders towards fish-eating birds, we conducted close to 100 meetings and interviews with anglers, hunters, and fishpond owners in the region. We also built three 40 square-metre floating platforms in Bulgaria and another platform in the Ukrainian Danube Delta for pelicans to use for breeding and roosting.

Satellite transmitters were successfully used to tag young Dalmatian pelicans from breeding colonies in Bulgaria and Greece, which revealed some individuals experiencing fatal collisions with power lines. To address this issue, we purchased almost 1000 bird diverters for installation by Romanian, Bulgarian and Greek power companies. Patrolling in Bulgaria, Romania, and Greece continues as planned, in coordination with protected areas management authorities.

- **Two new floating platforms** built for Dalmatian pelicans in Burgas lakes, Bulgaria, on which at least 29 breeding pairs were recorded
- 574 Dalmatian pelicans were found dead in Prespa Lake breeding colony in 2022, due to **avian influenza**. Another 22 dead Dalmatian pelicans were recorded on Lake Kerkini, and at Lake Cheimaditida, both in Greece
- The census of Dalmatian pelicans in the Balkans in May 2022 found only 3,222 birds, while in 2021 the count revealed 5,200 birds – a **decline of 40% within a year**
- Seven Dalmatian pelicans fitted with **GPS transmitter** that can now be followed online in real time, while the first Dalmatian pelican with a GPS died due to a collision with a power line
- **1000 bird diverters** for Dalmatian pelicans were purchased for installation on power lines in Romania, Bulgaria, and Greece
- Second edition of the **Festival of the Dalmatian pelican** took place in June in Persina Nature Park
- 'Pelican Way of LIFE' ended among the finalist of the prestigious **Natura 2000 Awards**


152 free-roaming European bison in the Southern Carpathians, half of which were born in the wild




Three bison translocated from Poland, with 14 European bison now roaming free in Rhodope Mountains

16 wolf-proof fences built in the Greater C \hat{o} a Valley to protect livestock, while **64** livestock guard dogs were integrated into herds


One Eurasian lynx reintroduced in the Velebit Mountains to increase population genetics


 **12** keystone species actively brought back in 19 different sites across 6 rewilding landscapes


 **69** keystone species populations naturally present are at minimum viable population levels in our landscapes

Over 1.5 million euros

raised for the European Wildlife Comeback Fund, seven initiatives received funding from the fund

 **17** cinereous vultures from Spain brought to the Rhodope Mountains, of which 14 were released successfully

 **Seven** cinereous vultures released in Iberian Highlands, with six new ones brought to the aviary for future release

 **24** griffon vultures equipped with GPS transmitters in the Central Apennines

The comeback of **50 wildlife species** described in the new Wildlife Comeback in Europe Report



well to the hot and dry conditions and expanded their home range.

The bison population in the Southern Carpathians has grown to at least 152 individuals, as genetic analysis has shown, which is substantially more than expected and a really good sign. Despite comprehensive coexistence measures, dealing with problematic bison remains a challenge. Ten new bison from Germany have been selected for release in June 2023 and preparations are ongoing. Funding from Cartier for Nature and Fondation Ensemble was secured, and a significant LIFE proposal to the European Commission was submitted in October, focusing on coexistence rather than a new release site, with renewed support from key partners and stakeholders (see feature story on pages 32–35).

Report on Wildlife Comeback

On September 27th, a fully updated report on Wildlife Comeback in Europe was unveiled at a public event in Cambridge, which was hosted by the Cambridge Conservation Initiative in the David Attenborough Building and attended by a large audience. The first reports were handed over to senior representatives from the European Commission, BirdLife International, and Arcadia. The launch was paired with a communications campaign aimed at promoting the idea of wildlife resurgence across Europe. The event was a resounding success, generating an immense amount of coverage in international media.

The new report represents an updated and enlarged version of ‘Wildlife Comeback in Europe’, a groundbreaking publication published in 2013. Of the 24 mammal species covered, the Eurasian beaver, grey seal, and European bison show the strongest comeback. Of the 25 bird species covered, barnacle goose, griffon vulture, great white egret and Dalmatian pelican

► Bonelli's eagles.

are also recovering well. Reasons for upward population trends include legal protection through the EU Birds and Habitats Directives, changes in policy and land use, as well as species management and conservation efforts, including rewilding.

Grey wolves, for example, are recovering across Europe and readily recolonise areas where humans allow their presence. The European Union is now strongly encouraging human-wolf coexistence by offering funding for prevention measures such as fences and livestock dogs, as well as full compensation to farmers across member states for livestock lost to wolf predation. After decades of decline, European vulture populations are also recovering, largely due to changes in EU legislation and intensive management and conservation efforts.

The ongoing recovery described in the new report is encouraging. However, in-depth analysis shows that wildlife comeback in Europe is still highly patchy, while some species – such as the Eurasian otter and cinereous vulture – show recent range contractions. The results of the report also need to be viewed in the context of large historical range contractions for many species.

Looking to the future, it is critical that we understand why certain European wildlife species are doing well if we are to give all species the best opportunity to bounce back and adapt to external factors such as climate change. The report gives cause for optimism and shows that given a chance, and with well-placed conservation efforts, wildlife can recover.

European Wildlife Comeback Fund

Along with the report launch, we took the opportunity to introduce the European Wildlife Comeback Fund (EWCF), which is a novel initiative aimed at supporting the reintroduction and population reinforcement of keystone



species within and beyond our rewilding landscapes.

With over 1.5 million euros already available, and more donations to come, the fund aims to facilitate at least 20 wildlife comeback interventions per year. Since September 2022, the EWCF received 13 applications from 10 countries. Of these, seven initiatives received funding, in seven European countries, of which six are outside Rewilding Europe's rewilding landscapes. Translocation plans for 2023 include 20 red and 20 fallow deer in the Danube Delta rewilding landscape in Ukraine, 17 Eurasian lynx in northwest Poland, five Bonelli's eagles in Sardinia, 60 dung beetles in southwest France, three horses and four roe deer in Portugal, and 23 white-tailed eagles in northwest Spain. The breadth of these releases really exemplifies the EWCF's overarching objective: to support the return of keystone species – not just as an aim in itself – but to restore natural ecological processes and boost ecosystem resilience.

Coexistence models

The wildlife comeback that Europe is witnessing means additional efforts are required to encourage and enable people to live in coexistence with wild animals. Our rewilding teams are focusing heavily on this in their work on the ground. The establishment of so-called 'wildlife smart communities' is one way to achieve this.

Camera trapping

In the Velebit Mountains, a wildlife comeback monitoring exercise was completed with support from the Zoological Society of London (ZSL) in the Jablanac concession in early 2022, providing a good understanding of the species composition in the area. However, there was still uncertainty regarding their abundances, highlighting the need for more training for the field teams and/or adapting the methods. Lessons learned from this exercise were considered in the 2022 monitoring, which included additional training. The monitoring effort was also expanded to Ramino Korito, with an emphasis on field team training and collaboration with ZSL. A total of 63 wildlife cameras were deployed to survey 8,500 hectares with results expected in May-June 2023.



Nature for People



PARKO D'AMICIS, REWILDING EUROPE

Economic benefits

In 2022, our work to build nature-based economies focused mostly on building local business networks in our rewilding landscapes, development of nature-based tourism, exploring a revolving fund for dam removal, and setting up Rewilding Climate Solutions.

Rewilding enterprise team

For rewilding to be successful it has to generate economic benefits for businesses and local communities. This is why we work to develop nature-based economies in the landscapes where we work. Our growing team of landscape-based enterprise officers, guided by the central enterprise team, work closely together to develop landscapes business plans, new and scalable business models, and explore new financing mechanisms. Supported by Rewilding Europe Travel, Rewilding Europe Capital, Rewilding Training Tourism, Rewilding Climate Solutions and other initiatives, our enterprise work has started to deliver significant results in terms of jobs, income and multiplier effects, thereby supporting local economies. The overview below presents the most important developments and results in 2022.

Building local business networks

The Wild Côa Network in the Greater Côa Valley rewilding landscape represents the most advanced example of a business network across all of our rewilding landscapes (and one which we would like to see replicated). The network is an association of like-minded enterprises in the Greater Côa Valley who share a vision for a wilder and more sustainable future. Its goal is to promote a nature-based economy in the region where the inter-related production and consumption of goods and services promotes rewilding and benefits the local communities. By the end of 2022, it already had 38 members and is still growing (see feature story on pages 28–31).

The Wild Côa Network aims to facilitate synergies between businesses across sectors in order to promote a stronger business environment that

◀ Across Europe rewilding is offering people the chance to reconnect with nature.

fosters cooperation instead of competition. It also enables the region to be marketed in a better way, promoting its cultural and natural values, while assisting local business in the development of sustainable business models in line with rewilding principles. Finally, it promotes partnerships between tourism-related entities to create new nature-based tourism packages. The network, while still developing, has brought strong added value to the region and to the appreciation of its rich natural and cultural heritage.

In the Central Apennines, so-called 'Rewilding Weeks' enable local stakeholders and guests from the wider area to meet with the communities that co-exist with wildlife – to work alongside the Rewilding Apennines team as they rewild and to support the economies of small yet fascinating Apennine villages, which are learning to live alongside and benefit from the resurgent wildlife of the area (see the feature story on pages 36–39).

Developing nature-based tourism

In each of our landscapes the development of nature-based tourism has been a key priority, although development has taken different forms. The Oder Delta became part of the Nature Guide Network, as part of the South Baltic Region (Germany, Poland, Lithuania). This offers visitors direct access to a qualified nature tourism guide who takes them on a gentle, nature-friendly exploration of the region, such as the Peene Valley on the German side. The Oder Delta team works to develop tourism in a sustainable way and in line with nature conservation and rewilding, promoting high-quality guided nature tours, as well as local and ecological products and sustainable mobility.

In the Rhodope Mountains, the new edition of the Crossbill guide to Rhodopes was finished (to be published in Spring 2023), making the area more popular for nature tourism. A strategy for

eco-tourism development in the village of Madzharovo is being developed with the main stakeholders.

In the Southern Carpathians, the social enterprise 'WeWilder' received a loan from Rewilding Europe Capital for its accommodation, which was opened in October. In the Velebit Mountains, five professional wildlife watching hides were built and developed by SKUA Nature, an Italian wildlife watching tourism company. Opening in 2023, they offer potential close encounters with species such as the brown bear, grey wolf, wildcat, red deer, white-backed woodpecker, Ural owl and other local mammals and birds.


In 2022, the Rewilding Training Tourism programme hosted 155 participants from 20 countries, with online and in-the-field training in the Central Apennines, Greater Côa Valley and Oder Delta. This training focuses on developing and upskilling the guiding and hospitality segment of Europe's nature tourism sector, with a focus on participants from the rewilding landscapes. Set up by Rewilding Europe, it aims to professionalise and scale up nature-based tourism in Europe. It comprises three separate stages, with each of these including an assessment and a 'Rewilding Certificate' for participants. It is designed for guides, hospitality and tourism entrepreneurs, and other local partners in rewilding landscapes, and incorporates Rewilding Europe's best practices.

▶ Local products from the Wild Côa Network.



7.5 million

euros of potential funding available for disbursement by Rewilding Europe Capital, 3 new loans provided


 59 rewilding-related jobs created in rewilding landscapes


 155 participants in the Rewilding Tourism Training programme from 20 countries

Five new wildlife watching hides built in the Velebit Mountains

38

members of the Wild Côa Network – a business network in the Greater Côa Valley

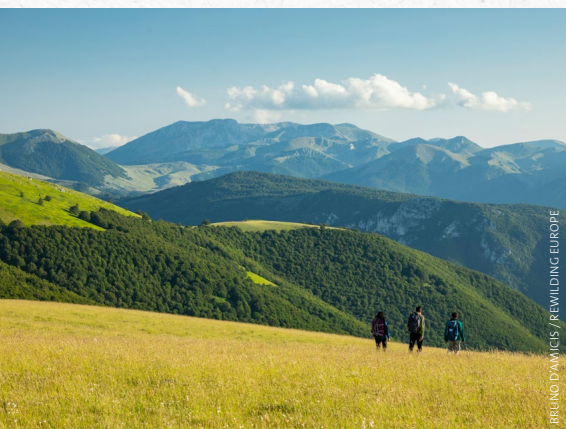
 Two new nature-based enterprises incubated (Rewilding Europe Travel and Rewilding Climate Solutions)

 Six rewilding initiatives identified in six countries prepared to sell nature-based carbon credits

260,000

euros of revenue in first year of Rewilding Europe Travel

20 nature tourism experiences in eight landscapes offered by Rewilding Europe Travel



BRUNO DAMICIS / REWILDING EUROPE



ENFERROCELES



BOGDAN BOBEV / REWILDING EUROPE



JAN NORDSTROM

◀ A selection of Rewilding Europe Travel destinations (top to bottom): the Central Apennines, Iberian Highlands and Rhodope Mountains, and Swedish Lapland.

Rewilding Europe Travel

With an ever-growing number of people looking to connect with high-quality nature on their holidays, today Europe's nature-based tourism sector is booming. To connect visitors with Europe's magnificent wild nature in a sustainable way, increase support for rewilding, and grow local economies, in 2022 the European Safari Company transitioned into a new company: Rewilding Europe Travel. This transition is a step forward in terms of scaling up nature-based tourism and its positive impact on wild nature and local communities, while promoting the essential link with rewilding.

Thanks to the efforts of Rewilding Europe and other rewilding initiatives, Europe's reputation as a place to witness some of the most captivating wild nature on the planet is on the rise. The reality is, that Europe is wilder than most of us imagine – a place where travellers can enjoy thrilling encounters with species such as the brown bear, European bison, white-tailed eagle, and grey wolf. The growth in nature-based tourism helps more and more nature-based entrepreneurs find and develop their own businesses, which means more jobs and essential income for rural communities. It will also see more money fed back into rewilding actions on the ground. Considering all the trends, Rewilding Europe Travel has huge potential for incentivising local people to start a nature-based business, thereby building support for wildlife comeback and rewilding in our rewilding landscapes and beyond.

Rewilding Europe Travel offers those who want to see rewilding impact with their own eyes two choices – to experience rewilding landscapes in small groups that depart on fixed dates, or to book customisable, private holidays based on existing travel programmes. Regardless of the experience, the emphasis is on connecting with stunning wild nature, learning more about rewilding, and enjoying fantastic local

hospitality. The journeys offered are designed to immerse clients in extraordinary natural and cultural landscapes in and around Rewilding Europe's rewilding landscapes.

By the end of 2022, Rewilding Europe Travel had a growing customer base, with clients attracted to a rapidly increasing number now 20 different offerings across eight rewilding landscapes.

Exploring revolving fund for dam removal

The launch of the Open Rivers Programme in October 2021, as a dedicated 42.5 million euro fund to support dam removal, was a huge step forward for river restoration across Europe. However, significantly more finance is required to address dam removal across our continent, with over 1 million dams in Europe, including 100,000 obsolete barriers. There is a need to attract additional finance to further enable dam removal across Europe and ensure that the impact of the limited number of grants available is maximised, i.e. where there is no other financing mechanism in place.

Contracted by the Open Rivers Programme, Rewilding Europe started investigations for a revolving fund as a useful and feasible financing mechanism for dam removal in Europe. The methodology of the scoping of such a fund included selecting priority countries (Sweden, Finland, France, Spain, Lithuania and the United Kingdom), researching existing funds and financial mechanisms, and holding discussions with the dam removal and wider green finance community through the networks of Rewilding Europe and Dam Removal Europe. We have also discussed the revolving fund concept with financial consultants, financiers and private foundations to obtain interest and feedback on the proposed structures and applicability, in addition to a desk study of similar financial mechanisms.



FLORIAN MOELLERS / ARND BRONKHORST

▲ A former peat extraction site close to the village of Święta, Oder Delta, Poland.

Due to the untested nature of such a revolving fund, the study showed that the best next step would be to test some of the case studies on the ground. This will help to determine the scale of demand for a wider fund and prove its potential to those removing dams and investors. We propose to use pilots with different repayment mechanisms, across the priority countries, with strong implementation partners and with mechanisms that have high replicability – this can support the development of a fund with pan-European scope.

Rewilding Climate Solutions

There is also a growing recognition that rewilding is one of the best ways of delivering large-scale nature recovery, in a way that benefits biodiversity, climate and people at the same time. This is leading to significant and growing demand in the private sector for investment opportunities within Europe that deliver such co-benefits.

Rewilding Europe wants to enable landscape-scale nature recovery by

.....
We enhance the commercial viability of rewilding initiatives by enabling them to sell nature-based carbon credits to the market.
.....

demonstrating that rewilding initiatives can generate new and significant value for landowners and managers, investors, a wider network of stakeholders, and society at large. In collaboration with Wetlands International as a technical partner and with funding from the Grantham Foundation for the Protection of the Environment, Rewilding Europe has set up a company to significantly enhance investment in rewilding, called Rewilding Climate Solutions.

With the aim of significantly scaling up European rewilding, Rewilding

Climate Solutions will unlock nature, climate and people positive investment in Europe by connecting landowners and managers interested in or already engaged in landscape-scale rewilding, with carbon buyers and impact investors looking to invest in rigorously verified, long-term, high-impact rewilding initiatives. In this way, we enhance the commercial viability of rewilding initiatives by enabling them to sell nature-based carbon credits to the market.

Such credits will differ from more traditional carbon credits in that they will facilitate the restoration of European landscapes in line with rewilding principles – thereby enhancing carbon capture and biodiversity, and delivering a range of other co-benefits, such as clean air, fresh water, and thriving nature-based economies. By the end of 2022, six investment opportunities had already been identified, with a focus on peatland restoration in Sweden, Scotland, Lithuania, Poland, France and Ireland. The new company is expected to become fully operational during 2023.

Wider benefits

We believe that rewilding can lead to new prospects, stronger social coherence, and an enhanced sense of identity and pride among local communities in our rewilding landscapes, while improving people's health and wellbeing.



▲ A wildlife watching trip during the European Rewilding Network gathering in the Central Apennines, Italy.

Climate positive

Rewilding not only boosts the climate change resilience of nature, but of communities too. Nature-based climate solutions, such as the regeneration of natural forests and increased natural grazing, can help people and businesses by minimising the risk and impact of global warming-related events, such as floods, droughts, and outbreaks of disease and catastrophic wildfire. They can also provide a range of co-benefits for sustainable economic development, health, and societal wellbeing.

Yet the huge potential of rewilding to deliver such solutions remains largely untapped. This is one of the reasons why Rewilding Europe is working so hard to scale up rewilding as quickly as possible – by demonstrating the benefits through its own practical action, by encouraging and supporting other climate positive rewilding initiatives, and by exploring options to increase investment in nature recovery.

In Rewilding Europe's operational landscapes, we have analysed the impact of climate change, how rewild-

ing interventions are contributing to climate change mitigation and adaptation at a local level, and which further climate-related interventions could be carried out in these landscapes going forwards. Most of the landscapes will deal with milder winters, hotter summers, prolonged droughts, less snow cover, more risk of fire and change (mostly decreases) in river discharges. The table below shows how our rewilding interventions in these landscapes are contributing to climate change mitigation and adaptation at a local level.

Rewilding interventions, applied in our landscapes, that reduce impact of climate change



NATURAL GRAZING

to reduce combustible biomass, reducing excessive fires



INCREASE SCAVENGER POPULATIONS

to control spread of disease



DAM REMOVAL

to restore natural flows and dynamics in rivers and wetlands



NATURAL FOREST REGENERATION

to increase resilience against fire, disease and drought



WILDLIFE REINTRODUCTIONS

to enhance ecosystem functioning



REWETTING PEATLANDS

to reduce carbon emissions



PROFORESTATION

to allow forests to get older for increased carbon uptake by older trees



BOOSTING CONNECTIVITY

creating wildlife corridors for species to move and adapt



WETLAND RESTORATION

to combat drought and flooding through water retention

Rewilding landscape	Village/small town	Driver(s) of change
Iberian Highlands	Cordueña, Spain	Rewilding staff residence (emerging)
Rhodope Mountains	Madzharovo, Bulgaria	Vulture visitor centre, birdwatching hotspot, new tourism accommodation, central position in Crossbill Nature Guide to attract nature tourists
Greater Côa Valley	Vale de Madeira, Portugal	Rewilding centre, rewilding site, stakeholder gatherings and meetings
Southern Carpathians	Armeniș, Romania	European bison release, bison visitor centre, WeWilder Campus and other local accommodation
Central Apennines	Pettorano sul Gizio, Italy	Rewilding team residence, volunteer groups, Rewilding Weeks, workshops and gatherings
Velebit Mountains	Gospic, Croatia	Rewilding Velebit office, stakeholder meetings and gatherings, staff residence
Danube Delta	Tarutino, Ukraine	Steppe restoration, social enterprise with local communities, reintroductions of kulan, steppe marmot, fallow deer and others
Oder Delta	Rhotenklempenow, Germany	Rewilding Oder Delta office, centre of activities in the German part
Affric Highlands	Glenmoriston, Scotland	Rewilding Centre, Dundreggan Estate, volunteers, rewilding hub, Trees for Life residence

Revitalising local communities

In several of our landscapes we have started to see the revitalisation of local communities, as a result of different developments. In some cases, young families and individuals (including local rewilding team members) have returned or begun to live in local villages, breathing new life into places that have long suffered from rural depopulation. In other cases, new rewilding enterprises such as those based on wildlife guiding and accommodation, are attracting visitors, while rewilding centres are becoming hubs for local stakeholders and partners to meet. International publicity about rewilding interventions, such as wildlife reintroductions, is also helping to attract people.

In this way, businesses based on wilder landscapes and wildlife comeback are offering new local products and services and providing new jobs and income opportunities. In these cases, social coherence is increasing and local society and culture are enhanced, with local business networks generating multiplier effects. It is great to see the local and regional branding of these landscapes and local products starting to build new identities and local pride related to nature and wildlife, while cultural heritage and traditional skills are reinvigorated by the new rewilding narrative. The table above gives examples of local villages and small towns in our rewilding landscapes, presenting the main rewilding-related drivers of positive socio-economic change.



Art festival: connecting wilder nature and local culture

The natural world not only provides people with resources such as clean air, fresh water, and fertile soil but less tangible benefits too, such as the inspiration for artistic expression. Over the centuries the complex beauty of nature has stimulated innumerable artists, whether it be the array of colours in a sunset or the natural geometry of a pinecone. Some take this beauty and transpose it into an entirely new medium, while others manipulate natural materials themselves and transform them into art.

Nature, culture and art will come together in the 'CÔA – Corridor of Arts' Festival, which will take place in the summer of 2023, in the Greater Côa Valley rewilding landscape in northern Portugal. Organised by Rewilding Portugal, it will see artists connect with communities in the natural environment of the valley to co-create works of art, using natural materials, respecting natural decay, and referencing the valley's unique cultural history. By building engagement, it will help to promote rewilding and the recovery of local wild nature.

Case study: Oder Delta

How can rewilding enhance nature and the benefits it provides, as well as generate stakeholder support? By answering these questions, a new study in the Oder Delta could lead to the scaling up of rewilding in Germany.

Straddling the German-Polish border on a key ecological crossroads, ongoing rewilding actions have seen wildlife begin to thrive in more natural densities here, with unmanaged natural processes reshaping the landscape. With nature-based tourism also on the rise, growing numbers of people are visiting the area to reconnect with nature and enjoy a chance to spot the so-called 'Big Seven' – the Atlantic sturgeon, grey seal,



▲ Portuguese artists at work in the Greater Côa Valley.

◀ Call for artists to take part in the CÔA – Corridor of Arts Festival

▶ The Rewilding Centre at the Dundreggan Estate is the gateway to the Affric Highlands rewilding landscape.

.....

We enhance the commercial viability of rewilding initiatives by enabling them to sell nature-based carbon credits to the market.

.....

beaver, white-tailed eagle, elk, wolf and the European bison.

This exciting landscape is now the subject of a groundbreaking three-year study – the first of its kind carried out in Germany – which will examine rewilding and the benefits it provides to both people and nature. Entitled 'REWILD_DE – Conservation of biodiversity and evaluation of ecosystem services through rewilding – learning from the Oder Delta', the research initiative could eventually lead to rewilding being scaled up across the country, with the Oder Delta acting as a model.

Funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research, the new initiative is coordinated by the Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research and involves three partners: the German Centre for Integrative Biodiversity Research / Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg, the Eberswalde University for Sustainable Development, and Rewilding Oder Delta, which is carrying out rewilding efforts in the delta.



PAUL CAMPBELL / TREES FOR LIFE

Through their evaluation of rewilding in the Oder Delta, the research team will aim to answer several key questions. How can rewilding protect and enhance wild nature through activities such as river restoration, human-wildlife coexistence, and nature-based solutions such as natural grazing? What socio-economic benefits does rewilding provide? And how can rewilding strengthen regional economic potential? Answers to these questions will help to determine the scale of the role that rewilding could play in German nature conservation and helping to reverse biodiversity decline. The researchers will also look at how rewilding is perceived and generates support from stakeholders in and around the delta. Local people will participate in a 'rewilding dialogue'.

Rewilding centres

In 2022, several rewilding teams established or began developing rewilding centres: locations where people in the region can meet, sometimes combined

with other functions such as local offices, display functions or even overnight stays, and acting as gateways to rewilding landscapes.

The Greater Côa Valley in Portugal was the first landscape with a rewilding centre, in the village of Vale de Madeira in the municipality of Pinhel. This beautiful building, located in the middle of the small village, is rented. In addition to being close to one of the rewilding sites already acquired, it allows for better contact with the community, involving them in initiatives and events related to the rewilding work. Opened in 2022, the rewilding centre in Vale de Madeira can receive and accommodate employees, researchers and partners, as well as visitors and tourists interested in getting to know the rewilding area.

In the Affric Highlands, Trees for Life started building the brand new Dundreggan Rewilding Centre in Glenmoriston back in 2021. It offers a gateway to the Dundreggan Estate and the Affric Highlands rewilding

landscape, showcasing how large-scale nature recovery can give people inspiring experiences, create jobs, and benefit rural communities. Developed in consultation with the local community, the free-to-access centre has been made possible thanks to the generous support of major funders. From April 2023 onwards, visitors, families, schools and those with specific needs can enjoy year-round events and experiences, discover how rewilding benefits wildlife such as golden eagles, red squirrels and wood ants, and learn about Gaelic culture and its deep connections with the landscape.

Rewilding Oder Delta has moved its offices to a new location where a rewilding centre is being considered, in the village of Rhotenklempenow in the German part of the rewilding landscape.

The Iberian Highlands and Velebit Mountains rewilding teams are also considering developing rewilding centres in the near future.

In 2022 we worked tirelessly to grow the European rewilding movement and elevate engagement with our rewilding work to new levels. In collaboration with our landscape partners, we showcased the results, impacts and benefits of rewilding, leveraging captivating content and our strong visual identity.

3 Building Engagement



Supporting a Europe-wide effort

The year 2022 was another bumper year for our engagement work. Thanks to productive cooperation between our central and local communications experts, we reached over 113 million people through various media. We developed dozens of engaging products and publications, demonstrating the results of our work and promoting the beneficial impacts of rewilding. Our online followers increased by 47% compared to 2021, reaching nearly 140,000 by the end of 2022. We saw an estimated 14 million impressions on social media, up 2 million from the year before.

The growing interest in rewilding was also demonstrated by the publication of a burgeoning number of popular books, while we saw global celebrities and influencers such as Jane Goodall, Barrack Obama, Ed Sheeran, Greta Thunberg, Leonardo di Caprio and others embracing rewilding in various media.

World Rewilding Day

Celebrating World Rewilding Day – which takes place every year on March 20 and attracts a growing number of participants each year – is important for raising awareness of rewilding. In 2022 World Rewilding Day saw rewilding initiatives from six continents jointly call for the restoration of wildlife populations to address climate change and keep global warming to an absolute minimum. It was also a day to showcase

World Rewilding Day saw initiatives from six continents jointly call for the restoration of wildlife populations to address climate change.

▲ The Rewilding Symposium and inaugural lecture of Professor Liesbeth Bakker were a great success, with the auditorium packed to capacity.

▼ A new series of short films showcasing the work of Rewilding Europe began production in spring 2022, shot by award-winning French filmmaker Emmanuel Rondeau.





139,869

online followers (up 47% from 2021)

255,000

unique web visitors to the central Rewilding Europe website

2,311 news articles
mentioning our
work reached about
113,000,000 people

Two
impact stories
published on climate
and the rewilding
movement

Eight convening events
to build a European
rewilding coalition

37 products and publications
promoting beneficial
impacts of rewilding



the diverse benefits of rewilding and celebrate nature by enjoying the great outdoors.

We saw many of Rewilding Europe’s rewilding teams organise public events, as people and communities lie at the heart of rewilding. Running up to the event, all our local rewilding teams shared videos from their rewilding landscape, showing our work using the hashtag #WhyWeRewild. The teams presented their actions on the ground – such as wetland restoration and efforts to support wildlife comeback – which contribute to healthier landscapes and ecosystems that are better able to absorb and store carbon, thereby helping to address the climate emergency.

Wild about film

Thanks to a partnership with global law firm Hogan Lovells (see also page 102–103), a new series of short films showcasing the work of Rewilding Europe began production in spring 2022. Bringing people closer than ever to rewilding and

the work of Rewilding Europe, at least six short films will be produced over the next two to three years, showcasing the rewilding vision of specific rewilding landscapes, the rewilding actions being carried out in these landscapes, and how these actions are benefitting wild nature and people.

These captivating and intimate portrayals of practical rewilding will be filmed by award-winning French filmmaker Emmanuel Rondeau of White Fox Pictures, who also shot ‘Zimbrul’ – a beautiful short film about the rewilding of European bison in the Southern Carpathians – in 2019.

Rewilding symposia

A well-attended rewilding symposium was held at Wageningen University in the Netherlands on September 29. The symposium was capped by the formal inauguration of Professor Liesbeth Bakker, Europe’s first chair in Rewilding Ecology at Wageningen University & Research’s Wildlife Ecology and Conser-



▲ Change Makers will empower young people by providing them with the skills and opportunities to develop their own nature-based businesses and livelihoods.

Scottish Change Makers

Young people are the future of rewilding, which means engaging them and harnessing their energy, ideas, skills and passion is incredibly important.

Change Makers is one example of how a local rewilding team engages with young people. It gives young people living in and around the Affric Highlands rewilding landscape the opportunity to shape the future by providing them with the skills and opportunities to develop their own nature-based businesses and livelihoods. Change Makers has brought together an initial group of around 12 motivated young people from communities in Cannich, Fort Augustus and Drumadrochit. They will have the opportunity to identify projects they want to take forward, with a focus on knowledge and capacity building. These could involve the development of practical, nature-friendly land management skills, or new ideas for nature-based jobs.

Young people often feel the need for change more urgently, especially in Scotland's shrinking rural communities. Here, affordable housing is often in short supply, job opportunities may be limited, and with each young person drawn away to the cities, the appeal of staying put is further eroded. Yet plenty of young people would like to stay if they could, to remain close to their families, and to stay in touch with the land through rewilding.

The Change Makers programme has already delivered a successful nature photography workshop where students were asked to take pictures that were meaningful to them, promoting some deeply felt connection with nature. The Change Makers programme is also developing a Green Leadership Award as an ecological strand to the existing Youth Leadership scheme run by High Life Highland, with a specific focus on rewilding, connection with nature, and wellbeing. The Affric Highlands team hopes the young participants will become nature champions within their communities, inspired by the physical and mental wellbeing benefits that rewilding can deliver.

vation Group. Bakker began her professorship back in 2020 and is working to progress rewilding's scientific agenda and enhance rewilding outcomes. The symposium saw rewilding scientists and experts come together to address rewilding from a multi-disciplinary perspective. The event, which followed a hugely successful rewilding symposium in 2020, was attended by nearly 300 people in real life, with over 1200 people from 70 countries registering for the online livestream.

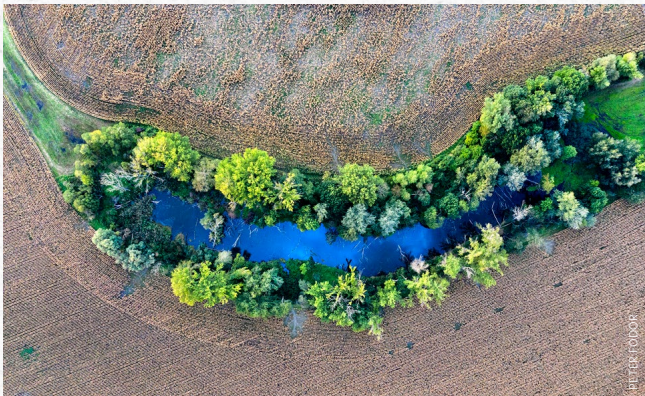
Portugal's first ever rewilding symposium took place in September at the Quinta do Pisão Nature Park (a member of Rewilding Europe's European Rewilding Network), just outside Lisbon. Organised by Rewilding Portugal and Cascais Ambiente, the event helped to raise awareness of rewilding and the rewilding agenda of Rewilding Portugal and Rewilding Europe. With a range of thought leaders and rewilding experts present, it saw many productive discussions take place around the opportunities and challenges of rewilding in Portugal. The symposium was attended by NGOs, government representatives, university students and other Rewilding Portugal partners and associates. The event was also livestreamed for free and has now been watched online by more than 2000 people.

Rewilding Europe Photo Award

In February, Rewilding Europe and the German Society for Nature Photography (GDT) signed an agreement which will see the annual European Wildlife Photographer of the Year competition feature a special Rewilding Europe Award going forwards. The new agreement is a natural fit for both parties, with the annual European Wildlife Photographer of the Year (EWPY) competition, which was launched by the GDT in 2001, showcasing some of the finest nature photography from Europe and around the world.



JOSHI NICHELL



PETER FODOR



MATT MARAN

Impactful, high-quality nature photos have always been a cornerstone of Rewilding Europe’s communications too, helping us to capture people’s hearts and minds as we work to make Europe a wilder place. The new award is an excellent opportunity to engage people around the world, educating them about many aspects of rewilding and the diverse benefits that it offers.

Rewilding Europe and the GDT share many of the same goals and philosophies. We both recognise the value of stunning photography when it comes to reaching out to people, conveying the wonder of the natural world, and the need to cherish and coexist with wildlife.

Joshi Nichell, a 24-year-old photographer and filmmaker from Germany, won first prize. He impressed the judges with

his beautifully backlit shot of a nocturnal brown bear taken in the Spanish region of Cantabria – today this iconic species is making a welcome recovery in many European countries. Joshi captured a unique moment, with the bear looking straight at the camera. In addition to being a technically accomplished and captivating shot, his photo hints at the excitement of encountering wild nature on its own terms, and speaks to the need for us to find ways of living alongside that nature harmoniously. Joshi received a Rewilding Europe travel voucher worth a total of 1500 euros, allowing him to visit one of Rewilding Europe’s rewilding landscapes, as well as pride of place in the competition exhibition (which travels across Germany and Europe for three years) and catalogue.

▲ 1st place and winning photo “Bear Mountain Spirit” by Joshi Nichell. A unique moment, with the backlit bear looking straight at the camera.

◀ 2nd place “Island of Nature”. This aerial shot by Peter Fodor depicts the impact of beavers as amazing ecosystem engineers and demonstrates how rewilding can breathe new life back into our landscapes.

▶ 3rd place “Graveyard Shift”. With his image of a fox in front of a church, photographer Matt Maran shows how rewilding – as a progressive approach to conservation – often challenges our established way of thinking.

With upscaling a major theme in our Strategy 2030, we established a dedicated Upscaling Team, who will oversee our upscaling work and offer a range of tools that encourage others to adopt rewilding, thereby furthering the development of rewilding as a mainstream approach to European nature recovery.

Scaling up rewilding



▲ Our new Upscaling Team.

From demonstration to upscaling

Our new Upscaling Team, which now comprises five members and is led by our Head of Upscaling, has an ambitious agenda through till 2030. The main objective is to scale up rewilding within and outside our rewilding landscapes, applying a wide range of tools. These include (scalable) rewilding principles, models and tools that can be adopted and applied by a wide range of stakeholders, including landowners and land managers, water managers, energy and navigation companies, politicians and policy makers, financiers and investors, foresters, wildlife managers, tourism sector, scientists and researchers. Our rewilding landscapes and the members of the European Rewilding Network serve as inspirational examples of what can be done at a much larger scale. Special attention is given to the mobilisation of younger generations, where we see a huge interest and appetite to engage with rewilding. The most recent developments of the most important tools are presented below.

European Rewilding Network

The European Rewilding Network (ERN) gained 11 new members in 2022 (overview on pages 86–87): Cousseau Dunes and Wetlands (France), Iberian Highlands (Spain), Lake Kuivasjärvi (Finland), Nassonia (Belgium), Koitajoki Basin (Finland), Seawilding (Scotland), Paliurus (Italy), Tour du Valat Estate (France), The Taurus Foundation (Netherlands), Näätämo Basin (Finland) and Kivisuo Peatland (Finland).

.....
Our rewilding landscapes and the European Rewilding Network serve as inspirational examples of what can be done at a much larger scale.
.....



▲ ERN members and Rewilding Europe visit Biesbosch in the Netherlands.

◀ Scaling up natural grazing, using Tauros herds, is an important upscaling objective for 2030.

There are now 88 active members in the network, from 28 different countries. In 2022, the European Rewilding Network organised six online exchange events, of which two were exclusively for ERN members.

A total of 227 people joined the webinars and a further 3,500 have viewed the recordings online. One of the highlights was the sharing of experiences by one UK-based member, Wilder Blean, of rewilding their site and reintroducing European bison. Members also received a special presentation by the European Wildlife Comeback Fund on how they can benefit from this initiative.

Members of the network enjoy several privileges. In addition to being part of this active European community, which enables the exchange of practical rewilding expertise and skills, members have access to Rewilding Europe Capital, the European Wildlife Bank, Rewilding Europe Training, and the European Wildlife Comeback Fund.

European Young Rewilders

Young people across Europe are increasingly interested in rewilding. At the same time, wanting to protect and enhance nature can sometimes feel like a difficult and lonely task. The European Young Rewilders want members to feel like they are part of a like-minded community of people, all working towards the same goal, with the support of others. The former Young Rewilders Community was re-structured into the European Young Rewilders, which provides young rewilders with a platform that facilitates capacity-building, as well as the sharing of experiences and knowledge on rewilding.

Thanks to the hiring of a dynamic new coordinator, the EYR saw significantly increased action in 2022. This included a mixture of internal organisational actions, such as the determination of a strategy for 2030 (vision, mission, aim) and workplan for 2023; creation of a social media and communications plan; finalisation of a membership model for young rewilders (criteria,

43

initiatives of >1000 ha using rewilding principles outside our landscapes

European Young Rewilders boasted 150 members from 22 different European countries

24

strategic partnerships with formal cooperation agreements at central level



11

new European Rewilding Network members, totaling 88 in 28 countries

Six online ERN events, with 227 participants and 3,500 recording views



◀ Young rewilders visit Millingerwaard, the Netherlands.

▶ Marsican brown bears in the Central Apennines, Italy.

process, benefits); creation of channels (Facebook and Instagram page, Facebook member group, newsletter); adoption of visual identity and a new logo, and the recruitment of a team of 10 volunteers to support all of this work.

By the end of 2022, the EYR boasted 150 young members from 22 different European countries. The EYR Coordinator attended CBD COP15 in Montreal as a youth delegate, where she held a side event on rewilding, and presented the EYR at the Youth Summit and at the Restoration Day.

To boost the network and membership, the EYR started to work with national contacts that are part of the EYR Volunteer Team and act as a local point of reference and contact for young rewilders in a specific country.

The ambition is that the National EYR Officer will facilitate on-the-ground rewilding activities (with a focus on information and awareness) aimed at young people. Countries which already have such contacts are Germany, Poland, Italy, Belgium, Ireland, UK, France, Switzerland, Sweden, Portugal, and Denmark.

Rewilding Europe Training Centre

During 2022 we reviewed our training programme, which has become part of the newly set up Upscaling Team. This was done based on a needs assessment conducted throughout the initiative, with a focus on our rewilding landscapes. We have identified a long list of training needs, prioritising the most urgent ones in terms of achieving our

objectives and the capacity available. The most important training sessions that we selected based on this process are how rewilding carbon credits can support and upscale rewilding, and how we develop strategic partnerships based on a corporate vetting system. In the meantime, different training sessions on rewilding tourism are continuing for a limited number of people connected to our landscapes. We also started designing a Mass Online Open Course (MOOC) on rewilding. The idea is to divide this course into eight online sessions covering the most important rewilding topics, presented by experts from all over Europe, to be launched at the end of 2023.

Strategic partnerships

We are fortunate to work with several strong, active and very committed partners who believe in our approach and who are key to achieving our long-term objectives. At a central level we reviewed our partnership strategy and now distinguish financial and technical partners. Financial partners are organisations, public or private institutions, foundation or companies with the ability and desire to make Europe wilder, by providing financial means for our work. Technical partners are rewilding

#GenerationRewilding

To facilitate, educate, connect and mentor young people that are interested in taking part in the movement, the new plan for the European Young Rewilders revolves around five main strands:



EDUCATION

giving young people easy access to information and educational material about rewilding.



IMPLEMENTATION

enabling young people to be engaged in rewilding activities and actions, both within and beyond Rewilding Europe's landscapes.



FACILITATION

enabling young, early-career rewilders to enter the rewilding sector and start their own rewilding initiatives.



ENGAGEMENT

developing the European Young Rewilders into a large and active network for sharing and showcasing views and experiences.



IMPACT

expanding the outreach of the European Young Rewilders and gaining external credibility and exposure.

organisations, research facilities, media production companies, and all other kind of organisations that want to support our mission by joining forces on a non-financial basis.

In 2022, we fostered 24 strategic partnerships with different cooperation agreements at the central level, while our landscape teams benefitted from numerous partnerships with local stakeholders (see overview page 107).

Outcomes of new strategic partnerships included discussions with EUROPARC Federation to start a joint initiative on Wilder Parks in Europe. Cooperation continues with Wetlands International on peatland restoration in several countries through our newly set up Rewilding Climate Solutions company. Rewilding Europe is also part of a newly established consortium of organisations under NaturaConnect, a new, EU-funded initiative that aims to increase connectivity in Europe's protected area network (funded through the Horizon Europe programme). Together we aim to create targeted knowledge and tools, and build the capacity needed to support European Union Member States in realising an ecologically representative, resilient and well-connected network of nature areas across Europe.

European policy and science

In 2022 we looked at how Rewilding Europe can work to ensure rewilding is meaningfully embedded in policy and science, which is one of our upscaling objectives. These include state-of-the-art research programmes across European universities and scientific institutions, EU policies on nature and climate, and in the EU Restoration Directive and national conservation strategies in rewilding landscape countries.

Research and policy are closely related as the former is often used to justify the latter, although that justification is often ex-post as scientists struggle



to keep up with innovation from practitioners or concepts put forward in politics.

Policies and regulations that affect the rewilding interventions span the EU, national and sub-national levels; however, we believe most challenges are currently at the national level – including national transpositions of EU law. This means that Rewilding Europe's strategy must involve local rewilding entities taking the lead at the national and sub-national level. This should include the preparation of policy briefs and position papers, to be translated into local languages.

Building on Rewilding Europe's capacity to showcase rewilding and

.....
 Research and policy are closely related as the former is often used to justify the latter.

inspire a broad audience, thought leadership and networking, we believe our strategy for policy and research advocacy should be to:

- provide thought leadership and build an evidence base on prioritised topics;
- push particular policy agendas in cooperation with key partners, which could be pushed through an alliance or coalition of rewilding organisations from across Europe;
- gather information through networking to identify threats and opportunities at the EU level and national level;
- identify and engage influential supporters who we can call upon in case of threats or to help address a particular obstacle.

These recommendations will be taken forward in 2023, to shape our policy and research activities as part of our upscaling work. The focus will be on policy issues related to natural grazing, carcass deposition, natural forest regeneration, wildlife comeback, human-wildlife coexistence, wildlife corridors, and connectivity.



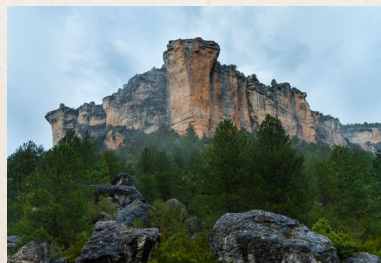
MIKA HONKALAINEN / SNOW CHANGE

New to the network

These initiatives joined the European Rewilding Network in 2022.

○ Cousseau dunes and wetlands (France)

The “Cousseau, dunes and wetlands” initiative is working to return natural grazing to an area of coastal land to the west of Bordeaux, using feral bovines of the Marine landaise breed. The team is also working to reintroduce dung beetles, which play a critical role in recycling the organic matter deposited in the landscape by large grazers.



○ Iberian Highlands (Spain)

Rewilding Europe’s Iberian Highlands rewilding landscape, which covers 850,000 hectares of land in Spain’s Southern Iberian Chain, is home to a wide range of endangered wildlife species. Rewilding efforts will improve the health and functionality of local ecosystems, with a focus on natural processes such as natural grazing, predation and scavenging.

○ Lake Kuivasjärvi (Finland)

Lake Kuivasjärvi is located in the headwaters of the River Kokemäenjoki in southwest Finland and is negatively impacted by forest ditching, erosion, peat mining, and nutrient loading. The Landscape Rewilding Programme supports the rewilding efforts of Pro Kuivasjärvi, a local association that has been carrying out catchment-wide restoration since 2016.





○ Nassonia (Belgium)

The public-private Nassonia initiative is working to rewild an area of state-owned forest in the Belgian Ardennes. The overall goal is to enhance the site's biodiversity and wildlife abundance, and enable scientific research, while continuing to allow people to visit and enjoy nature.



○ Koitajoki Basin (Finland)

The Koitajoki River Basin covers 6500 square kilometres in eastern Finland. Since 2020, the Koitajoki River Rewilding initiative has been working to restore this large boreal river, as well as stimulate a resurgence in traditional knowledge, oral histories, and local governance in villages along the river.



○ Seawilding (UK, Scotland)

Scottish NGO Sea wilding is working to restore seagrass beds and oyster populations in Loch Craignish, while supporting the creation of green jobs. By the end of 2022, efforts carried out as part of this pioneering community-led rewilding initiative had seen 0.5 hectares of seagrass planted and 220,000 European oysters restored to the seabed.

○ Paliurus (Italy)

With its programme "Wilder coast of Scerne" the Paliurus Association is aiming to develop sustainable nature-based tourism on Italy's Adriatic coast, protecting and restoring a local river delta, enhancing biodiversity, and supporting local jobs.



○ Tour du Valat Estate (France)

The Tour du Valat Estate, which covers 2649 hectares in the French Camargue region, is working to restore natural water flow and function. Conservation efforts are focused on the site's temporary marshes, saltmarshes and dry grasslands, which are very important for waterbird populations.



○ Taurus Foundation (the Netherlands)

The Dutch Taurus Foundation is dedicated to creating a substitute for the extinct auroch (an ancient wild bovine) that can thrive in and boost the health of Europe's wild landscapes. The principal technique is "back breeding", which combines cattle breeds with desired characteristics.



To learn more about these and other ERN members, visit rewildingeurope.com/network



○ Näätämö Basin (Finland)

The watershed of the Näätämö River, which flows from Finland to Norway and discharges into the Barents Sea, is home to the Skolt Sámi – an eastern Sámi group that rely heavily on reindeer herding and fishing. Co-management efforts in the Näätämö watershed started in 2011, when the Skolt Sámi and Snowchange began research and rewilding interventions to combat the negative impacts of climate change, with a primary focus on Atlantic salmon.



○ Kivisuo Peatland (Finland)

The 750-hectare Kivisuo Peatland is the largest site in the Landscape Rewilding Programme, which is overseen by Finnish NGO Snowchange. As with many other degraded peatlands in Finland, rewilding here represents an unprecedented opportunity to boost carbon storage and develop socio-economic activities, such as wildlife watching, water storage, and the sustainable harvesting of natural products.



SOPHIE MONSARRAT / REWILDING EUROPE

The road to recovery

In 2022, Rewilding Europe's European Wildlife Comeback report showed that wild nature will bounce back if we give it space and means. The aim of the pioneering European Wildlife Comeback Fund is to help scale up such a recovery.



▲ The release of water voles in Cornwall in the UK will boost local biodiversity.

In 2022, a new and updated Wildlife Comeback Report involving 50 European wildlife species showed how selected animals have made a remarkable comeback in Europe over the last 40 to 50 years. This bucks the continent's negative biodiversity trend and offers genuine hope that European wildlife can and will recover if we give it the space and means to do so.

But why are some wildlife species thriving while others are not? The report, commissioned by Rewilding Europe, illustrates how measures such as improving legal protection, enlarging protected areas, supporting co-existence, and reducing pressures such as habitat loss and unsustainable hunting can all contribute to wildlife comeback. It also highlights the importance of species reintroductions – both in terms of enhancing biodiversity and restoring the health and functionality of ecosystems. This is particularly the case when it comes to keystone species, which play a critical role in shaping ecosystems.

A question of timing

For the reasons listed above, Rewilding Europe has always supported the reintroduction of missing keystone species and the reinforcement of threatened populations, where population expansion and dispersal movements are prevented by barriers to natural connectivity.

Yet reintroductions and population reinforcements are challenging

◀ A newly released Eurasian lynx takes off on the road to freedom on the Polish side of the Oder Delta.

▶ Red deer in the Danube Delta will help to create a biodiversity-rich, half-open mosaic landscape through their grazing and browsing.

processes. Wildlife translocations take a long time to prepare and organise, given the need to identify a suitable source population and an obligation to ensure any release does not expose animals to unacceptable risks. At the same time, local communities need to be engaged with to ensure they support the return of missing species.

All these factors can make it difficult to match the availability of funding with the readiness of translocation plans. To overcome this challenge, Rewilding Europe created the European Wildlife Comeback Fund (EWCF), a ring-fenced budget dedicated to providing timely funding for translocation efforts that stand ready to proceed but which need funding to do so.

The overarching goal of the fund is to dramatically increase the number of wildlife reintroductions across Europe, following IUCN guidelines. It aims to provide financial support for reintroductions and population reinforcements in a timely and flexible manner – with a focus on keystone species – and to connect “demand and supply”, ensuring that animals are not culled when they might instead be safely released elsewhere within their historical ranges.

The need for action

Despite the recoveries recorded among selected species within the latest European Wildlife Comeback report, wildlife populations continue to occupy just a fraction of their historical range. The 2022 global Living Planet Index compiled by WWF shows an average 69% global decline in the relative abundance of monitored wildlife populations between 1970 and 2018, and while Europe and Central Asia have fared less badly than other parts of the world, they have still experienced an average drop of 18% in the last fifty years.

This context is what makes the EWCF so important. Securing the future of



▲ A Bonelli's eagle.

the world's biodiversity increasingly depends on not only reducing existing threats but also taking active steps to reintroduce missing species. Already the EWCF has guaranteed funding for more than ten different translocation efforts across Europe in 2023, with funding going to initiatives from Scotland to Ukraine, and from Poland to Sardinia, including wildcats, Eurasian lynx, fallow deer, roe deer, Bonelli's eagles, white-tailed eagles and water voles.

A message of hope

In Ukraine, 20 fallow and 20 red deer have been released onto Shabash Island, an area of 8,000 hectares within the Danube Delta rewilding landscape. Reintroducing these species marks the return of these large herbivores to an area from which they were driven to extinction in the 1980s by uncontrolled hunting.

The release has been carried out despite the additional complications created by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The resilient team from Rewilding Ukraine had to work with the military authorities to identify a release site away from the militarily sensitive coastal part of the Danube Delta and then satisfy the relevant authorities that the tracking collars being fitted to the deer did not represent any form of security threat.

Funding from EWCF supported the capture and transport of red and fallow deer from the Carpathian region in the west of Ukraine and then further

.....
 The overarching goal of the fund is to dramatically increase the number of wildlife reintroductions across Europe, following IUCN guidelines.



NEIL LORRICE / REWILDING EUROPE

▲ The EWCF-funded dung beetle release was staged as a “big mammal release” to symbolise the important role small animals have in restoring ecosystem health and functionality.

▼ The release of 60 dung beetles in the Landes De Gascogne is the first of its kind in France.



NEIL LORRICE / REWILDING EUROPE

enabled the construction of a pontoon to the island, so that the trucks bringing the deer to the island could cross the open water surrounding the release site. Further releases are planned later in the year, making use of the same pontoon, and it is expected that the deer – which are strong swimmers – will soon disperse around the wider Danube Delta landscape.

Sophie Monsarrat, Rewilding Europe’s Rewilding Manager, describes how the reintroduced deer will join the growing assembly of large mammals that have been released into the landscape, from water buffalo to Konik horses.

“These large grazers serve to diversify the structure of vegetation, participate in nutrient cycling, interact with water dynamics, support a large variety of habitats, and reduce fire risk by decreasing the volume of standing biomass that contributes to fuel loading.”

This initiative exemplifies the can-do attitude that underpins the EWCF, with efforts to rewild Ukraine’s part of the

Danube Delta symbolic of the country’s desire to look beyond the current conflict to a more peaceful future. In time, it is hoped that this rewilding landscape will serve as an inspirational example of what could be done to restore nature at a wider scale in Ukraine, and become a significant attraction for tourists as nature’s powers of recovery help to inspire wider healing from the scars of war.

All creatures, great and small

Some small animals punch far above their weight when it comes to ecological impact. In France, funding from the EWCF is being used to translocate dung beetles (*Scarabaeus laticollis*) from north of Montpellier to the region just west of Bordeaux. These dung-eating insects disappeared from the coastal flatlands known as the Landes de Gascogne in the 1960s, following the conversion of moorland, dunes and forest to extensive pine plantations. The dominance of the pines led to the disappearance of the area’s feral cattle,

► A newly released male lynx lingers just long enough for a photo opportunity.

▼ A successful release means a happy team!

and with the disappearance of these bovines, so too went the dung which the beetles relied upon.

However, the cattle are back, thanks to the Society for the Study, Protection and Development of Nature (SEPANSO). SEPANSO has been experimenting with the restoration of natural grazing in this area using the marine landaise cattle breed since 1990, and as the herd has grown, so too has the amount of dung. The return of the dung beetles, facilitated by funding from the EWCF, is therefore eagerly anticipated.

“The species of dung beetle being translocated plays a crucial functional role, rolling balls of dung away from dunging sites, facilitating nutrient cycling, spreading dung more widely through the environment, and improving soil structure and fertility,” explains Sophie Monsarrat.

Overcoming challenges

Some wildlife translocations are more challenging than others. Predator introductions, for example, often generate more heated opinion than dung beetle translocations. This is particularly the case in areas especially where people have become accustomed to life without the presence of large wild animals. Predators can occasionally be a threat to livestock. Equally, large herbivores can be a threat to crops and livelihoods. Yet many of these risks can be mitigated with careful planning and management, while proper community engagement ensures concerns are addressed and goodwill and trust are maximised.

At the same time, restoring missing species can deliver wide-ranging benefits to local communities, outweighing any potential costs. In the far northwest of Poland, for example, EWCF funds are supporting the translocation of Eurasian lynx into Western Pomerania, reinforcing the population recently reintroduced to the region. Here, local



FABIEN QUETIERE / REWILDING EUROPE



ADAM LUSTOCK

teams are working to promote coexistence and increase public awareness of the benefits that typically accompany the return of the species, emphasising how lynx can contribute to ecosystem health and boost nature-based economies. More profoundly, lynx add to the sense of wildness we experience when interacting with the natural world, inspiring awe and fostering hope as we marvel at the wonder and resilience of the natural world.

A wilder future

Shifting baselines are a phenomenon whereby we fail to recognise changes from historical norms because what we are used to is already so far removed from the abundance and diversity of

healthy ecosystems. This means we do not notice the missing birds and butterflies that our grandparents mourn, because they were already disappearing as we grew up. Similarly, our children struggle to notice the declines we are aware of, because the world they are accustomed to is already poorer in so many ways than the one we grew up in.

Rewilding offers us a chance to reverse this process of impoverishment, to help wildlife come back to the places from which it has disappeared. It offers us all the opportunity to enjoy encounters with wild nature more regularly, strengthening our connection with the natural systems we rely on and yielding increasingly recognised benefits for our physical and mental wellbeing. Where insurmountable barriers make natural recoveries improbable, translocations provide a valuable way to reintroduce missing species or reinforce small isolated populations. This is the work the EWCF was created to do; it has already started to shift the baseline in the opposite direction, as a new generation is becoming accustomed to seeing more wildlife in our recovering landscapes. Excitingly, the fund is only just getting started!

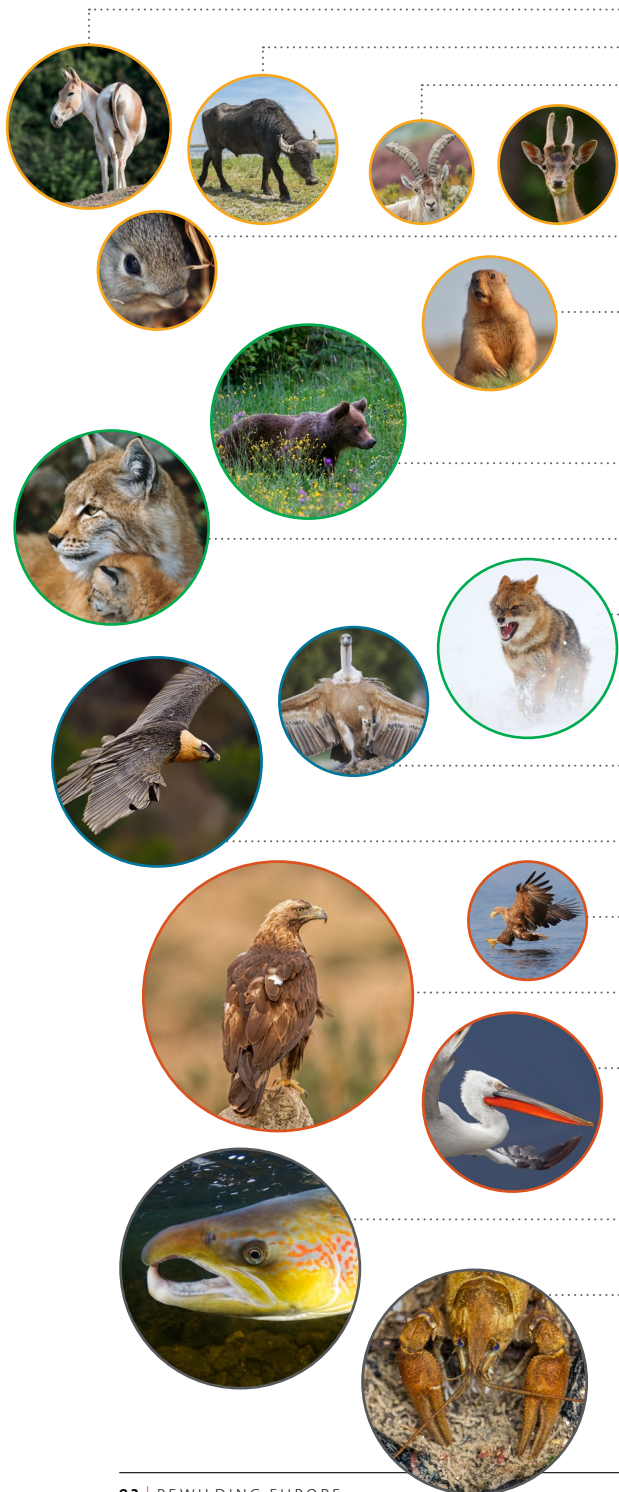
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Rewilding offers us a chance to reverse this process of impoverishment, to help wildlife come back to the places from which it has disappeared.

.....

Working with wildlife

An overview of the various wildlife species that our rewilding landscapes focus on.



	Iberian Highlands	Rhodope Mountains	Greater Côa Valley	Southern Carpathians	Central Apennines
HERBIVORES					
Arctic reindeer					
Chamois ¹				●	●
European bison ²		●		●	
Eurasian elk					
Tauros ³	●		●		
Wild horse ⁴	●	●	●		
Kulan	●				
Water buffalo					
Iberian ibex	●		●		
Red deer	●	●	●	●	●
Fallow deer	●	●	●		
Roe deer	●		●	●	●
European rabbit	●		●		
Eurasian beaver					●
Steppe marmot					
European hamster					
CARNIVORES					
Grey wolf ⁵	●	●	●		●
Brown bear ⁶		●		●	●
Iberian lynx	●		●		
Eurasian lynx		●		●	
Wildcat	●				●
Golden jackal		●			
Grey seal					
SCAVENGERS					
Cinereous vulture	●	●	●		
Griffon vulture	●	●	●	●	●
Egyptian vulture	●	●	●		
Bearded vulture	●				
OTHER BIRDS					
White-tailed eagle		●			
Golden eagle			●		●
Imperial eagle ⁷			●		
Bonelli's eagle	●		●		
Dalmatian pelican		●			
Eagle owl					
FISH/CRAYFISH					
Atlantic sturgeon					
Salmon ⁸					
Brown trout ⁹					●
White-clawed crayfish ¹⁰					●

● Populations are enhanced through measures such as restocking, reintroduction, anti-poaching, anti-poisoning and coexistence work, and habitat improvement.

● The species is keystone/flagship and benefits indirectly from measures supporting other species.

Swedish Lapland	Velebit Mountains	Danube Delta	Oder Delta	Affric Highlands	
					HERBIVORES
●					Arctic reindeer ○
	●				Chamois ¹ ○
			●		European bison ² ○
			●		Eurasian elk ○
	●	●		●	Tauros ³ ○
	●	●			Wild horse ⁴ ○
		●			Kulan
		●			Water buffalo
		●			Iberian ibex
	●	●	●	●	Red deer ○
		●			Fallow deer
	●				Roe deer ○
					European rabbit
●		●	●	●	Eurasian beaver ○
		●			Steppe marmot
		●			European hamster ○
					CARNIVORES
	●		●		Grey wolf ⁵ ○
●	●				Brown bear ⁶ ○
					Iberian lynx ○
	●		●		Eurasian lynx
	●			●	Wildcat ○
		●			Golden jackal
			●		Grey seal ○
					SCAVENGERS
					Cinereous vulture ○
	●				Griffon vulture
					Egyptian vulture ○
					Bearded vulture
					OTHER BIRDS
	●	●	●		White-tailed eagle ○
				●	Golden eagle ○
					Imperial eagle ⁷
					Bonelli's eagle ○
		●			Dalmatian pelican
		●			Eagle owl ○
					FISH/CRAYFISH
			●		Atlantic sturgeon ○
●			●	●	Salmon ⁸
●			●		Brown trout ⁹ ○
					White-clawed crayfish ¹⁰



1 Different subspecies, generally divided into Northern and Southern chamois.
2 Both lowland line and lowland-Caucasia line.
3 Using at least 6 different breeds: maronesa, sayaguesa, maremmana, limia, pajuna, podolica (all in the latest mix).
4 Using 5 different breeds: konik, karakachan, Bosnian mountain horse, garrano and Przewalski horse.
5 For Iberian Highlands and Greater Cõa Valley this is Iberian wolf.
6 In Central Apennines Marsican brown bear subspecies.
7 Spanish imperial eagle in Greater Cõa Valley, Eastern imperial eagle in Rhodope Mountains.
8 Baltic Salmon in Swedish Lapland and Oder Delta, Atlantic salmon in Affric Highlands.
9 Mediterranean trout (*Salmo macrostigma* or *Salmo cetti*) in the Central Apennines.
10 Subspecies *Austropotamobius italicus meridionalis* in the Central Apennines.



Operational model

Rewilding Europe is a pan-European organisation, with a strong central function connected to a network of rewilding landscapes. The central team and landscape teams are intrinsically linked and work together coherently. This co-production approach enables us to work at a European level, while local partners take the lead in rewilding initiatives adapted to a local context.

In nine of our ten rewilding landscapes, dedicated rewilding entities have been legally established with their own local boards. The nature of these entities differs depending on legislation, preference, and local context. Each of these entities acts as our dedicated and preferential main rewilding partner – in turn, each of them have established and manage a wide variety of partnerships with key local stakeholders. Most of these entities are still young and carefully building up their presence, work and credibility in their respective region and country. In this way, we have developed and are growing a distributed network of rewilding organisations across Europe, bound together in both formal and informal ways. A recently established Network Agreement will be signed by all rewilding entities and Rewilding Europe in early 2023, next to already existing contractual agree-

ments, fostering the co-production of rewilding in Europe.

On a daily basis, there is a very intense cooperation between central and local teams, ensuring cross-learning and delivering rewilding results and impact at all levels.

Within this setting we are continuously striving to maintain the optimum balance between central and local coordination and leadership. The main purpose of the central function is to empower the local entities and their teams, enabling them to become as self-supporting as possible. In addition to sharing Rewilding Europe's vision, mission and strategy, the central team provides support services in five main fields: rewilding, enterprise development, communications, upscaling and core functions – mostly management and development support. To be able to provide these services to local entities, we have significantly grown capacity both at central and landscape level in 2022 and continue to develop a range of tools that empower partner entities.

Numerous external relationships have been established and formalised, both at a central and local level (for a list, see last inner page). Such partnerships are critical to the achievement of Rewilding Europe's mission.

Rewilding
Spain



Rewilding
Rhodopes



Rewilding
Portugal



Rewilding
Romania



Rewilding
Apennines



Rewilding
Sweden



Rewilding
Velebit



Rewilding
Ukraine



Rewilding
Oder Delta





Organisation

Legal structure

Rewilding Europe is registered as a foundation (“Stichting” in Dutch) in the Netherlands. It is acknowledged as a charity for tax purposes (“ANBI status”) and certified by CBF, the Dutch supervisory body for organisations with a charitable purpose.

Rewilding Europe owns a limited liability company called Rewilding Europe B.V. This company serves as an incubator and holding company to pilot and develop new business concepts that support the mission of the foundation and have a chance to become profitable. Rewilding Europe B.V. owns three limited liability companies:

- Rewilding Europe Capital B.V. provides loans to enterprises whose activities contribute to rewilding.
- Rewilding Climate Solutions B.V., established in 2022, aims to make rewilding a financially competi-

tive land use demonstrating that rewilding is investable and enables restoration on a large scale.

- Rewilding Assets B.V., also established in 2022, aims to hold ownership of land that will be rewilded.

Rewilding Europe has long-term agreements with partner organisations in its rewilding landscapes. These organisations are registered locally as not-for-profit foundations or associations, which means they have their own boards and staff. Although independent entities, they form an integral part of the Rewilding Europe organisation through an intensive and equal collaboration that can best be described as ‘co-production’. In 2022, the relationship between Rewilding Europe and its partner organisations in the rewilding landscapes was further strengthened by the formation of a Rewilding Europe

Network Executive Team and the development of a Network Agreement. In 2022, Iberian Highlands became the tenth rewilding landscape and in Romania, the local partner organisation was transformed into Rewilding Romania, which will cover work in both the Southern Carpathians and the Danube Delta.

Governance and leadership

The Supervisory Board, comprising six members, had four meetings in 2022, of which three were physical meetings. The Supervisory Board met twice in the Netherlands and once in Croatia, also meeting the team and board of Rewilding Velebit Mountains.

Having worked for several years with one Executive Director, Johan Booij was appointed as Finance and Operations Director and second statutory director in January 2022.



ISTOCKPHOTO

Following the 2030 strategy and fuelled by growing financial income, the Executive Board and Management team developed and implemented an Organisational Growth and Development Plan in 2022. This included the creation of new positions, the revision of existing positions throughout the organisation, and the formation of an Upscaling Team, based on both existing and new positions, including a Head of Upscaling. The Executive Director chairs the Management Team, comprising the Finance & Operations Director, four thematic heads (Rewilding, Enterprise, Communications and Upscaling) and two Heads of Landscapes (each overseeing five rewilding landscapes).

The remuneration of the Executive Director and the Finance & Operations Director comply with the guidelines of the Goede Doelen Nederland, the Dutch registered charities' association.

Our core values



Pioneering

We aim to push the boundaries of nature recovery.



Entrepreneurial

We seek new opportunities and innovative ways to rewild.



Inspirational

We showcase the beauty of wild nature and the benefits of rewilding to society.



Empowering

We provide the rewilding models, tools, expertise, and knowledge that can be adopted and applied by others to scale up rewilding.



Practical

We are a 'can do' organisation that is hands-on and operates in the field at landscape scale.



Experienced

We are uniquely experienced, with a decade of practical rewilding knowledge and learning on which to build.



Committed

We understand that achieving landscape-scale change takes time – this is why we are committed to long-term engagement in the places where we work.



Rewilding Europe as an employer

At the end of 2022, Rewilding Europe employed 25 staff in the Central Team, 19 working in the Netherlands and six in other European countries, complemented by external consultants with specific fields of expertise. Working with professionals, Rewilding Europe has developed into an inclusive organisation, where alignment to its mission and vision are critical.

With Rewilding Europe operating in 13 European countries, the diversity of its employees is essential. Fifteen of the 25 employees of the Rewilding Europe Central Team are from countries other than the Netherlands. The organisation is gender balanced, with females making up 64% of our employees and 67% of our Supervisory Board.

An institution of public trust must uphold the highest levels of integrity – this means creating an environment where the risk of integrity issues arising is kept as low as possible. The issue of integrity is covered in the Code of Conduct signed by all Rewilding Europe employees, contractors and partner organisations. In 2020, Rewilding Europe introduced a reporting procedure for integrity issues, both for external persons (through a special complaint section on the website) and internal. In 2022, we appointed an external confidential counsellor to handle all complaints relating to integrity issues, in a strictly confidential and professional manner. No complaints relating to inappropriate behaviour and integrity were received. Rewilding Europe evaluates its integrity policy annually to ensure that the highest standards are continuously maintained.



One European team

In 2022, the Rewilding Europe team comprised 190 people working from 17 different European countries, encompassing both central level and rewilding landscape teams. An overview of all Rewilding Europe team members in 2022 is presented below, including their position and resident country. Please note this list represents the situation at the time of publication of this Annual Review in June 2023.

○ Supervisory board

- Jan Derck van Karnebeek**
Chair until 30 March 2023 (the Netherlands)
- Sabine Hoefnagel**
Member
Interim Chair as of 1 April 2023 (United Kingdom)
- Odile Rodríguez de la Fuente**
Member until 30 March 2023 (Spain)
- Lena M. Lindén**
Member (Sweden)
- Aleksandrina Leonidova Mitseva**
Member (Bulgaria)
- Jens-Christian Svenning**
Member (Denmark)
- Charlie Burrell**
Member as of 1 April 2023 (United Kingdom)

○ Executive board

- Frans Schepers**
Executive Director (the Netherlands)
- Johan Booij**
Finance & Operations Director (the Netherlands)

○ Central team

- FINANCE & OPERATIONS**
- Violeta Giurgi**
Finance & Operations Manager (the Netherlands)
- Tamar Vloedgraven**
Finance Manager as of September 2022 (the Netherlands)
- Annette Mertens**
Grants Coordinator (Italy)
- Dana Bezdičková**
Grants & Operations Manager (the Netherlands)
- Floor Peters**
Finance and Operations Officer (the Netherlands)
- Lucy Kilkens**
Finance and Operations Officer (the Netherlands)

- Erik Jan Hofmeyer**
System Administrator (the Netherlands)
- Vanessa Cornejo**
Finance and Operations Officer as of 2023 (the Netherlands)
- Karin Gerritsen**
Legacies (the Netherlands)

REWILDING

- Raquel Filgueiras**
Head of Rewilding (the Netherlands)
- Jelle Harms**
Geospatial & Monitoring Manager (the Netherlands)
- Sophie Monsarrat**
Rewilding Manager as of September 2022 (the Netherlands)
- Theresa Stratmann**
Geospatial & Monitoring Officer as of November 2022 (Germany)
- Mei Abraham Elderadži**
European Rewilding Network Coordinator until June 2022 (Croatia)
- Julia Clark**
European Wildlife Bank Coordinator until 30 March 2023 (United Kingdom)

- Rohan Wadhwa**
GIS Field Officer until April 2022 (the Netherlands)
- Mykhailo Nesterenko**
Rewilding Manager as of June 2022 (the Netherlands)

ENTERPRISE

- Timon Rutten**
Head of Enterprise (the Netherlands)
- Helena Newell**
Enterprise Manager (United Kingdom)
- Janine Caalders**
Wildlife Economics Advisor (the Netherlands)
- Christian van Maaren**
Operations Manager of Rewilding Climate Solutions (the Netherlands)
- Irene Fernandez Saez**
Operations Manager Rewilding Europe Travel (the Netherlands)
- João Salgueiro**
Wildlife Economics Advisor until January 2022 (Portugal)

- Preethi Sridharan**
Carbon Project Developer as of August 2022 (the Netherlands)
- Daniel Verissimo**
Conservation Finance Expert as of September 2022 (Germany)

COMMUNICATIONS

- Laurien Holtjer**
Head of Communications (the Netherlands)
- Kristjan Jung**
Brand Communications Manager (Estonia)
- Nelleke de Weerd**
Social Media and Events Manager (the Netherlands)
- Nina Breck**
Communications Officer as of June 2022 (Germany)
- Daniel Allen**
Writer & Editor (United Kingdom)
- Kateryna Kurakina**
Communications Officer as of June 2022 (the Netherlands)
- Neil Aldridge**
Creative Content Manager as of 2023 (United Kingdom)

UPSCALING

- Amy Duthie**
Head of Upscaling as of 1 February 2023 (United Kingdom)
- Aukje van Gerven**
Training Manager (the Netherlands)
- Julia Mata**
European Rewilding Network Coordinator as of August 2022 (Denmark)
- Giulia Testa**
European Young Rewilders Coordinator as of September 2022 (Sweden)
- Kyle Grotens**
Upscaling Officer as of 2023 (Spain)

HEAD OF LANDSCAPES

- Deli Saavedra**
Head of Landscapes (Spain)
- Fabien Quétier**
Head of Landscapes (France)

Iberian Highlands

Pablo Schapira
Team Leader
(as of October 2022)

Mara Zamora
Finance and
Administration Officer
General Director
(as of December 2022)

Lidia Valverde
Communications
Officer
(as of October 2022)

Basilio Rodriguez
Enterprise Officer
(as of November 2022)

Pablo Villa
Herd Manager
(as of December 2022)

Marina Mónico
Rewilding Officer
(as of 2023)

Rafael Vigil
Herd Manager
(as of 2023)

José María Rey Benayas
Jordi Palau Puigvert
Marco Bolognini
Odile Rodríguez
de la Fuente
(as of April 2023)
Board Rewilding Spain

Rhodope Mountains

Andreana Trifonova
Team Leader as of
March 2022

Stoycho Stoychev
Team Leader until
March 2022

Stefan Avramov
Rewilding Officer

Hristo Hristov
Rewilding Officer

Desislava Kostadinova
Administrative
Coordinator

Nelly Naydenova
Communications
Officer

Polihron Karapachov
Enterprise Officer

Dobromir Dobrev
Vulture Expert BSPB

Todor Todorov
Enterprise Officer as
of 2023

Alexander Petrov
Anti-poaching Officer
as of 2023

Borislav Borisov
Anti-poaching Officer
as of 2023

Frank Zanderink
Petar Iankov
Rossen Vassilev
Milena Nikolova
(as of July 2022)
Board Rewilding
Rhodopes

Greater Cõa Valley

Pedro Prata
Team Leader

Marta Calix
Head of Operations

Catherine Phillips
Head of Finance

Sara Aliácar
Head of Conservation

Fernando Teixeira
Communications
Officer

Daniel Veríssimo
Enterprise Officer until
August 2022

André Couto
Conservation Officer

Miguel Pontes
Senior Ranger

Gonçalo Matos
Herd Manager

Pedro Ribeiro
Field Officer

Marta Vieira
Veterinarian

Sofia Capelo
Administrative
Assistant

Rui Marques
Field Operator

Nuno Paixão
Field Operator

Marlene Vieira
Rewilding Centre

Joaquim Canotilho
Enterprise Officer as of
August 2022

Rui Santos
Junior Ranger as of
2023

Edmilton Vaz
Finance Officer as of
2023

Marlene Monteiro
Responsável Centro
Rewilding as of 2023

Paula Saraiva
Estagiária Centro
Rewilding as of 2023

Hein van Beuningen
Paula Sarmento
(until July 2022)
Christina Branquinho
(until July 2022)
Miguel Bastos Araujo
(as of December 2022)
Joao Wengorovius
Meneses
(as of December 2022)
Board Rewilding
Portugal

Southern Carpathians

Marina Drugă
Team Leader

Alexandra Stancu
Administration &
Operations Officer

Paula Bora
Enterprise Officer as of
October 2022

Cătălin Josan
Senior Ranger

Sebastian Ursuța
Communications
Officer as of 2023

Anghel Drașovean
Field Operational
Manager as of 2023

Ioan Simescu
Ranger as of 2023

Vali Miculescu
Ranger as of 2023

Central Apennines

Mario Cipollone
Team Leader

Angela Tavone
Communications
Manager

Valerio Reale
Enterprise Manager

Fabrizio Cordisci
Field Operations
Manager

Pietrantonio Costrini
Bear Ambassador

Nicolò Borgianni
Vulture Field Officer

Jan-Niklas Trei
GIS Analyst

Claudia Brunetti
Chamois Field Officer
as of June 2022

Dara Brodey
Volunteer Coordinator
as of July 2022

Giulia Pace
Finance and Admin
Officer as of March
2022

Julien Leboucher
Rewilding Officer as of
April 2022

Enrica Calò
Communications
Officer as of 2023

Bérénice Guinel
Enterprise Officer as
of 2023

Donato Pinto
Financial Manager as
of 2023

Piero Visconti
Bruno D'Amicis
Antonio Carrara
Donato Pinto
Izabella Zwack
(as of November 2022)
Board Rewilding
Apennines

Swedish Lapland

Henrik Persson
Team Leader as of
October 2022

Roger Olsson
Project Director until
October 2022

Karin Aström
Consultant for grants
and applications

Sofia Uhrbom
Financial
Administration

Anders Graner
Rewilding Officer as
of 2023

Petter Esberg
Rewilding Officer as
of 2023

Roger Olsson
Magnus Sylvé
Frans Schepers
Lars-Anders Baer
(Advisor)
Lena Lindén (Advisor)
Board Rewilding
Sweden

Velesit Mountains

Marija Krnjajić
Team Leader

Nino Salkić
Rewilding Officer

Andrea Perić
Communications
Officer

Marin Rončević
Enterprise Officer

Kristijan Kukas
Concession Expert

Igor Blažević
Wildlife Ranger

Davor Dundović
Wildlife Ranger

Marijan Maras
Herd Manager Lika
Plain as April 2022

Mile Tomljanovic
Wildlife Ranger as of
November 2022

Damir Ugarkovic
Concession Expert,
Advisor as of 2023

Kruno Bošnjaković
Communication Officer
as of 2023

Silvija Zec
Kresimir Macan
Vedran Lucić
Frans Schepers
Board Rewilding
Velesit

Oder Delta

Ulrich Stöcker
Team Leader (Germany)

Peter Torkler
Team Leader (Poland)

Katrin Schikorr
Team Coordinator

Jonathan Rauhut
Rewilding Officer

Suleika Sunken
Enterprise Officer

Frank Götz
Schlingmann
Network Coordinator

Izabela Skawinska-Luther
Communications
Officer

Brit Carlotta Köhler
Project Officer

Eliza Grabowska
Project Manager

Agata Rucin
Content Producer

Hanna Lietz
Student Assistant until
October 2022

Joshua Koch
Project Assistant until
October 2022

Wiebke Brenner
Project Officer

Katrin Quiring
Project Officer

Ringo Behn
Enterprise Support

Nancy Wolf
Freshwater Ecosystems
Officer as of July 2022

Agnieszka Sobon
Communications
Officer as of October
2022

Magdalena Urlich
Enterprise Officer as
of 2023

Stefan Schwill
(Germany)
Frauke Bennett
(Germany)
Artur Furdyna (Poland)
Board members
Rewilding Oder Delta

Danube Delta

UKRAINE

Mykhailo Nesterenko
Team Leader

Oleg Dyakov
Rewilding Officer

Kateryna Kurakina
Communications
Officer

Tetiana Galiutkina
Financial Officer

Oleksiy Pudovkin
Field Officer

Elena Gavran
Assistant

Nataliia Kulik
Accountant

Joseph Chernichko
Nataliia
Zakorchevnaya
Igor Studennikov
Board Rewilding
Ukraine

ROMANIA

Serban Ion
Enterprise Officer

Robert Negru
Wetland Restoration
Officer

Stefan Constantinescu
Serban Ion
Deli Saavedra
Board Rewilding
Danube Delta

Affric Highlands

Stephanie Kiel
Team Leader

Marian Bruce
Enterprise Manager
(as of March 2022)

Nicola Williamson
Field Officer
(as of March 2022)

Paul Greaves
Riparian Officer
(as of June 2022)

Cait Gillespie
Marketing and Media
Coordinator
(as of March 2022)

Alan McDonell
Programme
Development Manager

Mollie Saunders
Change Makers
Programme Officer
(as of November 2022)





Financial overview 2022

Stichting Rewilding Europe's consolidated financial statements for 2022 (dated 31 March 2023) have been audited by De Jong & Laan accountants, who expressed an unqualified opinion in their independent auditor's report. Rewilding Europe's Supervisory Board has officially approved the auditor's report and the consolidated financial statements for 2022. In this Annual Review we present a summarised financial overview, including some important developments, a comparison with previous years, and the budget for 2023.

Income

Rewilding Europe's income increased from 6.3 million euros in 2021 to 8.6 million euros in 2022. This increase is mostly a result of higher income from non-profit organisations and individuals and reflects the progress in our fundraising efforts. The higher

income from non-profit foundations can be largely explained by the income received from the Grantham Foundation (1.4 million dollars) and the Arcadia Fund (1 million euros), while the higher income from individuals can be largely attributed to a 1 million euro donation from a private Swiss donor.

Income from companies, EU subsidies and other income increased slightly, while the income from lotteries (the Dutch Postcode Lottery) remained stable.

In general, our structural income (both restricted and unrestricted) is becoming more steady and secure over the longer term, thanks to increasing support from a range of donors and partners. In 2022, we launched a new initiative offering private donors the opportunity to become a 'Rewilding Patron', and also the possibility for people to leaving legacies to Rewilding Europe.

With a budgeted income of 10.1 million euros, we expect our income, and especially the income from non-profit organisations, to further grow in 2023.

Expenditure

Rewilding Europe's expenditure increased from 4.7 million euros in 2021 to 6.9 million euros in 2022. Expenditure levels in 2022 were significantly higher than in 2021, mostly due to the increased efforts of the growing landscape teams and the ending of limitations caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Overall, 86% of the expenditure was dedicated to Rewilding Europe's four main objectives. Furthermore, 2% was spent on fundraising and 12% on the management and development of the initiative. 52% of the expenditure is directly allocated to the rewilding landscapes and 48% is spent at central level, largely in support of the rewilding landscapes.

.....

86%

of our expenditure was dedicated to Rewilding Europe's four main objectives, with 2% spent on fundraising and 12% on the management and development of the initiative.

.....

With a budgeted expenditure of 12.1 million euros, we expect to significantly increase our expenditure in both the rewilding landscapes and at central level in 2023. The aim is to deliver on the ambitions in our 2030 strategy and the annual workplans, while covering the budget deficit of almost 2 million euros through our reserves (see next section) and possible additional funding.

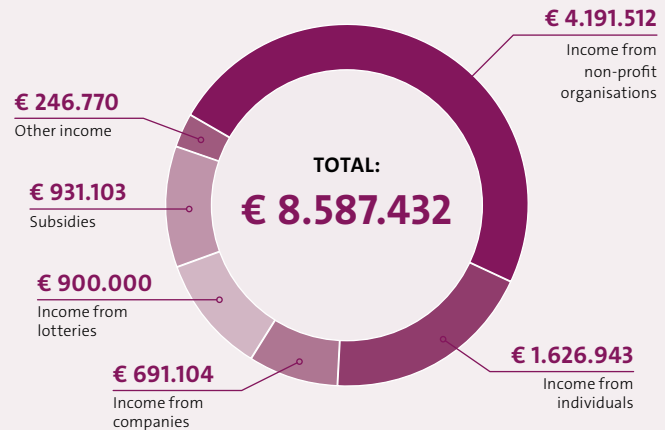
Assets and liabilities

The positive results in 2022 and the two preceding years are reflected in the consolidated balance sheet of Stichting Rewilding Europe. At the end of 2022, the bank balances were 6.9 million euros and the reserves 6.4 million euros. The reserves include the donor restricted reserve (2.2 million euros), the European Wildlife Comeback Fund (0.5 million euros), a general reserve (1.5 million euros), the Rewilding Europe Capital reserve (0.9 million euros), and a continuity reserve (1.3 million euros). The continuity reserve was increased with 0.6 million euros in line with the growth of the organisation (in order to be able to cover the costs of the work organisation for a period of six months). On the assets side, the loans (1 million euros) are provided through Rewilding Europe Capital to entrepreneurs in the rewilding landscapes, while the accrued income and prepaid expenses (1 million euros) mostly consist of payments to the landscape teams, for which no expenses have been reported yet. On the liabilities side, the subsidies received in advance (1.5 million euros) represent EU subsidies received for which no expenses have yet been reported.

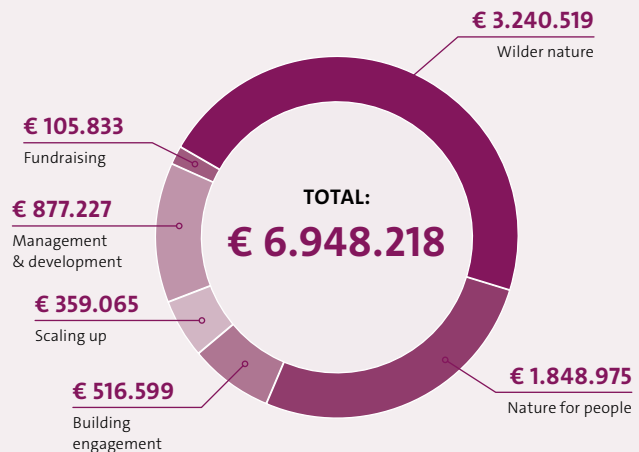
Want to know more?

Our 2022 audited financial statements are available on our website: rewildingeurope.com/public-disclosures.

Income



Expenses



Assets and liabilities (as of December 31st, 2022, in euros)

Assets		Liabilities	
Loans	996.264	Reserves	6.351.040
Accrued income and prepaid expenses	1.008.470	Long term Loan (EIB)	555.357
Other assets	96.896	Subsidies received in advance	1.472.045
Bank balances	6.917.258	Other short term liabilities	640.446
Total	9.018.888	Total	9.018.888

The corporate connection

Engagement from the business sector is critical to the upscaling of nature recovery. Moving forwards, a new set of principles will ensure Rewilding Europe's corporate partnerships continue to align with our mission and vision.

Amplifying impact

From Exodus Travel and HSBC to FedEx and EnviroSustain, Rewilding Europe receives – or has received – financial and non-financial assistance from a carefully selected range of businesses. Since our foundation in 2011, increasing awareness of the importance of nature recovery and society's growing demand for nature-positive practices have seen our initiative benefit from a limited but steadily increasing number of such partners. This highly valued support is helping us to scale up rewilding and

amplify its positive ecological and socio-economic impact.

At Rewilding Europe we have always recognised that the corporate sector has an important role to play in advancing our rewilding mission. In these collaborations and partnerships, we always seek a direct connection to our mission and clear rewilding benefits with lasting, measurable outcomes.

Redesigned relationships

Today, funding for rewilding in general is on the rise as a growing number of

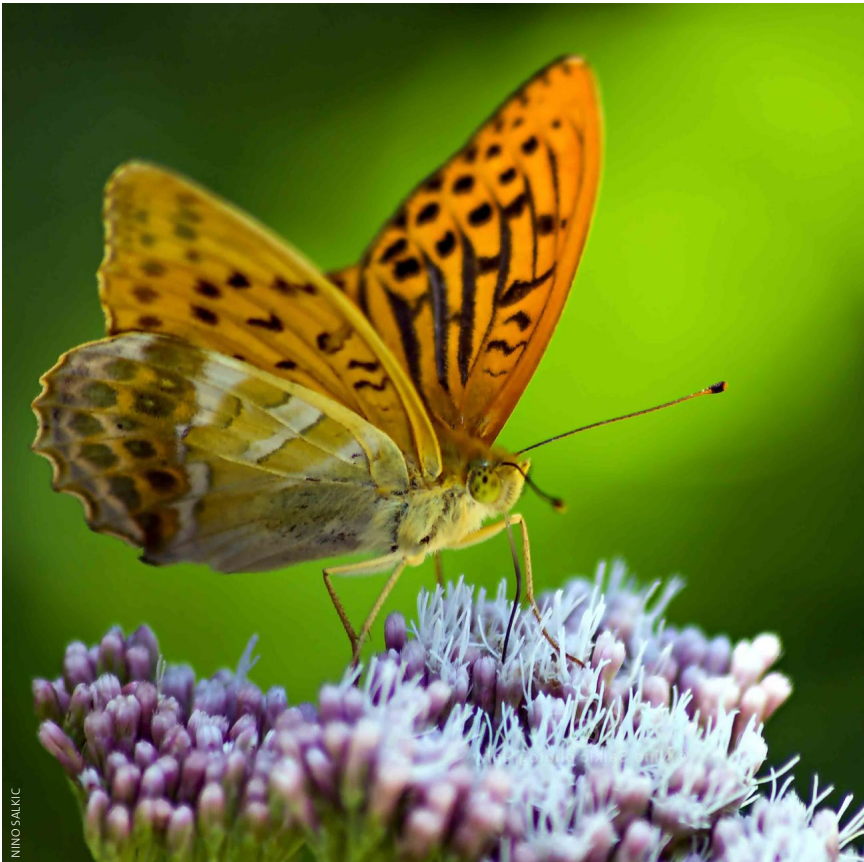
businesses, investment institutions and philanthropic foundations take financial decisions that help to restore nature in a holistic way. The private sector now has a unique opportunity to redesign its relationship with nature by investing in nature recovery at large scale. By adopting rewilding, businesses can build on their existing efforts to address issues such as climate change, ensuring their operations have a positive impact on nature, climate and people. This means going beyond a narrow focus on emissions, or carbon, or tree planting, or renewable energy.

A perfect match

This kind of wider and more meaningful ambition is exemplified by Rewilding Europe's partnership with global law firm Hogan Lovells, who support us and our member organisations with pro bono (free of charge) legal advice and other forms of non-financial support. In 2022, the firm also signed an agreement with Rewilding Europe to finance the production of a new short film series focused on our rewilding landscapes, to be produced by award-winning French videographer Emmanuel Rondeau. The first, on the Velebit Mountains of Croatia, was released in March 2023.

"Having supported rewilding in Finland since 2019, we knew that this innovative form of nature protection and recovery had a proven track record of delivering positive impact, in terms of addressing climate change, enhancing biodiversity, and delivering

.....
"The private sector now has a unique opportunity to redesign its relationship with nature by investing in nature recovery at large scale."
.....



NINO SALKIC

.....
 “Working with companies as they seek to become involved in European nature recovery is a tremendous opportunity.”

a wide range of other benefits to people and communities,” says Mareike van Oosting, Hogan Lovells’ Responsible Business Manager for Europe, the Middle East and Asia. “The partnership with Rewilding Europe was a perfect match for our business because it also gave opportunities for our colleagues across Europe to work on a joint mission.”

“Over the last year, Hogan Lovells have provided Rewilding Europe and its member organisations with tremendous legal support in different areas,” adds Rewilding Europe’s Finance and Operations Director, Johan Booij. “Among other things, they have helped us to establish the limited liability companies Rewilding Climate Solutions and Rewilding Assets, and to set up a network agreement, and also to prepare for land purchases. In addition, they are also hugely enthusiastic about rewilding, which is something we look for in all our partners.”

For Hogan Lovells partner Manon Cordewener, one of the main attractions of rewilding is its proven impact.

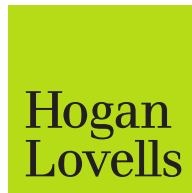
“More and more corporates are looking to partner with international organisations that are delivering tangible results. While rewilding is a long-term process, you can already see the impact, which is backed up by a growing scientific community. Rewilding Europe has always been very transparent about what it wants to achieve, how it will achieve it, and what is actually happening in the field. Reporting back is just as important as doing the work in this regard.”



▲ Mareike van Oosting



▲ Manon Cordewener



[rewildingeuropa.com/
corporate-engagement-principles](https://rewildingeuropa.com/corporate-engagement-principles)

Closer alignment

To ensure that Rewilding Europe partners with businesses that are even more closely aligned with our mission and vision – and with whom we can work in a mutually beneficial way to advance rewilding – we have designed a set of corporate engagement principles. These cover everything from prioritising rewilding benefits and commitment to nature recovery and environmental sustainability to endorsement and transparency. The full set of principles is available to view on the Rewilding Europe website. A comprehensive vetting procedure has also been developed.

For Johan Booij, the new principles and procedure are all about evaluating the direction and ambitions of businesses, and their actual performance.

“Navigating the world of corporate partnerships can be challenging due to the many areas of ambiguity and the prevalence of so-called ‘greenwashing’. Some industries are particularly difficult to envision working with, and we would only consider partnering with those are willing to agree to significant changes to their business model.

“Nevertheless, working with companies as they seek to become involved in European nature recovery is a fantastic opportunity to create real rewilding gains across the continent. I invite all those businesses who have set relevant ambitions in their sustainability strategies and want to become nature positive to collaborate with us. Together we can achieve great things.”

Why We Rewild



○ Providing hope and purpose

Rewilding generates a better future for people and nature. While it leads to a richer, more vital tomorrow, rewilding encourages practical action and collaboration today.



○ Reversing biodiversity loss

Rewilding safeguards and enhances biodiversity by creating space for species to return, including wildlife that drives ecological processes.



○ Climate mitigation

Rewilding can play a critical role in helping us to mitigate the scale and impact of global warming by storing carbon and preventing severe flooding and wild fires.



○ Economic opportunities

Rewilding boosts local economies by creating new sources of sustainable, long-term revenue for businesses and communities.

Join the rewilding movement

As we work to make Europe a wilder place, Rewilding Europe is always looking to collaborate with private, corporate and public partners, such as foundations, companies, institutions and private individuals.

We invite you to become a:

Technical partner

To achieve our mission and generate impact, collaborating with technical partners is crucial for us. We warmly invite organisations and initiatives, research and technical institutions, fellow rewilding organisations, media production companies and any other kinds of organisations to join forces and provide pro-bono support and know-how, and become our technical partner.

Financial partner

If you are an organisation, public or private institution, foundation or company with the ability and desire to help us making Europe a wilder place, we warmly invite you to become our financial partner. As our partner you believe in Rewilding Europe's approach, and your financial support can significantly contribute to our success at a European level. As we are building a differentiated financial base,

we offer you the opportunity to support us in different ways, such as through earmarked or un-earmarked funding, grants or investments. We warmly invite you to become a Rewilding Europe patron or major donor, or to explore a corporate partnership with us. Tailor-made partnerships are always possible.

Corporate engagement principles

Working with companies as they seek to become involved in nature recovery in Europe is a tremendous opportunity to create real rewilding gains across the continent.

The corporate sector has an important role to play in advancing our rewilding mission. In these collaborations and partnerships, we always seek a direct connection to our mission and clear rewilding benefits with lasting, measurable outcomes. Rewilding Europe has designed Principles of Corporate Engagement for successful engagements with the corporate sector.

Leave an enduring legacy

If you want future generations to enjoy a wilder Europe which benefits both people and nature, please consider supporting our work with a gift in your will. Your family and loved ones naturally come first, but we hope that you will also remember Rewilding Europe. This is a personal matter and your decision to make in your own time. We're here to help if you need us.

rewildingeuropa.com/join-us/legacy

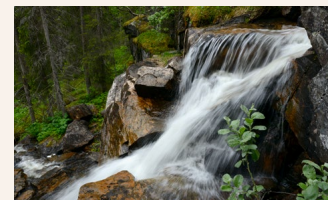


Your support matters at every level

You can also make a contribution to the rewilding movement by:

- ➔ Making an online donation through our website
- ➔ Promoting rewilding via social media by sharing articles
- ➔ Organising fundraising activities
- ➔ Visiting one of the rewilding landscapes
- ➔ Joining the European Rewilding Network with your own rewilding initiative

More at: rewilding-europe.com/join-us



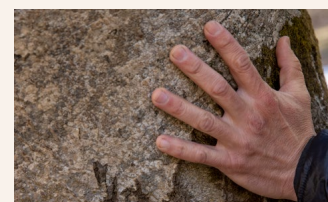
○ People's health and wellbeing

Clean air, fertile soil, good health, and well-being. Naturally functioning ecosystems deliver a huge range of benefits essential to human existence.



○ Identity and pride

Rewilding brings people together, generating synergy and a sense of pride. With new opportunities available, young generations return to abandoned landscapes.



○ Reconnecting with nature

Experiencing the thrill of wild nature reconnects people with our living planet. Building an enduring relationship with nature makes people healthier and happier.



○ Nature is our best ally!

It is available as a cost-effective, pragmatic, proven solution – right now.



Partnerships are key to us

We are fortunate to work with a number of strong, active, and very committed partners. Their valued support in 2022 allowed us to get where we are now and we look forward to achieving more great things with them in the years ahead.

Technical partners



Princess Laurentien van Oranje

Since Rewilding Europe began in 2010, Princess Laurentien van Oranje has supported our initiative by providing strategic advice and facilitating meetings and events. In recognition of her highly valued contribution, she received a special Rewilding Europe Award in June 2022 from Executive Director Frans Schepers.

A visit to the Central Apennines in Italy in September, together with her husband Prince Constantijn van Oranje, gave her great inspiration and motivated her further to continue her role.

We wholeheartedly thank the princess for her dedicated support and fantastic team spirit and look forward to working with her in the future.

Financial partners



A heartfelt thank you

From funding partners, donors, investors, advisors, scientists and photographers to conservationists, entrepreneurs and all other supporters – a diverse range of organisations and individuals provided invaluable support to Rewilding Europe in 2022.

To all those who helped us move forward, we truly appreciate your support and look forward to continued cooperation in the years to come. We are also deeply grateful to the increasing number of private individuals who supported us with donations in 2022.





Rewilding Europe®

Making Europe a Wilder Place



Rewilding Europe wants to make Europe a wilder place, with more space for wild nature, wildlife and natural processes. In bringing back the variety of life, we will explore new ways for people to enjoy and earn a fair living from the wild.

Let's make Europe a wilder place together!



www.rewildingeurope.com

Rewilding Europe • Toernooiveld 1, 6525 ED Nijmegen, the Netherlands • info@rewildingeurope.com

