

# Rewilding efforts in England are of a smaller scale compared to efforts in other nations, study argues

October 12 2021

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A unique "domesticated" form of English rewilding—which is distinct from activities in other parts of the world where there are lower levels of human intervention—is now emerging, a new study argues.

Rewilding in England occurs on a smaller scale than in other parts of the world, leading to greater need for human intervention and therefore less scope for animals and land to behave without human control, the research says.

Dr. Virginia Thomas, from the University of Exeter, examined two English "rewilding" sites—the Avalon Marshes and Wild Ennerdale, interviewing those involved in their care and development as well as experts from outside the projects

In the study, published in the journal *Environmental Values*, she outlines how proposals to reintroduce large carnivores are largely absent in England as part of attempts to make rewilding (appear) safer and less threatening to those who will be most affected by it, such as farmers and land owners. As a result, rewilding's intention to increase biodiversity is somewhat curtailed.

Dr. Thomas said, "In England we're seeing a 'domestication' of rewilding. It is being adapted to exist alongside people, compared to other countries where it involves less human intervention, in order to make it less culturally challenging and more palatable."

At the Avalon Marshes, land has been restored from intensive [agriculture](#) and peat production to a mosaic of wildlife habitats and extensively farmed land. At Wild Ennerdale, a previously intensively farmed and forested valley has been restored to a more "natural" state, intensive sheep farming has been largely replaced by naturalistic cattle grazing, and commercial Sitka spruce plantation forestry is being replaced by the regeneration of native deciduous woodland.

Dr. Thomas said, "Rewilding in England is somewhat abridged—its aim of restoring ecological function can be fulfilled to some extent but it is limited by the availability of [species](#) and it will not be able to fully restore ecological functioning unless and until all ecological niches are filled."

Farmers and land managers interviewed as part of the research argued strongly for continued management of England's countryside to conserve

heritage and cultural landscapes, protect biodiversity, maintain rural livelihoods and communities, and assist in providing national food self-sufficiency, thereby contributing to food security. They argued extensive farming, involving some human intervention in the landscape, as opposed to the "hands off approach" of rewilding, could achieve these aims.

Dr. Thomas said, "In order for rewilding to make any meaningful contribution to conservation in England, it is necessary for it to be accepted by communities. The modifications in this country to some of rewilding's more radical and contentious proposals may allow it to make a greater contribution to conservation than if those involved stuck to a stricter interpretation of rewilding."

**More information:** Virginia Thomas, Domesticating Rewilding: Interpreting Rewilding in England's Green and Pleasant Land, *Environmental Values* (2021). [DOI: 10.3197/096327121X16328186623841](https://doi.org/10.3197/096327121X16328186623841)

Provided by University of Exeter

Citation: Rewilding efforts in England are of a smaller scale compared to efforts in other nations, study argues (2021, October 12) retrieved 27 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2021-10-rewilding-efforts-england-smaller-scale.html>

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