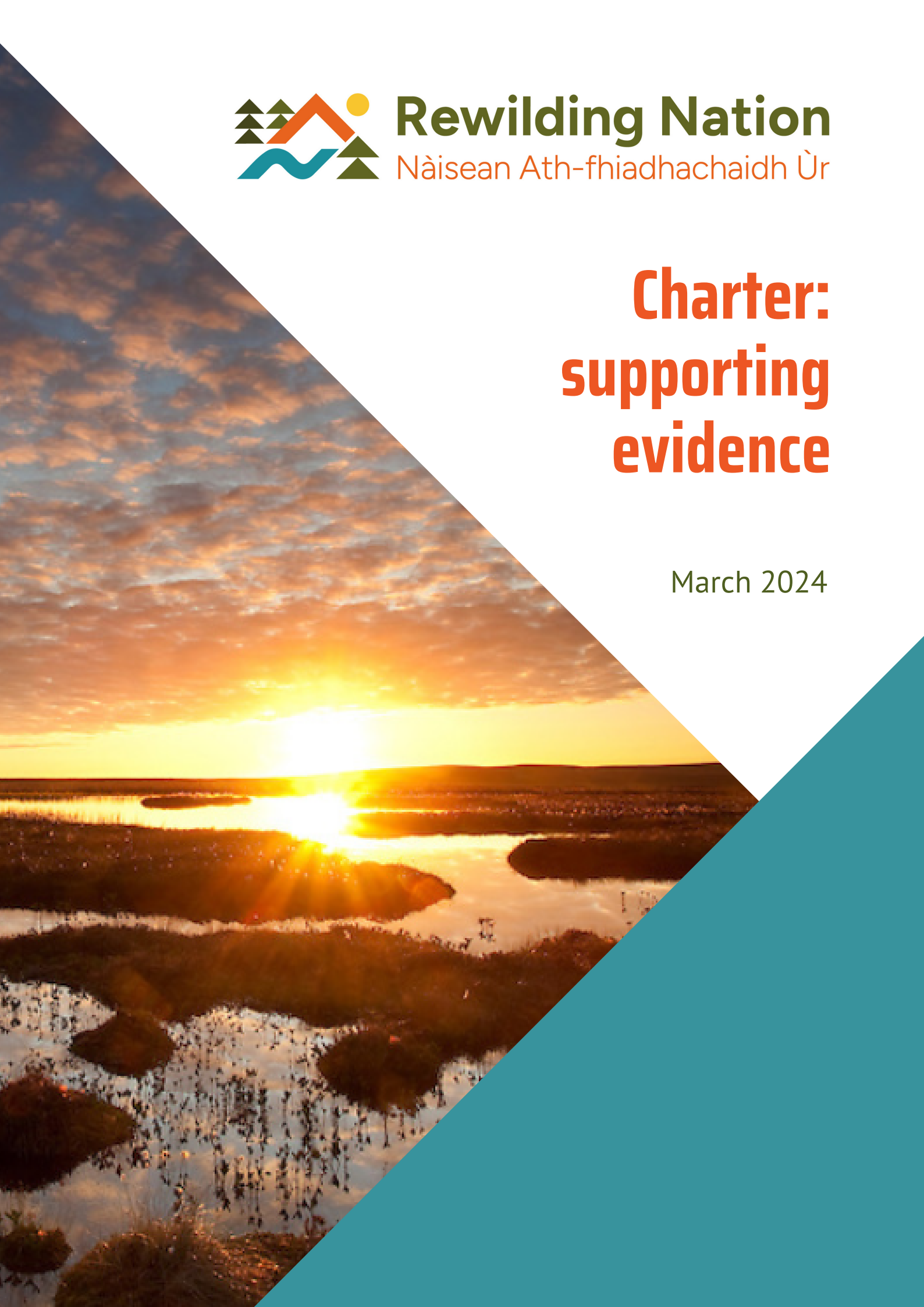




**Rewilding Nation**  
Nàisean Ath-fhiadhachaidh Ùr

# Charter: supporting evidence

March 2024





# Introduction





# Executive summary

Scotland's ecosystems are under pressure. On land and at sea, we face nature loss and climate breakdown. This can feel overwhelming: what can any one person do?

As a nation, we can unite behind a clear message: Restore. Revitalise. Rewild.

The Scottish Rewilding Alliance was founded to bring together organisations who share an aspiration for rewilding to take root across Scotland. Our approach embraces working at scale in partnership with landowners, communities, interest groups and governments. For 5 years, we have shared learning and experiences between our members. We have cooperated and supported each other to deliver our objectives. We have reached out to organisations beyond the Scottish Rewilding Alliance to create open conversations about rewilding.

We want to see Scotland restoring its natural world. We want to see Scotland's people coexisting with nature. We want everyone to work together to create a Rewilding Nation we can all be proud of. We want to see fragments of nature reconnected across the nation. These principles underpin the Rewilding Nation Charter: a document that represents the hopes of all the people in Scotland who want to see this vision brought to life.

We're asking everyone who shares these hopes to sign the charter, to make their voices heard, and show their support for the charter's four principles.

2021-2030 is the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, which aims to prevent, halt and reverse the global decline of nature. We want to see Scotland rise to this challenge by declaring itself a Rewilding Nation. The evidence is mounting that rewilding offers a multitude of opportunities for both people and nature.

The living systems on which we all depend are being eroded – undermining our access to food, fresh water and clean air; hindering our ability to lock away carbon and cope with climate breakdown's floods, wildlife die-offs, droughts and crop failures; harming our health and wellbeing; and depriving communities of economic opportunities.

Scotland can lead the way as a Rewilding Nation: tackling the nature and climate crises while creating a cascade of benefits for people.

**If you support this vision, now is your chance to speak.**

# What is a Rewilding Nation?

At the Scottish Rewilding Alliance, we share a vision of a country that teems with life once more, with our hills and glens richly draped in a patchwork of native woodlands and healthy peatlands. We want to see wetlands thrumming with life, holding water and locking up carbon; to see grasslands awash with flowers and alive with birdsong; to see great, green seagrass meadows and vast, shining oyster beds, filtering water and sheltering marine life. And we want to see all this stitched together in a rich living tapestry, enjoyed and cared for by the people of Scotland.

The Scottish Rewilding Alliance has developed the Rewilding Nation Charter to represent the hopes of all the people in Scotland who want to see this vision brought to life, revitalising key natural processes, restoring missing species, enriching communities and building resilience against the challenges we know the future holds. We're asking everyone who shares these hopes to sign the charter, to make their voices heard, and show their support for the charter's four principles.

The power of nature to heal itself is extraordinary - but not unlimited. Through working together, people can restore natural processes and create a practical, hopeful path for responding to the climate and nature emergencies. This wilder future will take time to achieve.

**Declaring Scotland a Rewilding Nation is only the first step on this journey. We expect the Scottish Government to create a credible plan for the restoration of Scotland's nature and identify how the people of Scotland can participate.**





# Why become a Rewilding Nation?

Scotland's land and seas are full of variety: densely populated cities, wooded valleys and rivers, distinctive crofting townships, dramatic mountains, neatly clustered towns, sandy beaches and rocky shores. There is no part of Scotland that has not been shaped in some way by people. The rise of subsistence farming, land clearances, commercial farming, plantation forestry, industrialisation and urbanisation have all affected the Scotland we see today.

Scotland's ecological health has declined. The Biodiversity Intactness Index places Scotland 28th from the bottom: a nation where nature has receded and continues to fall. [1] 1 in 9 species are threatened with national extinction. [2] Our ability to produce food, access water and maintain safe homes depends on a healthy environment with functioning ecosystems. The living systems on which we all depend are being eroded.

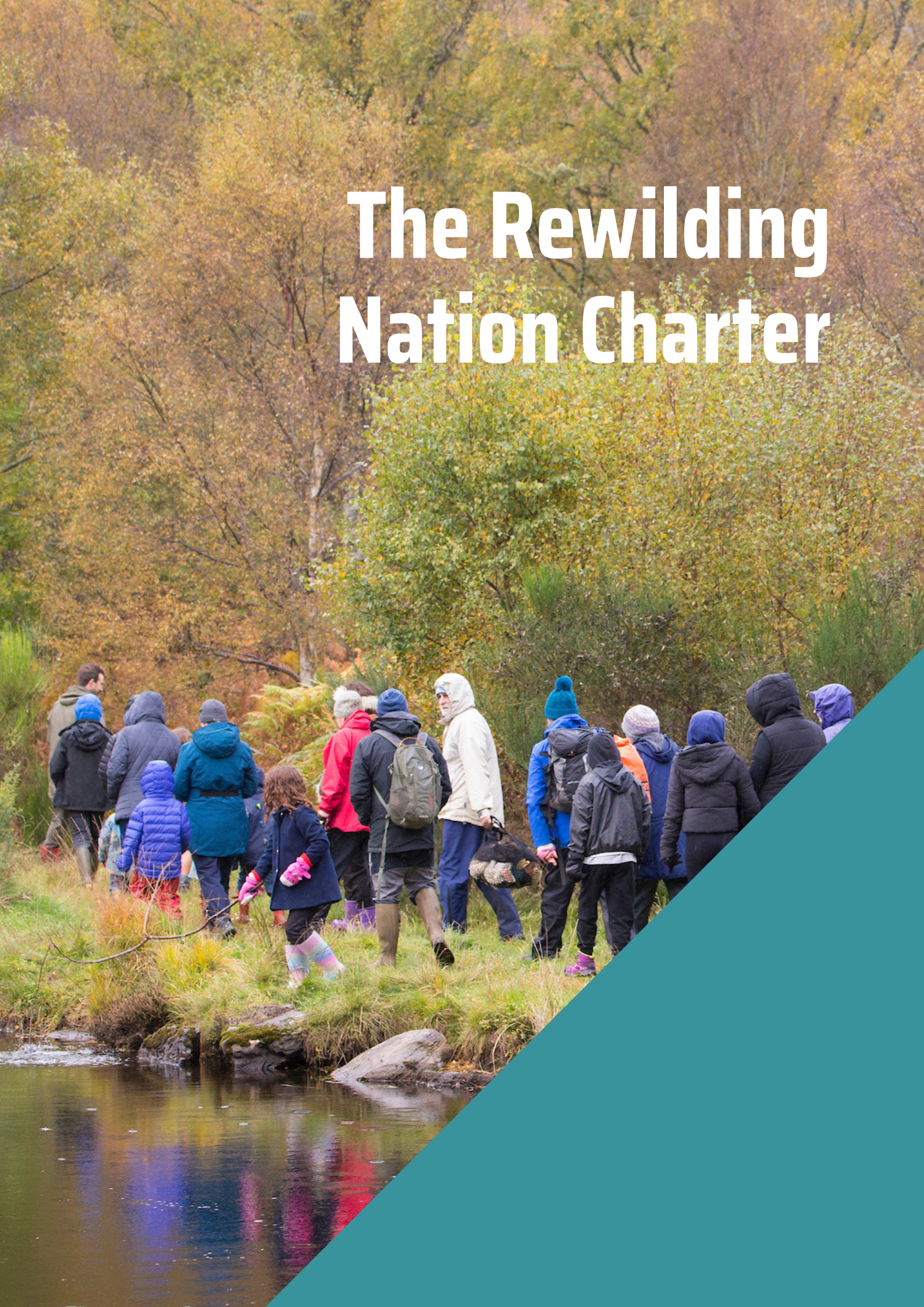
In the face of the intensifying nature and climate crises, rewilding offers us a chance to reverse this pattern of destruction and decline. Large-scale ecosystem restoration can help us cope with the effects of climate breakdown and fight back against biodiversity loss. The UN General Assembly has declared 2021-30 the Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, which aims at uniting "the world behind a common goal of preventing, halting, and reversing the degradation of ecosystems worldwide". [3] There is a growing evidence base that rewilding can restore biodiversity, deliver ecosystem services and support nature-based economies. [4]

The emerging extinction crisis and escalating climate breakdown require bold action from all sectors of society. Humanity has failed to make sufficient progress in addressing the direct and indirect drivers of biodiversity loss and climate breakdown. But people can make positive change when we act decisively and collectively. As a Rewilding Nation, Scotland could lead the way on large-scale nature recovery, offering hope for tackling the nature and climate emergencies and creating a cascade of benefits for people and communities.

Sign the Charter today if you want Scotland  
to become the world's first **Rewilding Nation**



# The Rewilding Nation Charter





# About the Rewilding Nation Charter

The Rewilding Nation campaign was launched in March 2024. The Scottish Rewilding Alliance is calling on the Scottish Government to declare Scotland a Rewilding Nation, committing 30% of Scotland's land and seas to rewilding principles. We believe that a Rewilding Nation can be achieved fairly and at scale. We are urging everyone who shares our hopes and sense of urgency to make their voices heard by signing the Rewilding Nation Charter.

This document provides supporting evidence for the campaign and Rewilding Nation Charter. The Charter can be found at [rewild.scot/charter](https://rewild.scot/charter).

## Rewilding Nation Charter

### **1 Rewilding to Restore Nature**

Nature underpins the food we eat, the air we breathe and the water we drink, but nature cannot continue supplying these life-giving services in the face of unrelenting exploitation. Rewilding offers our best hope of restoring health to the natural world we all depend on.

### **2 Rewilding Ourselves**

Nature is at its best when it is wild and unpredictable – an endless source of surprise, joy and wonder. If we want to enjoy all the fruits of nature's dynamism, let's learn to embrace more uncertainty, support coexistence with wildlife and make more space for wildness in our day-to-day lives.

### **3 Rewilding for People**

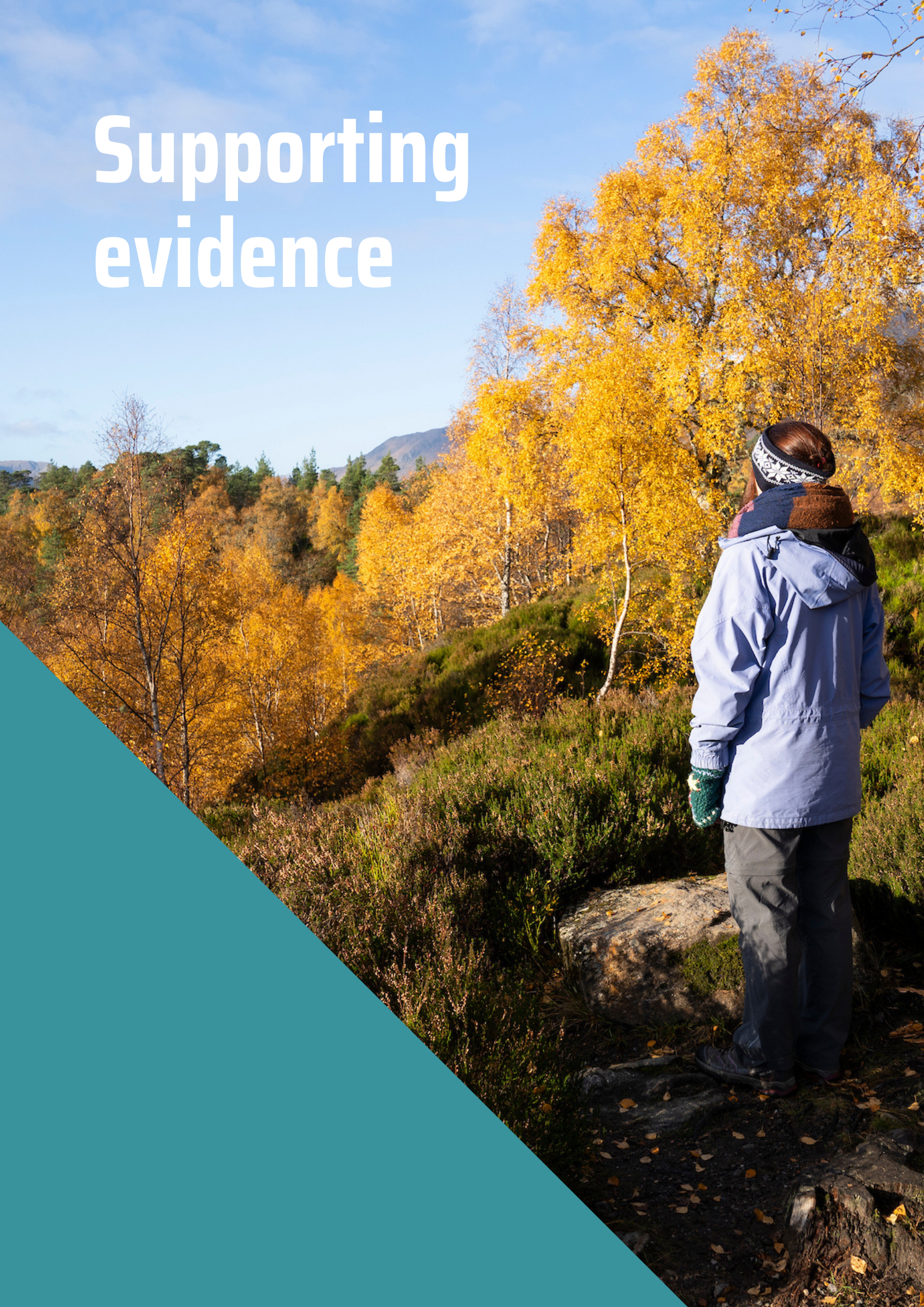
Business as usual is no longer an option. Changing how we do things is now essential, but everyone needs to be included in that change. So we invite people from all walks of life to join Scotland's inspirational rewilding journey. Working together, we can create a greener, fairer Rewilding Nation we can all be proud of.

### **4 Rewilding at Scale**

Rewilding can reconnect and expand our scattered fragments of remaining nature – reversing biodiversity loss in these small and isolated pockets. Crucially, rewilding at scale would restore landscape-level connectivity, allowing wildlife to flourish and helping us tackle climate breakdown.



# Supporting evidence





# Defining rewilding

The Rewilding Task Force of the IUCN's Commission on Ecosystem Management has been developing a global definition and guiding principles for rewilding. [5] A survey of rewilding experts produced a unifying definition and 10 guiding principles for rewilding. [6] This highlighted that rewilding is a spectrum of scale, connectivity and human influence that aims to restore nature to the point where it can sustain itself.

The James Hutton Institute has produced a definition of rewilding for Scotland's public sector [7] which is as follows:

*Rewilding means enabling nature's recovery, whilst reflecting and respecting Scotland's society and heritage, to achieve more resilient and autonomous ecosystems.*

*Rewilding is part of a set of terms and approaches to landscape and nature management; it differs from other approaches in seeking to enable natural processes which eventually require relatively little management by humans.*

*As with all landscape management, rewilding should be achieved by processes that engage and ideally benefit local communities, in line with Scotland's Land Rights and Responsibilities Statement, to support a Just Transition.*

The Scottish Rewilding Alliance welcomed the publication of this definition. We believe that this definition would, however, be improved by consideration of the following:

- Rewilding means giving nature more space in a vast, inter-connected network of flourishing habitats, allowing lost wildlife to return, creating a greater abundance and diversity of life.
- Rewilding asks us all to recognise that we are one species among many, bound together in an intricate web of life that doesn't recognise lines drawn on a map. Our future is tied to the atmosphere, the weather, the tides and every other living creature on the planet.
- Giving nature more freedom to revive dynamic natural processes, such as the free movement of rivers, the regeneration of forests and peatlands, natural grazing and predation, is an investment in the living systems we all rely on.
- Rewilding land and seascapes can create jobs, revitalise communities and improve health and wellbeing.
- Rewilding offers people the opportunity to take action to tackle the nature and climate emergencies, through governance, involvement in land use decisions, volunteering and other forms of participation.

# Incorporating rewilding into policy frameworks

Rewilding is already happening all around Scotland. There are over 150 rewilding projects in Scotland, from the very large to the very small. They include large private estates, small private landholdings, farms, crofts, community owned landholdings and third sector landholdings. Rewilding is happening through the efforts of individuals, charities, public sector bodies and community groups.

Rewilding in Scotland is popular. [8] The vast majority of people in Scotland would like to see large areas become wilder. The following section outlines the opportunities for Scotland should it choose to rewild.

But despite growing global praise for Scotland's rewilding progress, we are one of the world's most nature-depleted countries. We estimate that around 2% of Scotland's land and a negligible amount of Scotland's seas are currently managed for rewilding.

Around a third of the total rewilding area in Scotland is made up of land managed through landowner clusters or collaborative partnerships, just under a third is owned by charities and about a quarter by private individuals or companies. Many of those who have chosen to rewild, whether they are community groups, private individuals or charities, do so despite a lack of coherent support and funding from the government.

If we want to see a Scotland rich in wildlife and full of vibrant communities, we need to enable more people to make the choice to rewild. Ensuring that public grants, subsidies and advice services are set up to enable this choice is essential.

We also need to connect up these fragments into larger rewilding areas and enable the return of missing species. This larger-scale land use planning can only be brought about through leadership and support from government. Currently, no government policy or framework embraces rewilding principles. [9] An independent report recently published by the New Economics Foundation for the Scottish Government pointed out rewilding "could be incorporated further into [Scottish Government] policy and potentially offers a better benefit-cost ratio to more active forms of restoration." [10]

Policy areas such as the Nature Networks and 30x30 initiatives and the Scottish Government's Net Zero targets could improve their ability to achieve their aims through incorporating rewilding principles into their work. Current and planned legislation should also incorporate rewilding principles wherever possible.



# Opportunities for Scotland

30% of Scotland's land and seas committed to rewilding principles would have a myriad of benefits for both people and nature. Some of these potential benefits are outlined in this section.

## **Rural communities**

Much of rural Scotland faces a rural depopulation crisis that will deepen in the absence of intervention. [11] Economic opportunities in rural areas are threatened by the climate and nature emergencies. Rewilding offers new opportunities and could help anchor populations while attracting new people to areas. Initiatives such as Abriachan Forest Trust balance managing the land for nature with the creation of employment opportunities. [12] Ecological restoration carried out by the Mull and Iona Community Trust is interlinked with the provision of tangible community benefits. [13]

## **Young people**

Young people face an uncertain future. The worsening environmental crisis will harm their physical and mental health, but also damage other areas of their lives. This is especially true for young people from low income households, young people from ethnic minority groups and disabled young people. [14] Rewilding can offer opportunities for young people to take action on some of the crises facing their generation. SCOTLAND: The Big Picture's network of NextGen rewilders developed a series of films about rewilding. [15] Scaling up the number of rewilding projects could offer more opportunities for young people across Scotland to be involved in practical rewilding efforts.

## **Urban communities**

Those living in urban areas, especially in communities experiencing deprivation, often suffer from a disconnection to wilder nature that has consequences for mental and physical wellbeing. The opportunity to visit and participate in rewilding can improve health outcomes. In Aberdeen, a move from managing greenspace for order and tidiness towards managing greenspace for nature has transformed areas such as St Fittick's Park. [16] This much loved park is now the centre of a fiercely fought campaign to defend its existence for the benefit of people and nature. [17]

## **Gaelic culture**

The Gaelic concept of dùthchas stresses the responsibility to look after your homeland as well as your right to be there and belong to it. [18] Scotland, now one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world, has much to re-learn from its history. The incorporation of Gaelic into the visitor centre at Dundreggan and the work of Trees for Life has demonstrated how nature and heritage can uplift each other. [19] Environmental renewal and cultural renewal can go hand in hand.

## **Resilience**

Continued climate breakdown will bring with it more unpredictable weather and an increased risk of flooding. [20] Research suggests that rising temperatures through climate heating are causing climate zones across the northern hemisphere to move northwards, and upwards in elevation, at an unprecedented rate. [21] Enhancing the scale, quality and connectedness of our native habitats would enable more species and communities to adapt and adjust their range, saving them from species decline or extinction. Flooding is already a significant risk in Scotland, affecting homes, communities and businesses. [22] Rewilding interventions around rivers can mitigate against this risk. For example, reconnecting rivers with their floodplains and reducing flow variability can provide natural flood management benefits. [23]

## **Net zero**

Rewilding could help the Scottish Government achieve its net zero target through its contributions to carbon sequestration and emissions reduction, alongside improving the resilience of existing ecosystems and providing wider benefits for people and nature. [24] In order to reach net zero emissions, we need to remove and store excess carbon already in the atmosphere. Rewilding pulls carbon out of the air and stores it in trees [25], peat [26], kelp [27], seagrass [28] and other habitats.

## **Agriculture**

The vast majority of land in Scotland is agricultural land, owned or tenanted by farmers and crofters. Food production depends on a healthy environment. Supporting farmers and crofters to adapt to a changing climate, access knowledge and skills and invest in farming practices that support natural processes is essential. Actively managing more land for nature is compatible with Scotland's need to produce food in a way that is just and sustainable.

Some agricultural landholdings will find a balance on their own land. Bamff Wildland in Perthshire will continue to produce high quality food while putting nature back in charge of the land. [29] Argaty in Stirlingshire balances food production with a commitment to wilder nature that has seen them reintroduce beavers. [30]

Other landholdings would benefit from the mass restoration of nature, as their actions to farm more sustainably on their land help mend ecosystems on a larger scale. A recent NatureScot review of barriers and opportunities to large scale nature restoration and rewilding projects concluded that “by re-establishing functioning ecosystems, large-scale nature restoration can ensure long-term productivity of the land and should support resilient food production for the long-term.” [31]

## **Coastal and island communities**

Scotland’s seas could support far more wild flora and fauna than they currently do. Scotland could be a trailblazer when it comes to marine rewilding that involves or is led by communities. The work of initiatives such as Seawilding [32] and the Community of Arran Seabed Trust (COAST) [33] have shone a light on how marine restoration can be achieved equitably and with the support of local people.

## **Social capital**

Rewilding initiatives that are led by communities, include communities in their governance or that seek to include communities in their work could help build social capital. The Natural Capital Laboratory set up by AECOM, the Lifescape Project, the University of Cumbria and the landowners collaboratively researches how to measure and monitor rewilding. The project outputs will include assessing the project over five years to quantify impacts for both nature and people. [34]

## **Wellbeing**

Scotland’s world leading land access legislation confers responsibilities as well as rights on landowners, including rewilders. The opportunity to explore wilder nature is fundamental to the success of rewilding in Scotland. As places become wilder and more hospitable to nature, they may become more challenging to traverse - but the benefits they offer for physical and mental wellbeing will also increase. Mar Lodge in the Cairngorms National Park began its journey of enabling the regeneration of native woodlands over 2 decades ago. [35] Tens of thousands of people each year visit to enjoy the recovering landscape.



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# Acknowledgements

The Scottish Rewilding Alliance thanks the 11th World Wilderness Congress for its initial Global Charter for Rewilding the Earth. You can read the original Global Charter for Rewilding the Earth at [wild11.org/charter/](http://wild11.org/charter/). It was launched in April 2020 and endorsed by over 100 organisations from across the world, representing a network of +3500 partners covering local communities, landowners, Indigenous Peoples, communities, land trusts, multinational development banks, private banks, NGOs, philanthropists, agencies, corporations, international organisations, and research institutions. The endorsing group also covers some of the world's largest ecosystem conservation and restoration initiatives.

Rewilding initiatives and supporters in Scotland endorsed the Global Charter and continue to support it. We are glad to be part of a global rewilding movement.