

PATHWAY TO A REWILDING NATION

Our manifesto for the
2026 Holyrood
elections



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.

SUMMARY

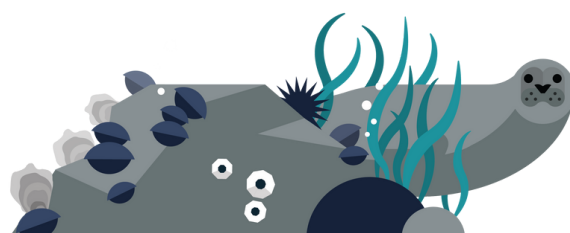
Our land and seas support fewer people and less nature than they once did - and could again. We believe a wilder Scotland is a fairer, healthier, and more hopeful Scotland. By restoring natural processes, recovering native species, and reconnecting people with land and sea, we can become a Rewilding Nation.

2021 - 2030 is the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration. This is Scotland's opportunity to declare itself the world's first Rewilding Nation, committing to nature recovery across 30% of land and seas – for nature, climate and people. Thousands of people and organisations have already signed the Rewilding Nation Charter, calling on Scotland to set a global example in nature recovery.

But this would be just the beginning. To make it happen, we need a Scottish Government committed to restoring our natural environment through groundbreaking legislation, sustainable funding and a clear vision for the nation.

A vision of a country that once again teems with life, our hills and glens richly draped in a patchwork of native woodlands and healthy peatlands. We want to see wetlands thrumming with life, storing water and locking up carbon; to see grasslands bursting with flowers and ringing 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.

This manifesto sets out key steps that we need the next Scottish Government to take. We're calling on all political parties to support the Rewilding Nation vision.



KEY STEPS



1	REWILDING THE GOVERNMENT	Create a strong framework for rewilding across all levels of government, by introducing legislation and funding that support rewilding.
2	REWILDING AT SCALE	Upscale rewilding across Scotland's landscapes and seascapes, restoring ecosystems and creating opportunities for local communities.
3	COEXISTING WITH WILDLIFE	Ensure policy, legislation and public bodies support coexistence with wildlife and create robust procedures and funding for reintroducing missing native species.
4	RESTORING OUR LAND	Reduce pressure on and damage to ecosystems on land, create funding routes for restoration and support land managers transition to rewilding approaches.
5	RESTORING OUR SEAS	Protect and restore 30% of Scotland's seas so that natural processes recover, ensuring that communities are actively involved.
6	ECONOMY AND SKILLS	Make nature restoration a core part of Scotland's economic strategy and workforce development.
7	COMMUNITY AND CONNECTION	Strengthen the bond between people and nature by ensuring that everyone can connect with, and benefit from, wilder nature throughout their lives.

WHY REWILD?

Rewilding is already happening across Scotland, with nearly 200 projects of varying scale and scope. These include private estates, farms, crofts, community-owned land and sites managed by charities and public bodies.

But despite growing global praise for Scotland's rewilding progress, we remain one of the world's most nature-depleted countries. We estimate that around 2.5% of Scotland's land and less than 1% of Scotland's seas are currently managed on rewilding principles.

80% OF SCOTTISH PEOPLE
WANT THEIR GOVERNMENT
TO SUPPORT REWILDING



Polling shows that 80% of people in Scotland think the Scottish Government should have policies in place to support rewilding. If we want to see a Scotland where large areas become wilder, with missing species returning and communities thriving alongside nature, we need to help more people make the choice to rewild. Putting in place policy, legislation and funding to support this is critical.

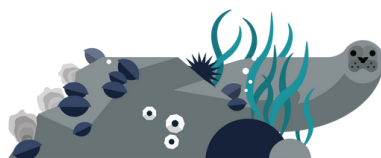
A MESSAGE FOR SCOTLAND'S NEXT GOVERNMENT

The Pathway to a Rewilding Nation is a bold, joined-up policy agenda to guide Scotland towards a greener, fairer future. Most people across the country want a government that puts nature's recovery at the heart of its mission – because our future depends on it.

If you can take three steps for a wilder, healthier Scotland next session, make them these:



Reform rural subsidies to incentivise rewilding, supporting people to integrate large-scale nature restoration into land management.



Ban destructive practices in Marine Protected Areas and empower communities to lead restoration, kickstarting the recovery of marine habitats.



Support a managed lynx reintroduction, following established processes for local consultation around species reintroductions.

1 REWILDING THE GOVERNMENT



Scotland needs a government that works with nature – not against it.

Across Scotland, vital natural processes are broken. We know Scotland can work together to create a Rewilding Nation. But the government has a critical role to play – it must embed ecological restoration into every level of decision-making, from national legislation to local planning.

Introduce a Rewilding Nation Bill to create a plan for how Scotland can achieve 30% of land and sea rewilding – delivering major benefits for people, nature and climate. By setting out a clear, just framework for how 30% of Scotland's land and sea can be managed for rewilding, the Scottish Government can begin to plan for and champion the many benefits of rewilding. This legislation would provide much-needed guidance for communities, land managers, public bodies and businesses who wish to contribute to rewilding but currently lack a clear framework for doing so. It would ensure Scotland meets its national and global commitments on nature and climate. Target 2 of the Global Biodiversity Framework says that 30% of degraded ecosystems should be restored by 2030, sitting alongside a separate target to conserve 30% of land, waters and seas. It would also ensure an evidence-led and fair approach to rewilding.

Support local authorities to produce Ecology Strategies and create Nature Networks that are ecological corridors. This would make it easier to identify, restore and protect key ecological corridors – the habitats and stepping stones that connect wild spaces together, allow natural processes to flow and give wildlife the space to move and adapt. These local strategies and networks would help build resilient ecosystems and support community action at the grassroots.

Establish national and local spatial plans for land and sea that encompass rewilding. Coordinated spatial planning would help align land and marine use decisions with ecological restoration, ensuring decisions are joined-up, climate-ready and informed by nature. Recognising and harnessing the connection between land and sea is also critical.

Include ecological restoration areas in the next National Planning Framework. Including ecological restoration areas would embed rewilding priorities in Scotland's planning system, ensuring that development and infrastructure better support nature recovery.

Create a funding and financing system that values and invests in nature. Reforming public finance to value ecosystem services and support nature-positive investment is essential to delivering long-term restoration goals. Nature restoration schemes on land and at sea require secure, reliable multi-year funding.

Ensure public bodies have a duty to restore nature. Embedding a legal duty to restore nature across all public bodies will turn ambition into action, making nature recovery a shared responsibility.

2 REWILDING AT SCALE



Imagine a Scotland where nature flows free.

Rewilding at scale means fixing natural processes across our land and sea – rewriggling rivers, expanding forests, reawakening our coasts and connecting up fragmented habitats. We need a systems approach to restoring Scotland's land and sea.

Make nature recovery the primary purpose of our protected landscapes and seascapes to restore ecosystems, tackle climate breakdown and support local economies. This would unlock the potential of these areas to act as carbon sinks and biodiversity hotspots, while ensuring they can become hubs for sustainable rural businesses and nature-based tourism.

Establish at least two national parks, including a marine national park, with nature recovery as the primary purpose. New national parks focused on ecological restoration will set a bold standard for protecting land and sea, helping wildlife thrive and communities flourish.

Establish Wild Zones around our coastline and rivers. Wild Zones would protect vital transition habitats and buffer areas, allowing ecosystems to recover and species to migrate naturally in response to climate impacts.

Ensure new '30 by 30' sites are restoring natural processes. To deliver true nature recovery, terrestrial sites should focus on restoring natural processes like hydrology, mixed grazing and predator-prey dynamics, enabling self-sustaining ecosystems. At sea, Marine Protected Areas should be protected from destructive fishing and managed on a whole-site basis to kickstart natural processes.

Ensure public funding promotes nature-friendly farming and forestry as well as catalysing rewilding at scale. Targeted public funding can support land managers, including farmers, crofters and foresters, to shift towards nature-based systems while enabling large-scale rewilding that delivers climate and biodiversity benefits.



Rewilding could help the Scottish Government achieve its net zero target through its contributions to carbon sequestration and emissions reduction. It would also improve the resilience of existing ecosystems and provide wider benefits for people and nature. 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, peat, kelp, seagrass and other habitats.

3 COEXISTING WITH WILDLIFE



We can share our future with wildlife – and prosper together.

By welcoming wildlife back, we can build stronger ecosystems and stronger communities, thriving together. We need clear structures and support to make this vision a reality.

Set national targets for habitat restoration as well as species abundance and diversity. Clear national targets create accountability and ambition, helping ensure policies deliver real improvements in biodiversity and ecosystem health.

Create a Wildlife Coexistence Fund. Unlike other countries with world-leading reintroduction and conservation programmes, Scotland does not have a fund to support positive coexistence with wildlife. Introducing a funding mechanism for this would improve human-wildlife relations for the future.

Champion the expansion of beaver populations in line with Scotland's Beaver Strategy. Beavers are ecosystem engineers whose presence boosts biodiversity, improves water quality and mitigates flooding; their expansion is vital for healthy landscapes.

Streamline legislation for vital reintroductions of missing native species to help rebuild healthy ecosystems. Simplifying regulatory processes will enable reintroductions of keystone species to proceed efficiently and with confidence.

Begin work on a managed lynx reintroduction, carried out in close collaboration with key stakeholders and local communities. Bringing the lynx back to Scotland could support ecological balance and ecotourism benefits, but must be community-led and evidence-based.

Ensure coexistence with wildlife is mainstreamed across government policies and public bodies. Embedding coexistence in policy ensures that housing, transport, farming and infrastructure can adapt to support biodiversity and reduce conflict.



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. 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 have demonstrated how environmental renewal and cultural renewal can go hand in hand.

4 RESTORING OUR LAND



Healing our land will secure our future.

By restoring Scotland's land we can create a future with cleaner water, richer soil, thriving wildlife and resilient communities.

Ensure the sustainable management of deer numbers so habitats can regenerate. Unchecked deer populations prevent woodland regeneration and degrade habitats; sustainable management is essential for recovery. We support the introduction of a funded National Deer Management Programme, community deer stalking programmes and the mainstreaming of wild venison in diets.

Support land managers to expand riparian restoration and Natural Flood Management. By making better use of rural subsidies, land managers can be supported to introduce measures that help slow water, prevent floods, improve water quality and provide habitats for wildlife.

Ensure large businesses who make use of our land and sea are required to fund ecosystem restoration. Those who profit from Scotland's natural resources should contribute to restoring them, ensuring a fairer and more effective recovery.

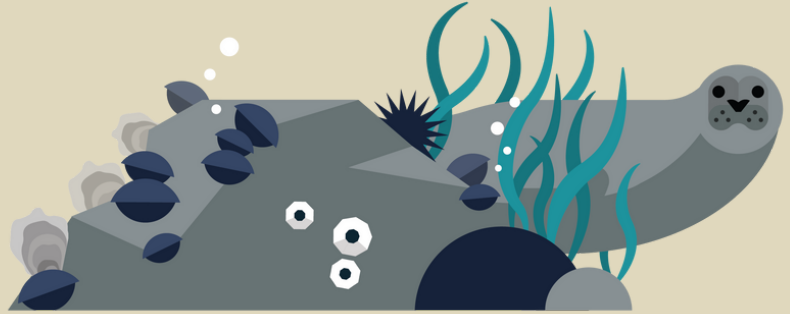
Require and incentivise cities and towns to integrate urban rewilding into their plans. Urban rewilding carried out at scale improves air quality, wellbeing and biodiversity, and should be a core part of local development and regeneration.

Double native woodland cover, with natural regeneration as the default approach. Doubling native woodland will store carbon, create habitat and reduce flooding. Natural regeneration is more resilient and cost-effective, and should be the default approach. Reforming forestry subsidies to reflect the need for wild, biodiverse and natural woodlands would encourage more natural regeneration.

Phase out commercial peat extraction nationwide and restore peatlands at pace. Peatlands are carbon stores and biodiversity hotspots. Ending commercial extraction and restoring degraded sites is crucial for nature and climate.

Remove planning barriers holding back rewilding. Cutting rewilding red tape will enable landowners, communities and organisations to deliver nature restoration more effectively and at scale. Creating ponds and wetlands – vital for nature and climate – should be a priority.

5 RESTORING OUR SEAS



Healthy seas mean healthy communities.

Years of delay and indecision have left Scotland's seas in a sorry state. Despite Scotland being home to a trailblazing No Take Zone established in 2008, our vital marine habitats have been allowed to decline and degrade. A wilder, fairer future is possible.

Immediately restrict bottom trawling and dredging across Marine Protected Areas. Stopping destructive practices within MPAs is a critical first step to allow marine ecosystems to recover and biodiversity to return.

Introduce whole-site protection of Marine Protected Areas. Managing MPAs as a whole site rather than for specific habitats or species will also catalyse nature recovery.

Integrate blue carbon stores into the Marine Protected Area Network. This will protect the flow of carbon capture and storage in Scotland's seas.

Establish an inshore recovery zone, to support sustainable fishing methods. Protecting inshore waters from damaging practices would support the recovery of fish stocks and coastal economies.

Support ambitious projects to restore carbon-rich habitats such as saltmarshes, seagrass, sea kelp and oyster beds. Restoring these habitats boosts marine biodiversity, locks up carbon and protects coastlines from erosion and sea-level rise.

Reform licensing processes for active marine restoration, incentivising seascape-scale restoration. Simplifying and supporting the licensing system would allow marine restoration projects to grow and innovate.

Develop community governance of Marine Protected Areas. Local governance increases accountability, builds trust and ensures that MPAs work for both people and wildlife.

Ensure marine planning supports the scaling up of rewilding and the prioritisation of nature recovery. Marine planning should drive positive action, making space for restoration and protecting marine ecosystems at scale.

6 ECONOMY AND SKILLS



Growing Scotland's future - with nature at the heart.

Investing in ecological skills, supporting nature-based businesses and putting rewilding at the heart of Scotland's economic strategy will transform Scotland's future.

Incentivise nature-based economies and jobs as part of a just, green transition. Nature-based jobs can drive economic renewal in rural and coastal areas while tackling climate and nature emergencies.

Establish 'nature-based enterprise zones' with business development support. These zones can support start-ups and social enterprises working in nature restoration, creating jobs and community benefit.

Develop a skilled green workforce. Training and upskilling people across Scotland in land and marine restoration will ensure our country has the capacity to deliver rewilding ambitions.

Ensure that the restoration of nature is a key pillar of Scotland's economic strategy. Making nature central to economic planning will futureproof the economy and align prosperity with planetary health.



© James Shooter

Much of rural Scotland faces a rural depopulation crisis that will deepen in the absence of intervention. 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.

Food production depends on a healthy environment. Supporting farmers and crofters to adapt to a changing climate and farm in ways that support natural processes is essential. Managing more land for nature aligns with Scotland's need to produce food in a just and sustainable way. Some will find this balance on their own land, like Argaty in Stirlingshire, a sheep and beef farm that has set aside less productive ground for nature – including reintroduced beavers that draw paying visitors.



© SCOTLAND: The Big Picture

7 COMMUNITY AND CONNECTION



Nature belongs to all of us.

Fostering a strong connection between people and nature, while ensuring that people benefit fairly from nature's return, will grow a greener Scotland – where nature and people thrive together.

Support a Right to Access Wild Nature and put in place solutions, including public transport, to deliver this. Access to nature is essential for health and wellbeing; public transport and infrastructure are key to ensuring it is inclusive and fair.

Enhance community participation in decision making processes and improve community benefit-sharing and ownership mechanisms. More democratic decision-making ensures rewilding benefits are shared and projects have strong, lasting local support.

Clarify crofter and tenant rights for carbon and biodiversity so they share benefits from nature restoration. Clear rights would empower crofters and tenants to engage in nature recovery and benefit from carbon markets and ecosystem services.

Support a Right to a Healthy Environment, establishing a human right to healthy ecosystems and a stable climate. This would protect people's rights through environmental law and ensure policy upholds the health of ecosystems.

Develop green prescriptions and connection with nature in recovery pathways. Nature is proven to support mental and physical health; green prescriptions can be an effective and low-cost part of healthcare.

Reform the Curriculum for Excellence to ensure children can learn outdoors and connect with nature. Outdoor learning fosters connection, understanding and care for nature. This is key to creating future custodians of the natural world.



People living in urban areas, especially in communities experiencing deprivation, can suffer from a disconnection to wilder nature that impacts their mental and physical wellbeing. The chance to visit and take part in rewilding can improve health outcomes. In Aberdeen, a move from managing greenspace for order and tidiness towards managing it for nature has transformed areas like St Fittick's Park. This much loved park is now the centre of a fiercely fought campaign to defend its existence for the benefit of people and nature.

REWILDING NATION CHARTER

The Scottish Rewilding Alliance is calling on the Scottish Government to declare Scotland a Rewilding Nation, committing to help 30% of Scotland's land and seas to be managed for rewilding. 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 at rewild.scot/charter.

ABOUT US

The Scottish Rewilding Alliance is a coalition of organisations that share a mission of enabling rewilding at a scale new to Scotland. Our members include environmental charities, community groups, farmers, small landowners and larger estates.

Since our launch in 2019, we have reached out beyond the rewilding movement to make links with others who care about how land and sea is managed for nature, climate and people in Scotland. We have urged the government to support rewilding. Our vision of rewilding has people and communities at its heart.

Find out more at rewild.scot

OUR APPROACH

We are committed to a holistic approach to rewilding that recognises the interdependencies between ecosystems, economics and communities. We developed our Pathway to a Rewilding Nation based on work with our members and rewilders across Scotland. We have commissioned stakeholder research on our policy proposals which will provide greater insights into how they can be delivered in the 2026 – 31 parliamentary session.

Estimated costs for our proposals are available on request.



Continued climate breakdown will bring with it more unpredictable weather and an increased risk of flooding. Research suggests that rising temperatures through climate heating are causing climate zones to move northwards at an unprecedented rate. 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. Rewilding interventions around rivers can mitigate against this risk. For example, reconnecting rivers with their floodplains can provide natural flood management benefits.

ABOUT OUR ILLUSTRATIONS

All the illustrations for our Pathway to a Rewilding Nation were produced by Ed Harrison.



**THE SCOTTISH
REWILDING ALLIANCE**