

REWILDING

A GUIDE FOR COMMUNITY GROUPS



Authored by:
Anna Lawrence
Charlotte Maddix



**THE SCOTTISH
REWILDING ALLIANCE**

More than
anything else, rewilding
means hope. Hope for a
liveable future. Hope that
the world can be wilder.
Hope that, together,
we can restore nature
– and ourselves.





FOREWORD

The desire to restore nature or rewild is shared by many people across Scotland.

For many community groups, nature restoration and promoting biodiversity are very important. That might involve hands-on rewilding, persuading others to rewild, or taking part in actions that support rewilding (like citizen science). Coastal communities in Scotland also have a growing voice and involvement in restoring local marine ecosystems.

There are no quick fixes to the nature and climate emergencies – but empowering people to work together to tackle these crises increases community capacity to deal with the challenges we face, and brings a whole cascade of benefits from health and wellbeing to nature-based jobs to reduced flooding and wildfires.

We were inspired to produce this guide because of the growing number of community groups who find that rewilding is part of their work. We want to share a snapshot of the amazing work taking place to restore Scotland's ecosystems, share tips for people wanting to take similar action and provide links to resources for community groups. We also want to make sure that how communities can contribute to rewilding or large-scale ecosystem recovery is in the spotlight.

As you read this guide, you'll see the different things that rewilding means to different community groups. More than anything else, rewilding means hope. Hope for a liveable future. Hope that the world can be wilder. Hope that, together, we can restore nature – and ourselves.



Karen Blackport and Steve Micklewright
Co-Convenors
Scottish Rewilding Alliance





By being a voice
for wilder nature,
communities can help
to enable rewilding
in their area.



WELCOME TO THIS GUIDE

This guide is for anyone in Scotland interested in rewilding alongside others in your community. You might be thinking of forming a community group to work with others to rewild local areas. You might be part of a community group and interested in how rewilding could be relevant to your existing or future activities.

From those working to restore and connect urban nature sites or return oysters to their local loch, to those taking on the restoration of thousands of hectares of degraded moorland, people across Scotland are creating a more nature-rich future.

What starts in a smaller local area can grow, both through increasing awareness of what's possible, and through connecting sites with corridors. By being a voice for wilder nature, communities can help enable rewilding in their area. And by working alongside other groups or organisations, like the Scotland-wide Northwoods Rewilding Network or initiatives like the Black Hills Regeneration Project, communities can be part of large-scale ecological restoration. At sea, large scale rewilding provides opportunities for communities to directly restore ecosystems at scale.

Every community is unique. Rewilding, too, will look different for different groups of people and in different places. This guide is based on the experiences of real communities who have shared their stories and their top tips for others. This guide explores how these groups can contribute to large-scale nature restoration through their own work.



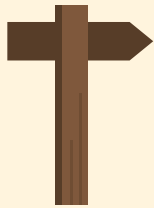


Rewilding
asks us to take bold,
transformative steps
to restore nature to
the point where it can
begin to care for itself
– and us – again.

CONTENTS



P09 GETTING STARTED



There are many different ways to start a community rewilding project. You will need a group, agreement about what you want to do, a place you can make a difference, ideas for what you want to do, access to ecological know-how and a way to track progress. Lots of inspiration and support is available in Scotland.

P13 CONNECTING AND ORGANISING



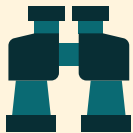
Think about who your community is. Even if you start with an informal group, as you grow, you might need to create a formal organisation. There are different models you can choose and different challenges you will face.

P25 WORKING ON LAND AND AT SEA



Different groups will have different approaches to making rewilding happen on land and at sea. Whatever route you choose, there is advice available.

P31 COMMUNICATING AND INVOLVING




Your work will need to involve the wider community at times. There are different ways to do this – and it's called different things! – but the most important thing is to make sure everyone has a chance to be included.

P45 REWILDING YOUR PLACE



Rewilding is about helping kickstart natural processes on land and at sea. It can involve working with the unknown. Get to know your place, access knowledge and support – and take action to restore nature.



Put simply,
rewilding is any
activity that aims
to restore natural
processes.

ABOUT REWILDING

What is rewilding?

Put simply, rewilding is any activity that aims to restore natural processes.

Natural processes are the interactions that shape our planet and support life. Natural processes can happen on a large scale, such as the movement of a flowing river or soil forming. They can also happen on a small scale, like a bee or a butterfly pollinating the flowers in your garden. The weather, geological processes, chemical processes and the interaction of different species can all drive natural processes. Predators like eagles or wildcats influence the numbers and behaviour of other species, while species like beavers or maerl (coral) change the land and sea around them.

A healthy ecosystem is one where natural processes are working properly.

Across Scotland, natural processes have been interrupted, damaged or halted. If you can restore these natural processes, nature can begin to restore itself. By creating healthy ecosystems and living in balance with nature, you create benefits for humans too. We all rely on nature for water, food and air as well as our own health and wellbeing. Rewilding asks us to take bold, transformative steps to restore nature to the point where it can begin to take care of itself – and us – again.



What does rewilding look like?



Rewilding Britain has produced a Rewilding Journeys document, which defines five levels of rewilding, from 'Restoration activities kickstart recovery' to 'Nature takes care of itself, with natural processes restored.' Communities have an essential role in each level.

Rewilding activities might include:

- ★ Protecting, expanding and connecting natural woodland
- ★ Reducing grazing pressure to help trees grow
- ★ Removing fishing pressure on marine habitats
- ★ Restoring wetlands, including through beaver reintroduction
- ★ Helping to bring back missing species to restore missing processes
- ★ Planting seagrass or restoring oysters to repair marine ecosystems
- ★ Restoring the free movement of rivers, through removing dams or reconnecting them with floodplains
- ★ Connecting up local habitats, allowing wildlife to move more freely
- ★ Allocating larger areas for nature
- ★ Creating smaller wildlife-friendly areas and joining them up



www.rewildingbritain.org.uk | Search 'Rewilding Journeys'

Principles for rewilding

SCOTLAND: The Big Picture's project Northwoods Rewilding Network has set out nine principles for rewilding that are specific to Scotland (The "Northwoods Nine").



www.scotlandbigpicture.com | Search 'The Northwoods Nine'

WHAT DO COMMUNITIES THINK ABOUT REWILDING?

For me rewilding is a synonym for nature restoration.

Our name is based on rewilding! The 'wilding' bit is the fun bit. Getting to or getting back, rediscovering the magic of having life around.

I'm very keen to push forward the idea that habitats and humans are very much intertwined. Doesn't matter that we are there, and using the land. That is part of what creates a habitat. You can be using the land and bring back biodiversity.

Restoration, rewilding, recovery, biodiversity: each of those words comes with preconceived notions. We're asking the community first: 'When I say restoration, what do you think?'

We tend to say 'restoring nature' as it's a catch-all that people can understand at any scale.

We do a form of passive restoration, remove pressures and allow the environment to recover. So for us, no preconceived notions of what would happen, we were just letting nature recover. What we have been doing is an ecosystem-based approach to monitoring, not species-specific, but rather focusing on lots of indicators to give you an idea of ecosystem health.



Communities
are good for rewilding.
At the same time,
rewilding is good
for communities.



Why do rewilding and communities need each other?





Humans are a part of nature. Our communities are shaped by the land and sea around us, living alongside plants and animals in interconnected ecosystems. In urban and rural spaces, our actions influence nature, from the way we garden or manage green spaces to the choices we make about how we use natural resources over large areas. Recognising our place in the natural world helps us understand that rewilding is about restoring balance, embracing our role as caretakers of the natural world and making space for animals and plants to thrive alongside us.

A recent study commissioned by Rewilding Britain shows that land reform in Scotland, and a shift towards community ownership, is often associated with changing ideas about how to manage land. 21 examples included in this [study of community ownership and rewilding](#) show objectives which include increasing biodiversity and nature restoration. In cases where communities have managed the land for a sufficient period, species populations have grown, and habitats have improved.

Marine nature restoration efforts across Scotland are showing that healthy ecosystems need engaged communities. Pioneering community-led restoration projects like COAST, Seawilding and others, demonstrate how communities and nature can thrive together on our coasts, while creating new jobs in rural communities.

So communities are good for rewilding. At the same time, rewilding is good for communities. Case studies included here show how rewilding has created employment.

Additional benefits from nature restoration include:

-  flood resilience
-  better health and wellbeing
-  new scientific knowledge about how nature restoration occurs
-  an educational resource and inspiration for schools



The Scottish Land Commission has many additional examples at www.landcommission.gov.scot | Search 'Community Benefits'



WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF REWILDING?

In February, people will start asking you 'when are the skylarks coming back?' Because they absolutely adore hearing the skylarks singing about their heads. We're re-engaging people with the natural world in a safe way.

We get close to 2 metres of rain per year in that area. The rivers run fast and hard, we get flooding... [rewilding is] the right thing to do.

It's like going back into childhood, the air is full of insects. I think it's kept me sane. It's an oasis of optimism.

During covid, people said it was a life saver. It's a 60 hectare site, in the middle of town, which feels much bigger, and at the same time feels safe.

It's a huge educational asset for local schools. We're aiming to realise an educational project for all the schools that back on to the moor.



GETTING STARTED



There are many different ways to start a community rewilding project. You will need a group, agreement about what you want to do, a place you can make a difference, ideas for what you want to do, access to ecological know-how and a way to track progress. Lots of inspiration and support is available in Scotland.

Inspiration and support

There are many different ways to start rewilding as a community.

Among the communities who contributed to this guide, some started with land and then decided to rewild. Others wanted to rewild and had no land, but started surveying the biodiversity and communicating about their local area anyway – and later found their own land. Communities concerned about the seabed have started by campaigning to protect their local area, by influencing politicians or by doing experiments to restore seagrass.

Many community groups start because they perceive a threat in their neighbourhood. This could be a new planning application, or a landowner felling much-loved trees. In Scotland we have rights to access environmental information, take part in environmental decision-making and access justice if laws are broken or decisions hurt the environment.

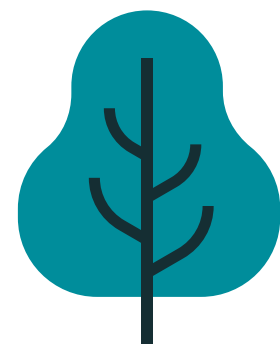
To be most effective, you will need:



- ✓ **A group**
Other people to share the work and create ideas
- ✓ **Broad agreement about what you want to do**
This could be restoring missing species like oysters, increasing the amount of seagrass or natural woodland
- ✓ **A place where you can make a difference**
It could be a shoreline, a river, a green space or a larger area of seabed or land
- ✓ **Ecological know-how (or access to it)**
You will need someone in your group, or in your wider network, who understands how ecosystems work
- ✓ **A way to track your progress**
So you can monitor change over the years

Over time, you may have the opportunity to buy land, or to work with legal experts to define a marine or land reserve. You may need to formalise your organisation. You may need to conduct community consultations, and involve the wider community in steering and making decisions. You might reach a stage where you want to employ people.

All of these activities help to grow and strengthen your influence, and they also require resources: time, energy, expertise and funds.



CASE STUDY:

Ury Riverside Park – Rewilding urban spaces



Ury Riverside Park is a 60 hectare floodplain in the centre of Inverurie. Under community management it has become a space for people and nature – working towards naturally functioning ecosystems and minimal human intervention.

How we got started

We were initially approached by Aberdeenshire Council who had received the land on which the park is situated as part of a planning arrangement for a significant development. Houses couldn't be built there because it's a floodplain. So they asked if we were interested in the biodiversity area. We were just a few interested people. We went to community consultation, using maps of the area, to get an idea from the community of what they would like to see there. We went back to some very basic ideas, and created a plan for a biodiverse park using native species of local provenance.

The council supported the idea of creating a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO) to take on the management of the park, so we're a community charity. Anyone in the local community can be a member. You need to understand the community – all communities are different. To do it well, you need to be part of that community. And to understand the kind of skills you need. We have trustees with skills in biodiversity, parks management, hydrology, finance, geology, community, websites, social media, photography.

Other advice



- The area has to be important for people, otherwise it dies. Engaging with the community is not just about consultation but about going back to them and showing what you've been able to take on board and what you haven't.
- It's a naturally functioning area, it doesn't look like a mown park. Folk have got used to that. The naturally meandering river is changing all the time. We get cyclists, walkers, birdwatchers and fishers; there's a children's play area and a natural play area. You can sit and listen to the skylarks.
- Giant hogweed is one of the big management challenges. It arrived from upriver and is toxic and dangerous to humans. We are experimenting and contributing new knowledge about management of giant hogweed.

Ury Riverside Park was the winner of RSPB Nature of Scotland 2022 Community Initiative Award 2022 and holds a 5-star certificate from Keep Scotland Beautiful.

Further information:



[www.scotlandbigpicture.com/
nrn-partners/ury-riverside-park](http://www.scotlandbigpicture.com/nrn-partners/ury-riverside-park)



www.uryriversidepark.com

Further resources



Northwoods Rewilding Network

A Scotland-wide chain of landholdings convened and coordinated by SCOTLAND: The Big Picture. Its partners 20% of whom are community-run, are all committed to nature recovery and share a vision for an ecologically restored landscape, where habitats are better connected and species can recover, expand and disperse.



www.scotlandbigpicture.com/northwoods

Rewilding Britain's Rewilding Network

Open to rewilding projects across Britain. It helps rewilding practitioners connect and share experiences, ideas and expertise.



www.rewildingbritain.org.uk/rewilding-network

Community Woodlands Association

A membership organisation for community woodlands in Scotland. It provides support for members and any interested people, through its lively annual Conference, monthly Bulletin, quarterly Newsletter, and learning exchange visits. It also offers online and in-person training sessions providing support across a range of themes, including acquiring land, woodland management and community involvement.



www.communitywoods.org

Coastal Communities Network (CCN)

A coalition of community-based groups and organisations committed to the preservation and safeguarding of Scotland's coastal and marine environments. They are supported by the wildlife organisation Fauna & Flora. Together, members of CCN address a wide range of pressing issues, including salmon farming, marine plastic pollution and the restoration of marine habitats. Fauna & Flora supports individual CCN members, assisting them in establishing their operations, developing governance structures, raising independent funds and initiating projects.



www.communitiesforseas.scot

Artist:

I'm an artist. My work is to do with waterways. I thought I would look at the whole river catchment, then I realised that was much too complicated, and I went to the other extreme, this catchment beside my house, 7.5 km². I got together with other artists in the pandemic, I got other people interested. It appeared to have interesting environmental qualities. And through those people I was introduced to an **ecologist**, and at that point things took off in a much more sensible way.

HOW DID WE GET STARTED?

Ecologist:

We were thinking about the whole burn. We thought, why don't we start doing surveys upriver from where it meets the main river, to look at birds, what's in the water, start exploring it and collecting data. We started organising regular community ecological surveys. It was part education, part survey. And then one day this piece of land suddenly came up for sale, and a few months later someone donated the money for our group to buy it.

CONNECTING AND ORGANISING



Think about who your community is. Even if you start with an informal group, as you grow, you might need to create a formal organisation. There are different models you can choose and different challenges you will face.

Who is your community?

Communities may be 'communities of place' – all the people who live in a geographical area. They can also be 'communities of interest' – people who share a common interest or identity, rather than living in the same place. This could include groups with shared cultural, social, or economic interests.

Communities who want to restore nature in an area are always in some way linked to 'place', although that will mean different things to different people. For some, the definition is tightly linked to the people who live in a particular place and call it home. For others, it may be more focused on a particular interest, such as angling or walking, or because their ancestors came from that place, which gives them a strong connection or affection for that place. The examples in this guide illustrate all of these. The River Ericht Catchment Restoration Initiative refers to 'communities of place and interest'. Others talk about the value of living in a place, and having a strong sense of connection to the landscape and its history.

Defining your community helps to define membership criteria. If you're making use of Scottish land reform laws, you'll need to define your community carefully. For Community Right to Buy, communities must be defined geographically, but Asset Transfer is open to communities of interest.

Communities
who want to restore
nature in an area are
always in some way
linked to 'place'.....
that will mean different
things to different
people.



WHO IS OUR COMMUNITY?

Glen Midge is a place-based community, but it's not a rigid definition. It's for anyone who is interested in restoring that habitat in that place. Most of the trustees live locally. And there's another layer of community: academic and scientific bodies that are interested in what we are doing. The support from them has been amazing.

You don't need to define your community, you can just come together. That's how COAST started. It's much wider than the community of place. We have lots of members who love Arran but don't live here full time.

Inverurie has sometimes been described as a dormitory town for Aberdeen. But there's a very strong view that it is a community and town in its own right. There's a lot of people with masses of skills. Which also doesn't hide the fact that a significant part of the town registers on the index of multiple deprivation.

If we do a promotional film it's me because I'm a local voice. That's important. It always has been, especially in conservation work. The big NGOs and the government agencies – they are seen as new colonialists if you like. I don't really believe that but that's how they are perceived.



Forming and growing a community organisation



Many community rewilding projects begin with informal groups, who work together with enthusiasm and vision. Carrifran Wildwood, which is now one of the longest established and highly regarded woodland restoration projects in Scotland, began with fortnightly meetings in a pub in Peebles. The setting didn't distract the group, whose hard work led to the purchase of a 655 hectare valley and planting of three-quarters of a million trees according to a carefully formulated ecological plan.

But in order to own a site, apply for funding, and employ staff, you will need to become a formal organisation.

A range of models are available to communities, and it's worth taking time to choose the one that works for your group. Many community organisations have had to spend time and money changing their constitution or even becoming a different kind of organisation, in order to be eligible for land reform laws, or to qualify as a charity.

In land reform law the organisation is referred to as the Community Body, which can be a Company Limited by Guarantee (CLG), a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO) or a Community Benefit Society (CBS). Guidance on choosing the right model for you is available from The Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO) ([see page 20](#)) or through [Information Notes](#) published by the Community Woodlands.

For example, COAST began as an informal group, and became incorporated with charitable status to employ their first employee. They organised around a core aim of improving the waters around Arran for community environment and economy. Then they worked with the opportunities and mechanisms that arose at the time. There were political opportunities for the No Take Zone and the South Arran Marine Protected Area, with specific politicians willing to move the projects forward.

Moving towards employment is a significant step for a community organisation. COAST and Seawilding have each grown from a small group of volunteers to employing more than five full-time staff. Bright Green Nature has applied successfully for an Awards for All grant from the National Lottery to employ their community outreach person.



For the board,

obviously you should get people from the community but also think about people's skills and knowledge and make sure they are as varied as possible. I think we're in a strong position right now. We have someone who has worked in project management all his life. He is always saying, "Why would you want me to be on the board?" but suddenly we are realising that we hadn't thought about things he's asking pointed questions about: why and where we're going, helping us to start getting our act together, framing the project.

“HOW DID WE SET UP OUR GROUP?”

Getting your purposes right:

We set up a SCIO because of the amount of money that was going to have to go through the bank account to buy the land. But the purposes of the organisation are not tied to the land – we're keen to engage the community throughout the whole catchment.



Governance of community organisations

Community organisations must make decisions in a way that represents the members and meets the objectives of the organisation. This is all part of the advice provided by SCVO ([see page 20](#)). Their pages on [Running your organisation](#) include links to good governance, to ensure that trustees understand their role, and to help recruit, induct and support good trustees. It's important to understand how to run effective meetings, fulfil roles of chair, secretary and treasurer, and deal with any problems that arise. SCVO also offers templates and tools to help you implement good governance practices.

Many of the case studies in this guidance highlight the need to have a good range of skills on the board, and typically this means including people with financial skills, technical and ecological skills. They also highlight the frequency with which these skills are already found in the community.

CASE STUDY:

Seawilding



The award-winning charity, Seawilding, is the UK's first community-led native oyster and seagrass restoration project. Their aim is to restore lost biodiversity, sequester carbon, create green jobs and mentor other community-based groups to do the same. They do this by restoring degraded inshore marine habitats, especially native oyster beds.

How we grew our group

At first, a community group called Cromach campaigned to stop dredging in Loch Craignish. One of our friends got really taken by oysters, and he started growing them, then decided to start a charity to deliver full-scale oyster restoration.

You go from being a group with very little admin, you get together every couple of months, it's all voluntary, you share out tasks. To get to the next level you need to set up a charity to take in funds and employ. You need enough money to be able to do that.

We got five years funding from the National Heritage Lottery, that gives us incredible longevity. The Coastal Communities Network were a really good source of support. All our trustees are from the community. In our peninsula you can find someone who knows about something. Now we have five full-time employees and one part-time.

Plus we've helped other communities start their own individual things. A lot of the time we're just a reassuring shoulder to cry on. Or we suggest the first step: get a few people together, do a survey, see what you've got.



© Peter Cairns



© SCOTLAND: The Big Picture



Other advice

- Experimenting is a massive part of what we do – we knew very soon that we were here to fail so that other communities didn't have to. There was no handbook on seagrass restoration, no one really knows how to do it. We're going through all these processes, figuring out how to rewild the sea. We're being as scientific as we can but if you wait for science to give you all the answers you've lost a decade. Everyone says it's the UN Decade of Restoration so we decided to get on with it.
- We tell the story quite effectively. We've got good visuals, website design, nice videos, good chat when we meet people, funders or private individuals. We started to build a reputation, get a bit of private finance, then a couple of people with more scientific backgrounds joined the community, we wrote a couple of bids for scientific funding, we became more robust in our reporting and bid writing.
- Government funding is only for one to two years, which doesn't work for nature restoration. In three years, you only get to try one thing and scale it up in that period. So we are now trying to get more corporate funding. There are no metrics for carbon or biodiversity in the sea yet, but we're working with companies that just want to team up with us and build relationships. That's quite an exciting space to be in.

Further information



www.craignish.info/blog



www.seawilding.org

Further resources



What are community development trusts?

Communities all over Scotland – large and small, rural and urban, mainland and island-based – are setting up development trusts to help their neighbourhoods flourish through community-led activity, partnership working and enterprise.



towntoolkit.scot/case-studies/development-trusts

Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO)

A national membership organisation for the voluntary sector. Their mission is to support, promote and develop a confident, sustainable voluntary sector in Scotland. SCVO can help with setting up your organisation, running your organisation, governance and employing staff.



scvo.scot/support/setting-up/structure





Funding your project

Planning, securing and managing finances is one of the big challenges for community rewilders. Funding for rewilding interventions, activities and events can come from a range of places, such as government grants, fundraising and private sources.

Community groups often want a building - somewhere people can gather and learn about what's happening. For rewilders, buying land may be a route you wish to go down. This can be a big change of direction for a group. Buying land can be very expensive. The Scottish Land Fund can help prepare you for and fund purchases of buildings of land. However, the funding does not work for every group. Other routes include high profile crowd-funding such as that followed by the Langholm Initiative whose inspirational story is told at [Our Story – Tarras Valley Nature Reserve](#).

For marine groups, having a boat for research can shift the organisation towards research and work with universities.

Funding from external investors can be an opportunity and can bring risks. One project has recently had to change direction abruptly because the investors' borrowing model failed, and the land has been put back on the market.

Some groups see the chance to make links between investment and community wealth-building. The River Ericht Catchment Restoration Initiative, for example, references the Community Inclusion Standard, and the Scottish Land Commission is developing a community benefits standard, which is being prepared at the time of writing this guide. This is a fast developing field, and communities wishing to work in partnership with natural capital investors will need to explore these links and beyond.

Top tips from community groups:

- ★ Make sure you have the right mix of trustees. If you haven't it will be a struggle.
- ★ Only take on the things you know you can deliver.
- ★ Work with the capacity you have. There's six of us on our board and everyone is quite busy, so we do what we can.
- ★ Keep your running costs as low as possible.
- ★ If you are going to start having employees, you have to do a huge amount of prep, get all your employee policies organised before you hire anyone.
- ★ Think about the budget that you are allocating for community consultation. Ours was way too small.



CASE STUDY:

Langholm Initiative – Tarras Valley Nature Reserve



The Langholm Initiative is an award-winning community development trust for Eskdale and Liddesdale, based in Langholm. Their main purpose is to work alongside local communities to make the area a better place to live, work and visit.

How we funded our work

In May 2019, Buccleuch Estates announced its decision to sell more than 10,000 hectares of Langholm Moor. This news came as a shock to the local community who have deep cultural connections with the land.

Following extensive local consultations, the Langholm Initiative agreed to take forward a fundraising campaign on behalf of the community, attempting to raise over £6 million to purchase 4,250 hectares of this very special landscape. Community ownership of land was a chance to help support wider regeneration of the town through new nature-based enterprises and make a meaningful contribution to the climate and ecological emergency.

At the start, this seemed like an impossible dream, but with a huge dedicated effort across the community, with an army of volunteers and support from partner organisations, the campaign quickly gained momentum and attracted international attention. A fundraising campaign attracted a huge £3.8 million in just six months. This enabled the initial purchase of 2,100 hectares of the Tarras Valley to go ahead, with the first half of the land officially transferred to the community in March 2021. The final 2,140 hectares of land was held off the open market in agreement with Buccleuch to enable the community to fundraise the final £2.2 million to secure the Northern half of the Tarras Valley.

The buyout's second stage was launched in October 2021. In nine months, the community defied the odds and "achieved the impossible" for a second time in two years, raising the total needed to double the size of the landholding and bring it into community hands.



© Martin Wright



© Martin Wright



© Shona Dickson

Funding sources



Grants and donations

They secured significant grants and donations from various public bodies, charitable foundations, large philanthropic donors and environmental organisations. Notable contributors included Alex Gerko, John Muir Trust, South of Scotland Enterprise, Anne Reece Foundation, Bently Foundation, Carman Family Foundation, Rewilding Britain and Garfield Weston Foundation.

Scottish Land Fund

The purchase was helped by grants and support from the Scottish Land Fund which is there to support community purchases of land and assets in Scotland, put in place through land reform legislation.

Crowdfunding

They utilised online crowdfunding platforms to reach a broader audience and encourage small donations from a large number of people, this was the main public facing platform for donations towards the land purchase. It was also used as the main media-facing update to help show fundraising progress against the main target and helped to generate continuing public and media interest.

Further information



www.tarrasvalleynaturereserve.org



WORKING ON LAND AND AT SEA



Different groups will have different approaches to making rewilding happen on land and at sea. Whatever route you choose, there is advice available.

On land

Existing landowners who are part of a community of place can work together to enable landscape scale change.

Bright Green Nature approaches this through working with garden owners. Others aim to work through existing large-scale landowners. The River Ericht Catchment Restoration Initiative highlights the challenges of ‘cold-calling’ landowners as a community group without owning any land itself, and where some landowners are ‘absentee owners’ – not living locally. The **Nevis Landscape Partnership** adopted a new constitution in 2021, to become a community-led organisation dedicated to delivering the Nevis Strategy. This says that ‘the community will be involved in decision making processes regarding the management of the Nevis landscape and visitor impact.’

The Glenmidge Burn Project started without land, by focusing on studying the biodiversity of the Glenmidge catchment, and while it now owns land, it sees this as part of a wider objective of enhancing the environment of the burn as a whole.

And there are communities, particularly urban groups, who see ownership as an unnecessary burden. Midlothian Wildflowers, for example, works closely with the local authority to restore meadows in the area, and collaborates with Midlothian Climate Action Network members to support the development of a Midlothian wildlife corridor, as well as a local food growing network.



HOW DO WE WORK TOGETHER ON LAND?

It's about empowering people. We've experienced hundreds of years of being removed from the land. Communities who don't own land are completely unempowered because they've been told for hundreds of years ... 'you're not allowed'. People are scared to speak up, or say anything controversial against landowners who are often employing them.



Becoming a community landowner

Many people see ownership as the route to community empowerment for rewilding. As landowners, the community can make and implement its own decisions about routes to rewilding.

Land reform laws and the Community Empowerment Act provide mechanisms to help communities acquire land. Many communities find other routes to owning land, through negotiated sales with landowners, crowdfunding or community benefit arrangements with investors.

Advice on moving towards community ownership is available from both government and non-government sources.



Community Land Scotland – a membership organisation, established to provide a collective voice for community landowners in Scotland. It has over 130 member organisations across Scotland, ranging from community landowners of major crofting estates in the Western Isles to inner-city community hubs in diverse communities. It provides a roadmap to community ownership.



www.communitylandscotland.org.uk/our-work/community-landownership

Scottish Land Commission – a public body that was set up to drive a “programme of land reform spanning both urban and rural land, to create a Scotland where land is owned and used in ways that are fair, responsible and productive.” It provides guidance on community engagement and ownership, based on evidence.



www.landcommission.gov.scot/our-work/ownership/community-ownership

The Community Ownership Support Service (COSS) – funded by the Scottish Government and provides advice and support to communities throughout the process of taking ownership of land and buildings. This includes help with feasibility studies, business planning, and navigating legal requirements.



www.dtascommunityownership.org.uk

Acquiring land – communities have the right to make requests to all local authorities, Scottish Ministers and a range of public bodies for any land or buildings they feel they could make better use of. They can request ownership, lease or other rights as they wish. The Scottish Government has made resources available to support communities in acquiring land. It provides a summary guide to asset transfer.



www.gov.scot/publications/asset-transfer-summary-guide

Vacant and derelict land – could provide opportunities for community rewilding. There is an official register of vacant and derelict land showing a map of available sites. Vacant and Derelict Land can be challenging, because it can be contaminated or unsafe. The Glasgow and Clyde Valley Community Ownership Hub has summarised community experiences with this kind of asset.



isshinyapps.shinyapps.io/SVDL_mapping_2023



[The Glasgow and Clyde Valley Community Ownership Hub](#)

CASE STUDY:

Lochwinnoch Community Development Trust – Leasing land for ecosystem repair



Lochwinnoch is a village on the southern edge of Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park. Members of the Community Development Trust include people who grew up there, had busy careers elsewhere and have retired back to their childhood home. Some of them were approached by the Yearn Stane Project, which was set up to restore a functioning ecosystem to the upland area of the Renfrewshire Heights.

Our journey to managing land

Lochwinnoch Community Development Trust (LCDT) is aiming to acquire and manage the Tandlemuir Estate, an area of around 500 hectares of rough grazing and 800 hectares of partly degraded peat bog, owned by Renfrewshire Council. In 2021 the Yearn Stane Project joined with the Lochwinnoch Community Development Trust to work towards obtaining a Community Asset Transfer of the estate so that ownership would transfer to the local community. LCDT is now applying for a 99-year lease instead.

The group states: 'The basic vision is to secure the future of Tandlemuir for the benefit of local communities. We aim to develop sustainable land use practices, combining small-scale regenerative agriculture with habitat restoration and eco-tourism which will boost biodiversity, reduce flooding and capture carbon, as well as benefit the social and economic wellbeing of the people of Renfrewshire.'

Other advice



- LCDT's experience shows the value of local expertise. Like so many other examples in this guide, valuable knowledge is to be found right there in the community. One trustee for example says, "My father was a farmer here – I know the ground very well and I know what it's not any more."
- They also point to the example of neighbouring farmers who have shifted to regenerative methods. "The lapwing population has gone through the roof, because of his highland cattle grazing in the winter. He's not using fencing, he's using collars – grazing them with his iPad! It's inspirational. We're interested in doing that."

Further information



lochwinnochtrust.org.uk

At sea

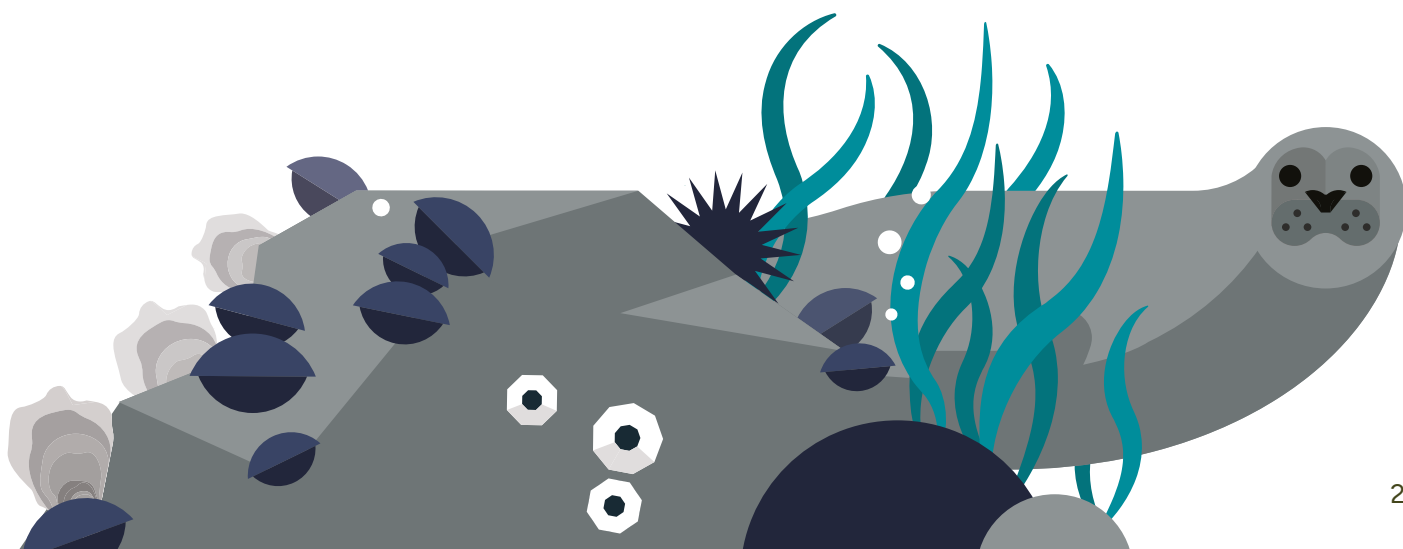
For groups wanting to help rewild marine areas, a different challenge comes up. Most of the seabed around Scotland is owned by the monarch but managed by Crown Estate Scotland, a public body. Taking ownership of the seabed isn't an option – but becoming more formally involved in managing the seabed is. Between 2021 and 2024, Orkney Islands Council had a trial partnership with Crown Estate Scotland to make decisions about the seabed around Orkney more democratic. Meanwhile, as the Scottish Government shapes the future of Scotland's marine protected areas, there might be more opportunities for communities to influence how their local seas are managed.

Activities may also be regulated by the Marine Directorate, NatureScot (if affecting biodiversity – planting seagrass, for example) and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) (if affecting water quality). Placing a structure such as an artificial reef may require a [Marine Licence](#).

HOW DO WE WORK TOGETHER AT SEA?

Marine Protected Area management is way better in England. There are issues with enforcement in Scotland, we can't even identify illegal fishing. If communities do identify it, it is then up to the community to identify the evidence; the court process is frustrating, and penalties are not harsh enough. We have a campaign running just now, but it's not fully funded, to challenge illegal fishing in the No Take Zone [Arran].

It's really frustrating – if we wanted to put down 100 oysters we'd need the marine construction licence, but if a dredger wants to come and literally smash up thousands of oysters they don't need any permission from anyone.



A woman with long red hair is shown in profile, looking down at a bundle of sticks and roots held in her hands. A group of children, including a boy in a black Adidas shirt and a girl in a blue Adidas shirt, are gathered around her, looking at the bundle with interest. The background is a bright, slightly cloudy sky.

Top tips from community groups:



- ★ I underestimated the need, not only for financial support but also empowerment and giving people confidence to take control. I also wish I had known how many farmers want to do something for nature but are scared of the economics and the reaction of their peers.
- ★ I recommend having knowledge of the law, forensic knowledge of it. We relied on other people to keep us informed but if you are doing a Community Asset Transfer I think you really need to have it at your fingertips, know what your rights are and be explicit in your understanding when you are in dialogue with the council.

COMMUNICATING AND INVOLVING



Your work will need to involve the wider community at times. There are different ways to do this – and it's called different things! – but the most important thing is to make sure everyone has a chance to be included.

Engaging, participating, educating

In any community activity there are different levels of involvement in decision-making. While trustees and members of the organisation will be most involved, a community organisation needs to also include the wider community - this is known as community participation or engagement.

Involving the community will take different forms at different stages. At an early stage it may simply involve informal conversations to 'take soundings' about interest in an idea. Later, fuller consultation may be needed. This might be a formal requirement for funding purposes, or to make sure that you have support, you have addressed concerns, and you are benefitting from creative suggestions and the range of skills in the community.

More active forms of participation can give the wider community more power to get involved in decisions and management activities. There are helpful resources available to guide you through types and methods for engagement.

While many groups are using the term 'community engagement' to refer to a wide range of activities and involvement, some prefer terms such as 'participation', which can be seen as a more active word. 'Co-design' can also be useful to explore. It's important to find the words and language that work for your situation – but more important is the attitude behind it, and the ways in which everyone has a chance to be included.



HOW DO WE INVOLVE OTHERS?

There's an expectation that everyone should do everything for free. We paid our steering group members.

Engaging with the community is not just about consultation but about going back to them and showing what you have been able to take on board and what not.

We tried to do as many live, in-person consultation events rather than online because we want to constantly build relationships. It's more time and money because of the cost of hiring venues. But it massively pays. Also offering food and drink at the meetings, if people are coming for an evening.



Further resources:



The International Association for Public Participation has designed a spectrum to help with selecting the appropriate level of participation for any process. The IAP2 Spectrum of Participation can be adapted to 'community participation' by replacing the word 'public' with 'community' throughout. It ranges from 'Inform', through increasing levels of community influence over decisions: 'Consult', 'Involve' and 'Collaborate' and finally 'Empower'.



IAP2 Spectrum of Participation





CASE STUDY:

Learning from experience: how we would do community engagement differently!

One community group shared their reflections on their experiences.

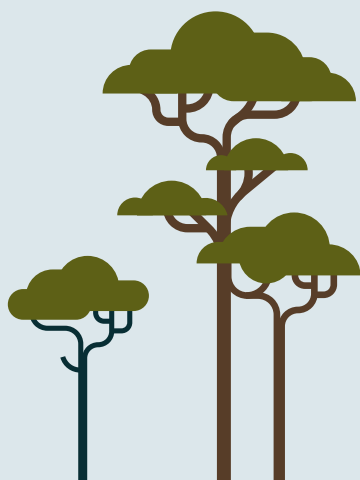
What we learnt from consulting with the community

We messed up. I'd do it again, knowing how to carry out a successful community engagement – and facilitate it. Where people can have their say, share their ideas. Not a meeting where everyone says, "you don't know what you are doing!" It got a bit heated.

It's partly that the funding conditions define community support as specifically the very local community. To get Scottish Land Fund support, that community support has to be pretty much unanimous. I hadn't understood that. It became clear – as the community split – we weren't going to be able to go down that funding route. We were sent a declaration signed by people saying they didn't want the community to buy the land. Somebody wanted to buy the land and sabotaged the effort! What got out of hand was that we inadvertently created a space for misinformation.

So our advice is: prepare carefully for a community meeting and get someone to facilitate it from outside the community. So that what comes out is not just a yes / no but also "yes and look at all these things we could do", so that people can get enthused and start dreaming. Because it's hard - you're going to need that.

It's one of the most sensitive and difficult things to handle, that community support. I've done lots of creative projects with communities. But we suddenly found ourselves completely out of our depth. It's worth it even if in the end if it doesn't happen, the relationship with the community is not jeopardised by the proposal – divided by no's and yes's. And if it does happen you have this momentum!



Forming alliances and partnerships

Beyond the community, relationships with other organisations and individuals help to make rewilding projects happen. Sometimes the initiative even starts with an external partner. Lochwinnoch Community Development Trust was approached by the Yearn Stane Project which in turn was set up by a tree nursery social enterprise and an ecological consultancy, to restore a functioning ecosystem to the upland area of the Renfrewshire Heights. The Community Development Trust was inspired to take action to lease part of the area (see Case Study page 28).

Others started with a small community group and went in search of alliances with influential partners, or organisations with access to important stakeholders such as landowners or fishermen. Several communities highlighted the value of support from Members of Parliament, Members of the Scottish Parliament, and councillors. Ury Riverside Park noted their positive experience of working with the local authority and of including councillors on their board.

The rewilding world includes a range of valuable support networks and organisations, such as the Coastal Communities Network (run by Fauna and Flora International), SCOTLAND: The Big Picture's Northwoods Rewilding Network and Rewilding Britain's Rewilding Network. The Global Rewilding Alliance connects groups with rewilding projects across the world. The Scottish Rewilding Alliance connects rewilding organisations, including community groups, to campaign on and advocate for rewilding in Scotland.

HOW DO WE WORK WITH OTHERS?

Tay Ghillies Association is one of our partners. They have a remit across the whole catchment so they are a community of interest and place. They have connections to all the local wild fish people.

These networks are really useful. There's no point other communities frying their brains because the Scottish Rewilding Alliance are responding to a consultation for you.

Landscape-Scale restoration needs to be completely collaborative. No one organisation can do this on their own. The power and the strength to realise restoration at scale comes from working together across the landscape. That's the power and strength community participation can bring – involving the whole network of people in the landscape who know and care about the land and have relevant professional expertise

Further resources



Local Place Plans and Community Action Plans

These two types of plans offer ways for communities to define their needs and communicate them to others. They are often prepared by community councils or community development trusts, working in participation with the wider community. It can be helpful for community groups to include their intended or actual rewilding sites, in one or both types of plan, to ensure wider recognition and support.



www.ourplace.scot/home/local-place-plans

Community Action Plans (CAPs) in Scotland are strategic documents created by local communities to address their specific needs, problems and potential. These plans are developed through a participatory process that involves community members working together to identify priorities and outline actions to improve their local area.



www.dtascommunityownership.org.uk

Working with public bodies

Working with public organisations can present communities with unexpected challenges. The rules that steer public bodies, conservation designations and regulating resource management, can all be blunt instruments for community management, and for the restoration of fully functioning ecosystems.

For example, parts of the Tarras Valley (owned by Langholm Initiative) are designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), and a Special Protection Area (SPA). The population of hen harriers is a key indicator for successful management, in official eyes. Guidance suggests the removal of natural woodland regeneration and keeping the area as 'open ground', but from experience a great deal of the statutory legislation can be interpreted differently, depending on the individual.

Similarly, Seawilding found that regulations poorly implemented by commercial organisations were applied rigorously to their small-scale activities. These obstacles can feel disproportionate and require patience.



CASE STUDY:

Bright Green Nature: working with homeowners



Bright Green Nature is a charity which offers micro-grants and advice, working with schools, families and village groups across the Scottish Borders to bring nature back to spaces that they own and live in.

How we engage with local people

We provide a unique microgrant to participants in our 'Wild Your Space' programme - we are usually oversubscribed. The spaces we work with range from micro scale (small gardens) to several hectare community areas. So there will always be a need to manage these spaces, there are limitations on where natural processes can take over. But even in a small garden we see wildflower patches or ponds increasing structural diversity and improving health of that area, or communities leaving dead wood in woodlands instead of clearing it up.

Schools lack training and especially time to maintain these areas, so our Nature Restoration Officer spends a lot of time training people up. Sometimes we get a stellar application from a family or school that really stands out in terms of what they are doing, and the level of engagement with the local community. So we have started an 'Ambassador' programme, people within the community to empower and spread the word.

At first it was just the funding – families who had no extra funds to bring nature back to their spaces. What really makes a difference however, is the level of engagement and training that we can provide, usually 1:1, which is resource-intensive but worth it for the empowerment. We have just started to develop resources for 'ponds', 'wildflower' or 'hedgerows'. Often people don't know where to look online and so these are useful resources. We also have a tool library for schools, and provide pond plants and peat-free compost. We are looking to try and provide seed and trees through partnerships.

We have one part-time employee (Nature Restoration Officer) and a part-time volunteer. The microgrant administration also involves the founder (1 day per month) and our Trustees in the decision process.

“ ”

When the Newstead community raised funds to buy our Village Green, residents expressed a clear wish to encourage biodiversity and wildlife habitats while providing an outdoor social space. With the microgrant we were able to seed a wildflower area to help attract pollinators along with bluebells and primroses in the woodland. We have also very much appreciated the helpful advice and support which Bright Green Nature have offered us.

Our project has been moved along more quickly because of the funding we received for pond plants. The pond is already proving a draw to native wildlife and we were enchanted by the different species of dragonflies that visited last year.

Further information



brightgreennature.org



Volunteers and experts

Community work is by definition voluntary – you are offering your time and skills for free. As you grow there may be more volunteers involved. There is a lot of information available about motivating and managing volunteers, which will be especially useful for larger projects. It's also important to remember that volunteers are experts too, and have skills, knowledge and connections they can bring to a project.

Professional and personal connections can help bring in people who want to support your work. They may offer services pro bono – for free – or connect you with students and others looking to gain experience by contributing their skills.

The Community of Arran Seabed Trust (COAST) highlighted the expertise of volunteers as a key feature of their work. For example, they have an advisory board, formed of people from different areas and industries around the island. They are the organisation's "first port of call", a sounding board for new ideas or directions for the organisation.

Trustees are volunteers too, and the work of being a trustee can be demanding and time consuming. Longer established groups recommend ways in which trustees could take a back seat for a while, and mechanisms are often built into an organisation's founding documents that require rotation. This can help to avoid burnout in your group.

HOW DO WE MANAGE VOLUNTEERS?

We are very lucky with the level of expertise that is available. We make projects that suit the expertise of our volunteers. For example we have an expert in data management. Another who knows a lot about governance. We jumped at that.

The founding members would get burnt out so we have built up a really strong group, which we're consistently trying to replenish while people dropped out and came back.

You could see a project like this as just a list of things that need to be done. We are really really busy people. It's a sink for time. You could spend ages and ages on this project. I like going down there without worrying about what has to be done. I don't go there every day. But there's a very nice thing about wandering along the bottom, there's a beautiful old apple tree, an old ash, they have become familiars, your friends.

People's professional backgrounds make it possible. There's always an ecologist or forester close by. Or a professional project developer.

CASE STUDY:

Midlothian Wildflowers



Midlothian Wildflowers is a constituted grassroots community group, working to create, care for and protect greenspaces throughout Midlothian while supporting the health and wellbeing of the communities we work with.

How we work with others – volunteers, partners, experts

In the first year we worked alongside 80 volunteers to restore a council owned meadow in Rosewell. The effort was massive and took a huge amount of work due to the council not maintaining the wildflower meadow, mostly because of significant budget cuts.

That's why Midlothian Wildflowers exists, to address the ecological and climate crisis locally – while we're losing greenspaces at an exponential rate due to mass housing development. Our mission is to protect, restore and care for existing meadows while finding opportunities to create new habitats while feeling well and making a difference to our environment.

We work on two council-owned meadows. We sought permission through the 'Adopt a green space' policy. Midlothian Council advertises this opportunity, with an application deadline of 29 April each year, for community groups to adopt a green space and maintain it along with the council for the benefit of the community and biodiversity. They own surprising amounts of land.

We have worked in partnership on a protocol with other organisations to support the council with a wildflower meadow maintenance plan. If you can show you can make it easy for them, it's a mutually beneficial partnership.

We work collectively with other organisations, Midlothian Council, Rosewell and District Community Council, Rosewell Scouts and Beavers, Lasswade High School and the Three Hares Community Woodland. We are active members of various organisations like the Midlothian Climate Action Network.

Other advice



- Find greenspaces that people care about. They might be littered and rank, but they have potential. They might be a verge, a small parkland with nothing growing. There are opportunities in the landscape to rewild.
- We're aware we're in a climate emergency. So 'take your time' is ok, but it won't help the declining butterfly and moth population. What we need to do is use our time to understand the ecosystems as a whole and understand what we've got. Knowing your greenspace, knowing your land, being rooted in your own space and community.

Good communication

Communication is an important part of any community or collaborative activity. Community rewilders emphasise three things in particular:

- 1** Give particular attention to your core messages. What are you wanting people to know, and what are you wanting them to tell you, or to join in with, or to help make a decision about? The case study 'Learning from experience' illustrates some challenges that arise when a vacuum arises for rumours to get out of control.
- 2** Manage expectations. Community owners may want change to happen quickly. The wider community may be disappointed when change takes a bit longer, or when it's not clear what changes are happening (as can happen when there's a need to take time to get to know the site).
- 3** Think about how accessible people will find your communication. Is it too text-heavy for visual people? Does the colour coding work for neurodiverse audiences? Can different versions be produced – perhaps a detailed report, plus a short illustrated poster?

Further resources



According to an article on [CharityComms](#), the membership organisation for charity communications professionals, one in 10 people in the world have dyslexia, one in 12 men are affected by colour blindness, the average reading age in the UK is nine years old, and more than 460 million people have some form of hearing loss. All this means that your communications may not be received and digested in the way you expect.

Links:



Tips for accessible communications



Scotland's Inclusive Communication Hub contains a section on organising inclusive and accessible events.



Disability Equality Scotland have some useful information on their website on how to make online events accessible.



Inclusion Scotland have a **guide to making social media accessible**.

Grounding in stories

Storytelling helps people feel connected to nature and understand how rewilding works. Sharing stories about local wildlife, habitats and projects brings people together. It inspires them to get involved and shows the positive impact rewilding can have on both people and the environment.

Bioregioning Tayside explained the importance of including cultural as well as scientific activities and responses in nature restoration projects.

“Our focus on resolving the climate and biodiversity crises has tended to be very sciency, it has all been about ecological restoration. There has not been enough recognition or celebration of how our landscapes are part of our culture through for example, stories, songs or place names. From a bioregioning perspective, we’d encourage people to re-connect to this cultural heritage and do their history, to learn how humans have impacted on their landscapes over millennia.

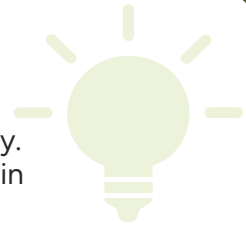
Taking the time to do this research, to understand, for example, how watercourses have been changed to enable more land for farming or to drive the mills for the textile industry, which areas used to be common land, which estates were bought and built through slavery money, the ecological impact the hydro dams have had.

Unless you know that, you cannot learn from the past or have the power to say, ‘It doesn’t have to be like this’.



Storytelling
helps people feel
connected to nature
and understand how
rewilding works.

Top tips from community groups:



- ★ Celebrate the wins – this massively empowers the community. You don't see many examples of the obvious wins – a small win leads to bigger projects.
- ★ We are constantly going out and asking for help for funds, or expertise. It is critical to ask for help.
- ★ You can build collaborations and partnerships that enable your message to be amplified, to such an extent that funding sources can't say no. Have to have the courage to do that!
- ★ I do walks once a month in the local area, and it's all very informal. We have a WhatsApp group, ... a lot of people who come along are just dog walkers, or go out at weekends. But they are very interested. People are more aware of places since lockdown.
- ★ It is very hard to do conservation work in the middle of winter. People don't want to come out. You need to buy them a hot drink, provide access to a toilet. [advice in urban areas]
- ★ Make it fun – make sure all your volunteers are enjoying themselves, staff are enjoying themselves – have social nights, coffee and cake!
- ★ 'Revealing the hidden' night walks with scouts, bioluminescence, creatures in trees. That really engages people in the mysterious.



REWILDING YOUR PLACE



Rewilding is about helping
kickstart natural processes on land
and at sea. It can involve working with
the unknown. Get to know your place,
access knowledge and support – and
take action to restore nature.

Making interventions

Rewilding is about helping kickstart natural processes on land and at sea. It involves working with the unknown – and creating hope in the face of an uncertain future, as our climate and ecosystems change around us.

The first step is often to do nothing. All the communities involved in the production of this guide emphasised the importance of making time to get to know the place and the ecosystem that they are hoping to restore.

You may also find it helpful to refer to Rewilding Britain's [12 steps to rewilding](#).

On land

The Langholm Initiative, which is managing over 4,200 hectares of the Tarras Valley reserve, has spent more than two years understanding the site and considering which actions to prioritise. They are now focusing on removing hundreds of miles of draining on the upland peat moors, to help restore the natural hydrology and ability of the peat to store water and carbon.

A key rewilding action is often to increase the area of woodland. The route to establishing more woodland will depend on the availability of trees to spread into the area, through seed and other forms of natural regeneration. If there are very few native trees in the area, it may be necessary to plant trees, as at Carrifran, where only a handful of trees remained in the valley and almost a million trees have been planted since the Borders Forest Trust took ownership of the 655 hectare valley.

When planting trees, make sure young trees and seeds are sourced responsibly. Look for local tree nurseries and seed suppliers. Reforesting Scotland has a [tree nursery directory](#). The Woodland Trust has plenty of [advice on planting methods](#).

In more densely populated areas, parks are often a starting point for community rewilding. Advocating for reduced mowing and spraying can be the main focus of community groups in urban areas.

On sea

For many marine rewilding projects, the important change is to remove pressure on an ecosystem so that natural processes can return. COAST described this as 'a form of passive restoration: we remove the pressures (by limiting fishing) and allow the environment to recover.' For projects on land, the damaged state of our natural environment means action of some kind will be needed to kickstart natural processes.

Networks like the [Native Oyster Network](#) can offer support for oyster restoration projects.



Seeing results

When you do intervene, whether by removing a pressure or introducing new components of an ecosystem (for example, by planting native woodland or seagrass), the changes that result may be surprising and more exciting than anyone could have imagined.

Isabella Tree, in her book *Wilding*, describes how the return of insect and bird life to their farm in Sussex surpassed any expectations of ecologists or farmers. Community rewilding groups have similar experiences and, as the community contributors to this guide show, may be making discoveries that are new to science.

Further resource



The Lifescape Project aims to catalyse the creation, restoration and protection of wild landscapes by pursuing projects which utilise skills including science, technology, law, economic and communications. Rewilding Britain commissioned a set of legal guidance notes for Scotland on developing and managing rewilding projects.



www.lifescapeproject.org/rewilding-law/scotland

HOW DO WE BRING NATURE BACK?

We've found that within the no-take zone and the marine protected area, you would think when you remove the fishing pressure that everything would bloom and go crazy, and you would get loads more of every species. But it's very complex, you have competition, predation, so we found that recovery is not linear, it goes up and down, and that hasn't been mapped before. We now have a decade of data, and that's really valuable.

In my experience of advising [urban and suburban] communities, the thing they most want to do is something really drastic like cutting down or planting. What I would encourage is to look really closely at what you've already got. For example, there are lots of tree seedlings waiting to come up. When a tree falls down all these baby trees will grow up. So I'd suggest you don't plant there.

There is this tension between doing nothing, and feeling the obligation to be doing something. I keep reminding myself that we have already done something really important, which is to make sure that that piece of land becomes something it needs to become.

Managing access

Different community groups have different reasons for restoring nature, and public access needs to be considered in the light of those reasons. In Scotland there is a general right of responsible access, and for some groups, attracting members of the public will be a high priority.

Ury Riverside Park, for example, is rightly proud of its approach to access, which includes flood-proof paths, benches and even play parks in carefully selected locations, as well as notice boards and clearly marked entrances. They estimate that they are getting 500 visitors per day because the park has been designed as part of an active travel route, and that this level of access and engagement has changed people's awareness of nature. For example, by noticing the arrival of singing larks in spring, or understanding the reasons for grazing to control the giant hogweed.

Others want to keep themselves out of the limelight, because large numbers of visitors could undermine the ecological processes that are helping to restore biodiversity. Carrifran Wildwood, near Moffat in south Scotland, welcomes visitors to share their experience and discuss the results. But they try to avoid being noticed as a tourist attraction. They took advice to keep the car park small and discreet. Of course people want to see what's happening, and the experience of woodland returning to this formerly bare valley is inspiring. So they have created a shorter trail near the car park which allows people to view the valley and experience the return of nature to this site.



Invasive species

One way in which intervention may be needed more urgently is in the case of invasive species. The case study of Ury Riverside Park provides an example of a community group which is pursuing three different approaches to controlling giant hogweed, including by grazing. They found the Scottish Invasive Species Initiative to be a helpful source of advice and ideas.

Other sites have to contend with self-seeded Sitka spruce, which can regenerate through 'seed rain' several kilometres from commercial plantations. Langholm Initiative, for example, has just completed a long and expensive process of removing unwanted Sitka spruce regeneration across the Tarras Valley moorlands using a team of local contractors, funded by the Scottish Government Agri-Climate Environment Scheme. Sometimes there will be financial support available for controlling invasive species, like the Scottish Invasive Species Initiative.

Further resource



The Scottish Invasive Species Initiative describes itself as an exciting and ambitious eight-year partnership project set up to tackle invasive non-native species alongside rivers and watercourses in northern Scotland.



www.invasivespecies.scot

HOW DO WE MAKE SPACE FOR NATURE?

I grew up on a railway that is now a Sustrans route. Midlothian Climate Action Network is looking to develop a wildlife corridor along that. There are a lot of wee patches. We need to be thinking about how to connect patches. We are seeing how much annuals move around. It's astonishing to see their journeys. We need to stop the isolation of tiny patches.

People often don't feel connected to large landscapes and find it challenging to grasp the relevance. So engaging people at a smaller scale and in the spaces they care about can open up conversations to build engagement and understanding of the importance of nature recovery and the role of rewilding/nature restoration. This can make people more likely to act, whether that's to lobby their local MSPs, support campaigns such as the Rewilding Nation, work in nature restoration or support local groups looking to rewild.

Monitoring and citizen science

Different community groups have different reasons for restoring nature, and public Rewilding is a journey into the unknown and unexpected. In addition to getting to know the community site, it will be important to monitor change. Rewilding Britain is developing a **Rewilding Monitoring Framework** to help with this. As they point out, 'Rewilding is defined by an absence of fixed targets or end points and the way it embraces uncertainty.'

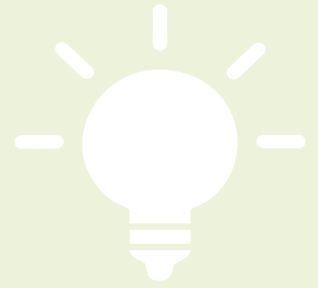
Ways in which communities are approaching this include:

- Ury Riverside Park emphasises the value of baseline data 'so that future generations can see how the park has changed over time.' They have trustees with expertise in botany, who enjoy doing transects and quadrats. They have also placed counters at the entrances, to know how many people are using the park.
- Glenmidge Burn Project is exploring the role of soil sampling, helped by the fact that one of their trustees is an environmental chemist.
- Carrifran, and COAST, have both learnt much from acoustic surveying – recording the sounds of the ecosystem.
- Carrifran mentions the 'luck' of having expert birdwatchers as members of its Steering Group. The Carrifran data on birds has provided a compelling story showing the return of woodland birds over 25 years, to a formerly bare valley.
- Collecting data on damage to your local environment can also be important and empowering, like reporting sightings of trawlers in marine areas where a trawling ban is in place.
- Camera traps can help to record passing mammals, but may not provide consistent data.
- Many communities are making a continuous record of change through sequential photographs, taken from the same point every month or season.
- Working with local universities and local naturalist groups can bring in additional support.



Top tips for monitoring habitat changes with photographs

From landscape photographer Ted Leeming



CHOOSING LOCATIONS

- ★ Pick locations covering all angles and a range of views.
- ★ Don't choose too many. Don't make it a burden!
- ★ If you can mark the point with an existing feature or a spot of paint it makes finding the spot much easier next time.
- ★ Some projects install a post with a helpful ledge or arrow showing where to place the phone or camera, to make sure photos are always taken at the same height.
- ★ If you want the public to help take photos, you could place a sign asking visitors to take a photo and share their images to a website.
- ★ Use what3words or another service like Ordnance Survey grid reference to identify each location – this makes it easier to find the points again.



PHOTOGRAPHING

- ★ Keep it simple – e.g. a single image shot on a wide angle, and use the same angle and focal length each time.
- ★ If the view is wide you could shoot in panoramic mode, or shoot two images.
- ★ Shoot with the sun behind your shoulders.



TIME OF YEAR

- ★ Try to shoot at a similar time each year. Think about whether you want all the trees green and in leaf or bare.
- ★ Try to shoot all your photographs in one day.
- ★ If possible choose a sunny day, and shoot early or late in the day for less contrast.



POST PRODUCTION

- ★ Store images in folders named for their location.
- ★ Include dates and location in the file names.

Different metrics for different audiences

Measuring change, and demonstrating impact, is exciting and rewarding. It can also be hard work, especially if you need to report to a public body with fixed expectations. Some areas of land in Scotland are designated or protected, which means the Scottish Government helps look after the site. Sometimes it does this directly, but it also does this by offering advice or keeping track of what is happening.

If a site is designated, the species listed in the designation will take precedence over all other species and habitats from the government's point of view. Some large-scale community led restoration projects have found themselves challenged by requirements to prioritise certain species rather than allow all the natural processes to return.

Citizen science

Citizen science involves a wide range of people collecting information about the species they see and hear in a given time period. The term 'citizen science' is used in different ways, but it can mean biological recording (such as birdwatchers noting their sightings, or moss enthusiasts conducting a field day), organised surveys by volunteers, or systematic observations by divers. All of this data is valuable, especially if communicated and analysed. Local Record Centres are important hubs for receiving biological observations, whether in notebooks, by email, or as records submitted through apps such as [iNaturalist](#).

Monitoring the species and habitats also provides an opportunity for wider community involvement. In urban areas, regular outings can be arranged with natural history societies to help people record. Unusual or 'difficult' groups of species can be particular attractions: for example, moth trapping can delight and amaze participants with revelations of unseen creatures. A popular approach is to organise a bioblitz – often a one-day event, to survey and record all the living species in a given area (or more likely, as many as possible!).

Even where collected using rigorous protocols, some community rewilders experience difficulties having their data accepted by official bodies. Or they struggle to find the resources to put it all into a computer. Marine community organisations, COAST and Seawilding, both solved this problem by partnering with academic researchers, who have the motivation to analyse and publish the data. COAST's decade of work has enabled scientists to study the changing occupants of the seafloor in the protected areas. Seawilding's work with oyster and seagrass restoration is pushing the boundaries of science. Both are now well-established organisations which welcome scientists. As Seawilding said, they offer to share equipment, and in return learn about the seabed.



A man with grey hair, wearing a light-colored button-down shirt and khaki trousers, is crouching in a field of tall grass and purple heather. He is looking down at the plants with a focused expression. His right hand is extended towards the heather. The background shows a vast landscape under a blue sky with scattered white clouds.

“HOW DO WE HARNESS THE POWER OF CITIZEN SCIENCE?”

There are a lot of keen amateurs out there, very keen to help. This year, we engaged with a natural history society, they came out in force, all sorts of specialists, did a really good rough and ready survey, a bioblitz.

We have lots of volunteers collecting data, all supported by research students. More recently we've had volunteer experts, really good divers. At the start of COAST the way we got information to show policy makers how important Arran was, we used a citizen science method called **Seasearch** – you send the survey form to them, NatureScot gets the data into national databases.

Loads of academics, they do their own projects, we support them, e.g. acoustics on seagrass beds to test it for biodiversity monitoring. Use our wetsuits, we'll show you our seagrass beds. We had two people who did citizen science internally, had to reject a lot of data that was useful for us.

It's fun for communities to do data collecting, but not sitting in front of a computer and putting data in... we've decided to not make our science nationally important science.



CASE STUDY:

The Glenmidge Burn Project

The Glenmidge Burn Project SCIO is a charity working towards the advancement of environmental protection of the Glenmidge Burn (Dumfries and Galloway, Scotland) and its surrounding habitats.

How we manage our land

We conduct activities to further public environmental understanding and engagement such as participatory ecological surveys, workshops and training. We also want to facilitate environmental scientific research projects and engage education institutions in using the area for their research. An essential part of our remit is to promote environmental awareness, particularly in children and young people.

The charity now owns 12 hectares (30 acres) of land to the north and west of Glenmidge, which we aim to protect, enhance and maintain for biodiversity. This is also a wonderful opportunity to further our aims of increasing environmental and ecological knowledge and awareness.

Our open day in February 2025 was attended by a wide range of local residents, landowners, artists, naturalists and members of NGOs with related objectives (such as conservation of the River Nith, which the Glenmidge Burn flows into). Participants were invited to take part in activities such as soil and earthworm surveys, sampling the burn for freshwater invertebrates, and time series photography to monitor vegetation change.



© Mark Hamblin / SCOTLAND: The Big Picture

Our open day
in February 2025 was
attended by a wide range of
local residents, landowners,
artists, naturalists and
members of NGOs with
related objectives.



© Mark Hamblin / SCOTLAND: The Big Picture

Other advice



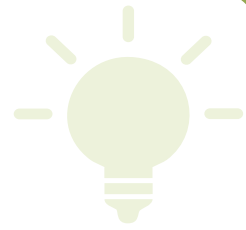
- Describing their experience, trustees emphasised the role of learning. One said "I've learnt a huge amount from the people around me."
- Another said "We're often asked what we're going to do. The answer is, nothing until we know more about it!"
- Currently, the trustees are discussing whether to return to low levels of cattle grazing, and whether to remove the field drains from the lower ground to restore wetland habitats.
- Their work is not all about managing the land they own, but relates to the whole catchment of the burn.

Further information



glenmidgeburnproject.com

Top tips from community groups:



- ★ Mark the entrance. Make sure you have something where people say, 'I am now in this community facility'.
- ★ iNaturalist, use that, get young people engaging in phones and tech but also looking closely at the environment.
- ★ Make sure you can demonstrate year-on-year change. Take photos, make films...
- ★ You need to understand that change can be slow. Try to limit expectations about the scale and speed of nature recovery – it's often a source of disappointment when it takes longer than expected.
- ★ Don't get misled into thinking you need to do something now. My regrets are all around not understanding what is happening naturally before intervening.
- ★ Cryptic things are really interesting. For example, fungi – for 11 months a year you don't see them, they're underground. You have a brief opportunity when all the fungi experts in Scotland turn out.

RESOURCES



How to rewild

The International Union for the Conservation of Nature's **10 principles to guide rewilding initiatives. The benefits and risks of rewilding – resource | IUCN**.

Northwoods Nine offers nine principles for rewilding in Scotland

Rewilding Britain have a **Rewilding Journeys toolkit**, tips on restoring natural processes and **12 steps to rewilding**.

SCOTLAND: The Big Picture run **training courses** on specific rewilding themes.

TCV Scotland offers environmental activities, information and resources across Scotland through their Community Network.

Community engagement and participation

IAP2 Spectrum of Participation was designed to assist with the selection of the level of participation that defines the public's role in any public participation process

National Standards for Community Engagement: The Scottish Community Development Centre's good-practice principles designed to improve and guide the process of community engagement. They are written from the perspective of a public body wanting to work better with communities.

Community Engagement in Decisions Relating to Land: the Scottish Land Commission's guidelines for landowners

Community engagement: good practice for restoring Scotland's rainforest: the Alliance for Scotland's Rainforests guidance on community engagement.

Involving Your Community: The Community Ownership Support Service's guide for community organisations planning to undertake a community asset project.

Green expectations is a guide to involving communities in landscape change.

Community benefits

The Scottish Land Commission's guidance on **delivering community benefits from land** sets out six key points about community benefits and provides some examples of current practice.

Their guidance on **community wealth building** sets out practical actions that public bodies can take to use and manage land productively and in the public interest.

Working with landowners

Transparency of Ownership and Land Use Decision-Making: Good practice guidelines from the Scotland Land Commission.

Land Ownership Map | Who Owns Scotland: the best source of information on land ownership in Scotland. Privately researched so accessed with a small subscription fee.

Register of Vacant and Derelict Land is a register of vacant and derelict sites.

Becoming community landowners

Community Land Scotland describe the benefits of community ownership and the steps involved in a community buyout.

You can also read about **case studies from Scotland and elsewhere** on the Scottish Land Commission website.

Community Ownership Support Service (COSS) is funded by the Scottish Government and provides advice and support to communities throughout the process of taking ownership of land and buildings.

Highlands and Islands Enterprise: **Ten Steps to Community Ownership**.

Scottish Government's **summary guide to asset transfer**.

Forestry and Land Scotland community asset transfer scheme.

Dumfries and Galloway Council community asset transfers – although specific to Dumfries and Galloway, all councils are required to support community asset transfer and should have similar websites and staff to help with the process.

Relating to nature

Nature Connected Communities Handbook invites communities to notice, engage, and relate with the more-than-human world, for closer community-nature relationships.

The Changing Treescapes Project have a guide to **Making Socio Ecological Art and Science Collaboration Work**.

Storytelling

Scottish Communities Climate Action Network are creating and sharing 1000 stories of **Scottish community climate action**.

The Catean Ecomuseum River Detectives investigated how the people of Strathmore managed their rivers, bogs and lochans in the past and how this knowledge might help local communities take better care of them now and in the future.

Planning and the law

Environmental Rights Centre for Scotland offer free advice on environmental and related planning law.

Planning Aid Scotland resources include **SPEED – Planning Advisory Service**: A Practical Guide to Better Engagement in Planning and Placemaking.

Local Place Plans | Our Place.

Community Action Plans | DTAS Community Ownership Support Service.

Lifescape Project including legal guidance notes for Scotland here on **developing and managing rewilding projects**.

APRS resources on development planning.

Setting up a community organisation

Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO) provides everything you need on **Setting up your organisation**, **Running your organisation** (including finances and employment), and **Governance**.

Development Trusts Association Scotland has a website full of news, examples and advice for its network of development trusts across Scotland.

CWA Information Notes – Community Woodlands Association includes information notes on forming a community group, governance and insurance.

The effective community group is a helpful guide to constitutions and other essentials, produced by Laurencekirk Business Club Council for Voluntary Service Aberdeenshire Central/South Aberdeenshire Council Community Learning and Development Service.

The Scottish Governance Code for the Third Sector is a statement of best practice, setting out the core principles and key elements of good governance, created by the voluntary sector for the voluntary sector in Scotland.

Verture (formerly Sniffer) have a **Community Climate Adaptation Routemap** to help communities or people driving local climate action, including nature restoration.

Volunteers

Volunteer Scotland offer resources for involving and managing volunteers.

SCVO have advice for managing volunteers

Forest Research produced top tips for managing **woodland volunteers**.

Funding

National Lottery Awards for All Scotland offers funding for community-led projects, from £300 to £20,000.

Scottish Land Fund supports urban and rural communities to become more resilient and sustainable through the ownership and management of land and land assets.

Foundation Scotland works with funders, donors and philanthropists who want to support communities, and with communities to maximise funding opportunities from place-based funds.

Individual local authorities have particular funding schemes.

Highlands and Islands Enterprise works with businesses, communities and social enterprises across the Highlands and Islands, while **South of Scotland Enterprise** does the same in the South of Scotland.

Community land and sea management: networks of support

Northwoods Rewilding Network is a Scotland-wide chain of landholdings committed to nature recovery.

The **Community Woodlands Association** is a membership organisation for community woodlands in Scotland.

The **Coastal Communities Network (CCN)** is a coalition of community-based groups & organisations committed to the preservation and safeguarding of Scotland's coastal and marine environments.

Community Land Scotland represents Scotland's community land owners.

Find out more about emerging **Nature Networks**.

Monitoring rewilding

The Rewilding Monitoring Framework is being developed by Rewilding Britain.

Community-led marine biodiversity monitoring handbook by NatureScot covers marine biodiversity surveys and monitoring of Scotland's coasts and inshore waters.

Briefing paper: Scottish land reform | Rewilding Britain: a brief overview of what 21 communities are contributing towards nature restoration.

A Community for Naturalists – find out more about iNaturalist.

Woodland Herbivore Impact Assessment Method User Guide – an example of participatory monitoring approach for habitat condition.

Seasearch offers a way to learn about marine life while protecting and restoring the sea.

Association of Local Environmental Records Centres – ALERC is a membership organisation representing LERCs, not-for-profit organisations that collect, collate and manage information on the natural environment for a defined geographic area.

Accessible communication

Scotland's Inclusive Communication Hub contains a section on organising inclusive and accessible events.

Communities Channel Scotland signposts **accessibility resources for your community group**.

Disability Equality Scotland have a guide to **making online events accessible**.

Inclusion Scotland have a **guide to making social media accessible**.

Inclusive working

SURF is Scotland's regeneration forum, working to improve the lives of residents in disadvantaged communities

The **Ethnic Minority Environmental Network (EMEN)** creates connections between ethnic minority groups and individuals, and mainstream organisations addressing climate change and climate justice in Scotland

Pride Outside offer training and wellbeing events aimed at helping organisations be more LGBTQ+ inclusive

ScotLINK have **resources** available on being inclusive and being an ally

Volunteer Scotland have top tips for **being inclusive** when offering volunteering opportunities

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to

All the groups that contributed to or inspired this guide, including Ury Riverside Park, River Ericht Catchment Restoration Initiative and Bioregioning Tayside, Glenmidge Burn Project, Carrifran Wildwood, COAST, Seawilding, Tarras Valley Nature Reserve, Bright Green Nature, Midlothian Wildflowers, Lochwinnoch Community Development Trust and many others.

James Nairne, SCOTLAND: The Big Picture

Sally Wallis, SCOTLAND: The Big Picture

Josh Doble, Community Land Scotland

Sara King, Dr Sahran Higgins and Millie Bonnevay, Rewilding Britain

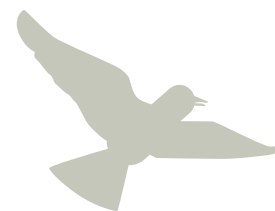
Jo Kerr and colleagues, Verture

And the other people and organisations that contributed to or reviewed this guide

Illustrations by Ed Harrison

GLOSSARY

Biodiversity	Short for biological diversity, this is the “variability among living organisms from all sources including, inter alia, terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they are part; this includes diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems” (Convention of Biological Diversity). Often used as a catch-all term for all living species.
Corridors (habitat or wildlife)	Areas of conserved, protected or high quality habitat that link larger wildlife areas together, allowing for the movement of wildlife between such areas and preventing fragmentation and isolation.
Ecosystem	<p>Living and non-living things in an area make up an ecosystem. Plants, animals, fungi and micro-organisms as well as rocks, soil and water are all part of an ecosystem. Unlike a habitat, an ecosystem isn’t a place – it’s a community of living and non living things.</p> <p>A pond is a habitat – a home for the fish and other organisms that live in it. But it’s also an ecosystem – a collection of complex relationships between the fish, plants, rocks and other things in the pond.</p>
Ecosystem engineer	Species which significantly change habitats. These species can have a large impact on the biodiversity of an area. Because of this, they play an important role in maintaining their environment. The term tends to be limited to only keystone species, because all organisms affect the area where they live, even if this effect is minor.
Grazer	An animal that eats grasses and herbs.
Habitat	The place, environment or conditions where a plant or animal lives and grows.
Hectare	A hectare is a way of measuring land. It is about 10,000 square metres. You can walk across it in a couple of minutes.
Invasive species	A non-native species that spreads from the point of introduction and becomes abundant. The invasive species label is usually only applied to species whose impact upon introduction has had a negative impact on the ecology of an area.



Keystone species	A species which has a disproportionately large effect on its natural environment relative to its abundance or biomass. Classic examples include wolves, beavers, sea otters and elephants. Keystone species play a significant role in defining the entire ecosystem they are found in, and often create habitat for other species. Without its keystone species, an ecosystem is dramatically different or may cease to exist altogether.
Landscape-scale conservation	A holistic land management approach that involves the pursuit of multiple benefits (e.g. water quality, biodiversity) across a defined area (e.g. a catchment, estuary or other recognisable landscape unit) through working in collaboration and at a large scale.
Natural capital	The world's stock of natural resources, including geology, soils, air, water and all living organisms, many of which provide valuable benefits to humans, known as ecosystem services. Eg. a woodland can be a natural capital asset, from which flows ecosystem services such as flood risk reduction, carbon capture and clean air.
Natural processes	Interactions among plants, animals, and the non-living components of the environment like climate or rocks. These interactions include photosynthesis, pollination, seed dispersal, grazing, decomposition and others. They are crucial for maintaining healthy ecosystems and supporting the long-term persistence of biodiversity.
Natural regeneration	The regeneration of trees and woodland through natural processes (e.g. seed dispersal), as opposed to planting by people.
Naturalistic grazing	Grazing that aims to replicate natural grazing patterns as much as possible. Herbivore density is not specified – populations are resource-limited, so that numbers fluctuate according to factors such as food availability, climate, pathogens and parasites; grazing animals are assumed to drive the ecosystem, and natural processes are allowed to act, rather than being aimed at targets for habitat and species composition; direct management intervention is reduced to a minimum, and the natural process is seen as an aim in itself.
Organism	A single living thing, like a plant, animal or fungus.

Predator	An animal that hunts, kills and eats other animals.
Prey	An animal that is eaten by other animals.
Reintroduction	The human-mediated movement of living organisms into an area where the species in question was historically native and has been made extinct. See also translocation.
Restoration	The process of repairing ecosystems that have been degraded, damaged or destroyed by human activities, for example through watercourse pollution, introduction of invasive species, over-extraction, or eradication of native species. Debate around the difference between restoration and rewilding is ongoing and the terms are often used interchangeably, but restoration historically has placed greater emphasis on vegetation/soil/geomorphology as agents of recovery, bottom-up processes and 'human-led' (nature-enabled') approaches towards a specified end-point. (Compare with rewilding)
Rewilding	The large-scale restoration of ecosystems where nature can take care of itself. It seeks to reinstate natural processes and, where appropriate, missing species – allowing them to shape the landscape and the habitats within.
SSSI	Site of Special Scientific Interest (a national legally designated protected area).
Designated or protected areas	Some areas are 'designated', which means they have special status as protected areas. In Scotland, this includes Marine Protected Areas, National Nature Reserves and SSSIs.
Succession	The sequence of ecological changes in which one group of plant or animal species is replaced by another as part of the natural lifecycle of a landscape.
Translocation	Translocation is the human-mediated movement of living organisms from one area to another.







www.rewild.scot