



SCOTLAND
THE BIG PICTURE

Rewilding for nature,
climate and people

SCOTLAND: The Big Picture

NEWS RELEASE FOR IMMEDIATE PUBLICATION

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REWILDING RELIES ON HEARTS & MINDS.

A new report explores the social and cultural barriers to nature recovery in Scotland.

Rewilding has recently generated more media interest than ever before, with the heightened focus on nature recovery following COP26, and widespread recognition that Scotland has become one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world. According to a recent poll carried out by YouGov, 77% of Scots support rewilding – the large-scale recovery of nature in order to reverse ecological decline, and to mitigate the impacts of climate breakdown.

Despite this growing support, some people still have concerns about rewilding and the change that it could bring about. *Hearts & Minds* is a new report produced by rewilding charity, SCOTLAND: The Big Picture, which seeks to understand different reactions to rewilding and consider how these might be holding back the restoration of our living systems.

“The practical idea of ecological restoration, or rewilding, is a simple one, but the social, cultural and political landscapes it must navigate to succeed are complex,” says Peter Cairns, Executive Director of SCOTLAND: The Big Picture.

“Conversations around changes to the way Scotland’s landscapes look and function can sometimes be uncomfortable – hence they’re mostly avoided. But we face a challenge that binds us all together: how to address climate breakdown and ongoing global nature loss. We need to create shared solutions to shared challenges.”

Hearts & Minds points out that across the spaces where rewilding is discussed, most notably social media, there can be a lack of tolerance for different perspectives, with entrenched, impassioned opinions from all sides. Rather than allowing issues to be explored, nuance to be understood and common ground found, these platforms so often seem to polarise the discussion and exaggerate differences, says the report.

Arranged by interest groups, *Hearts & Minds* explores attitudes towards rewilding among farmers, field sports enthusiasts, landowners, rural communities, conservation bodies and the general public, seeking to understand the sources of conflict and make recommendations on how to reconcile differing perspectives.

Barriers to the acceptance of rewilding by farmers include concerns over how a 'rewilded' landscape works economically, and potential loss of traditional farming practices. Yet the report points out that farmers and rewilders both want and need a healthy environment and thriving rural communities. Similarly, although some angling enthusiasts might prioritise catch numbers, everyone shares a common interest in clean, healthy river systems.

"We believe there is much more common ground than is currently portrayed in the popular media, and much to be gained from demystifying rewilding, fostering a more mutually respectful debate, and highlighting the benefits that large-scale nature recovery offers to everyone. *Hearts & Minds* doesn't pretend to have all the answers to what is a complex issue, but it does provide a springboard for building bridges leading to a more considered, progressive and inclusive conversation about how Scotland's landscapes could function better to benefit nature, climate and people."

The report concludes that more needs to be done to help different groups navigate the changes rewilding could bring, and recognise the opportunities relevant to their interests, if it is to gain wider support across the groups considered. Some resistance to rewilding undoubtedly results from its uncertain outcomes, but it could offer the best chance to mitigate many of the really scary challenges we have already precipitated through climate breakdown, from which there is arguably much more to fear.

Hearts & Minds can be downloaded in digital format:

<https://www.scotlandbigpicture.com/Store/free-downloads/Hearts-minds-pdf>

Or ordered as a hard copy: <https://www.scotlandbigpicture.com/Store/reports/hm-report>

Images (attached) and captions

JS_180618_-3: A rewilded landscape is one in which natural processes, such as the re-establishment of native woodland, is encouraged like here at Alladale in Sutherland.

PCA_12_150711_37; The return of white-tailed eagles to Scotland is hailed as one of the country's biggest conservation successes, yet many farmers have reported increasing impacts on their sheep.

MHA_749767: Some farmers and crofters perceive rewilding as a waste of potentially productive land but others are keen to develop a nature-friendly image to influence modern consumer choices.

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About SCOTLAND: The Big Picture

SCOTLAND: The Big Picture is a charity that works to drive the recovery of nature across Scotland through rewilding, in response to the growing climate and biodiversity crises.

More here: <https://www.scotlandbigpicture.com/Home>