

Tensions in the Interpretation and Implementation of Rewilding in Cultural Landscapes



Dr. Anna Gilchrist MCIEEM & Rowan Avery

Defining rewilding?

- Rewilding can mean a lot of things
- Rewilding projects are very diverse
- Despite this flexibility, at rewilding's core seems to be that it increases non-human autonomy
- In other words, it makes ecosystems wilder

See: Prior & Ward, 2016



But how wild?



Rewilding Europe, 2017, pp.12: *“the goal is to move up a scale of wildness within the constraints of what is possible.”*

Anthropo-centric

Designed ecosystem

Eco-centric

Autonomous ecosystem

Avalon Marshes



Knepp



Yellowstone



Drenthen, 2018

Forthcoming in *Environmental Values* ©The White Horse Press <http://www.whpress.co.uk>

Rewilding in layered landscapes as a challenge to place identity

Wynne-Jones, et al., 2018

Abandoning or Reimagining a Cultural Heartland? Understanding and Responding to Rewilding Conflicts in Wales - the case of the Cambrian Wildwood.

Tanasescu, 2017

Field Notes on the Meaning of Rewilding

Mihnea Tanasescu

DeSilvey & Bartolini, 2018

Where horses run free? Autonomy, temporality and rewilding in the Cõa Valley, Portugal

Caitlin DeSilvey | Nadia Bartolini

This spectrum elicits inherent tensions

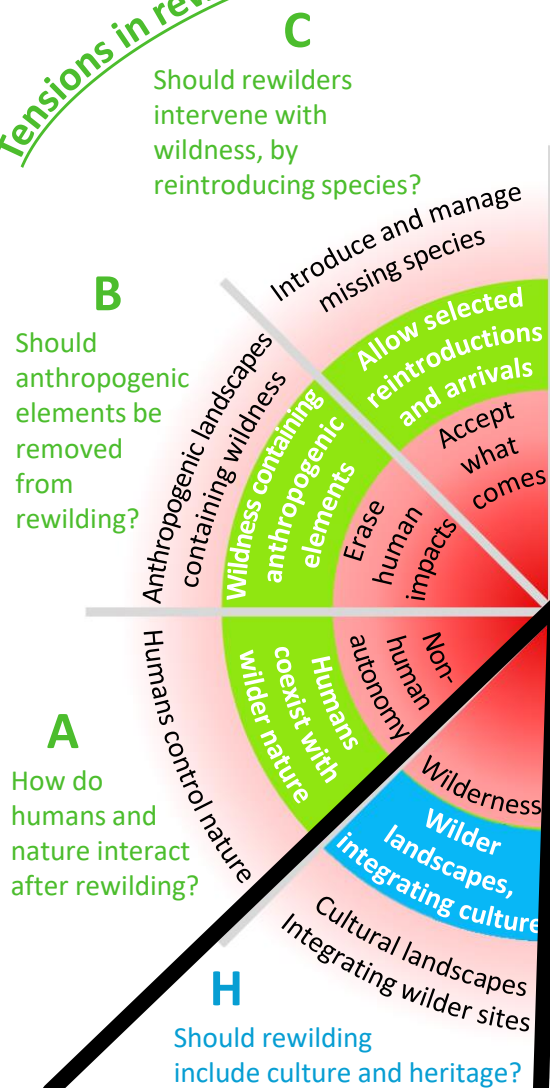
- Wherever a rewilding project is 'placed' on the spectrum, it generates different tensions
- How is rewilding being **interpreted**?
 - Should we reintroduce species, or allow natural colonisations?
 - Should human-introduced elements be removed?
 - Should humans be allowed into rewilding sites?
- How is rewilding being **implemented**?
 - Should rewilding erase heritage?
 - Should rewilding support livelihoods?
 - Should rewilding preserve targeted rare species?
- Often these tensions are what make rewilding projects controversial

Rewilding is a flexible concept; this might be used to facilitate *compromise*

- It has been proposed that the flexibility in the definition of rewilding makes the term unclear, or less meaningful (Jørgensen, 2015)
- In practice, this flexibility allows practitioners to choose how they interpret and implement rewilding to navigate philosophical or practical tensions
- Our work has been trying to explicitly identify these tensions by using the rewilding spectrum
- From this, we hope understanding the tensions can help us to propose practical **compromises** that may reduce conflict and controversy

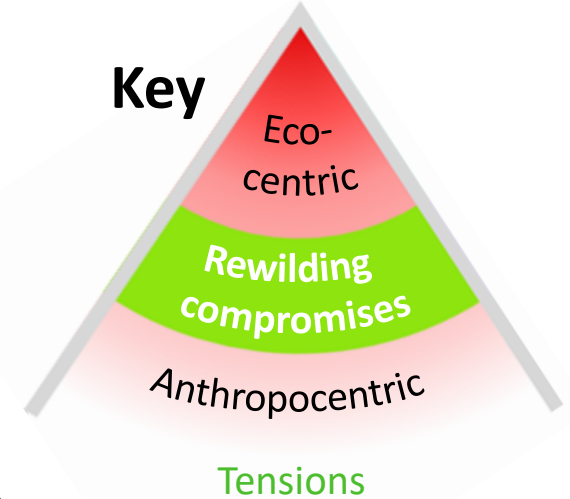
A brief look at our framework...

Tensions in rewilding's interpretation



Tensions in rewilding's implementation

Key



Tensions adapted from Gammon (2018)

Examples: tensions and compromises

- We propose that identifying tensions might help in reaching effective compromises in rewilding projects to reduce controversy and opposition
- We will now show how compromises may or may not be reached, using two examples of projects in the UK that could be considered as rewilding

Our practical examples

Map: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/f/f4/Template_europe_map.png



Proposed reintroduction of Eurasian lynx (*Lynx lynx*)

- 7 local farmer interviews
- Public survey (448 respondents)



Avalon Marshes wetland restoration

- 40 stakeholder interviews

**Example: a tension in the *interpretation*
of rewilding**

*Should rewilding prioritise historic
species, or dynamic processes?*

Historic species or dynamic processes?

Does rewilding make the ecosystem wilder by:

A) Restoring the species assemblage of a 'wild' historic baseline, before humans arrived

Or:

B) Prioritise dynamic ecosystem processes, rather than the compositional elements

Should rewilding prioritise historic species, or dynamic processes?

Replicated historic conditions

Open-ended dynamic processes

Anthropo-centric

Compromise?

Eco-centric



Proposed UK lynx reintroduction

Oostvaardersplassen



- The project focuses on rewilding one historic species
- Lynx predate roe deer; reintroducing a dynamic process
- ...But camera-trapping studies show that lynxes' ecological role is limited (Samelius, *et al.*, 2013; Schmidt & Kuijper, 2015)
- One historic species is rewilded, but the ecosystem is unlikely to become much more dynamic

Natural processes can have surprising results: are they always desirable?

Photos: Rowan Avery, 02/10/2018



Looking southwest over 8km of Oostvaardersplassen

Should rewilding prioritise historic species, or dynamic processes?

Replicated historic
conditions

Open-ended dynamic
processes

Anthropo-centric

Compromise?

Eco-centric



Avalon Marshes

“It's not a wild natural landscape, but [...] working with natural processes to create something new, obviously linked to something that, stretches to the end of time”

(Interviewee 21; a conservationist)

Example: A tension in the *implementation* of rewilding

*Should rewilding projects include
culture and heritage?*

Avalon Marshes: heritage built-into a wilder landscape

Slightly wilder
cultural landscapes

Rewilding project makes
little provision for culture

Anthropo-centric

Compromise?

Eco-centric



Avalon Marshes

- Layers of cultural heritage are visible in the wilder wetland landscape form, alongside reconstructions and signage
- Cultural narratives are remembered, not continued; the promotion of cultural landscapes is still limited

What stories should a rewilded landscape tell?

Slightly wilder
cultural landscapes

Rewilding project makes
little provision for culture

Anthropo-centric

Compromise?

Eco-centric



Avalon Marshes



Avalon Marshes

- *“people can actually get that physical impression of what life was like in a Roman building, Saxon building or an Iron Age building. [...] that jump back into a thousand, two thousand years, is what we're trying to do”* (Interviewee 38, heritage preservationist)
- Peat extracting veterans and conservationists all identified a compromise they'd accept: a reconstruction of a peat extractors' hut

Lynx and farming culture

Slightly wilder
cultural landscapes

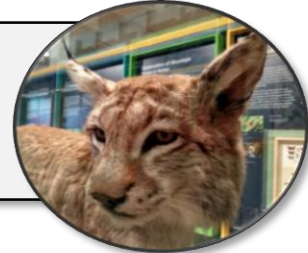
Rewilding project makes
little provision for culture

Anthropo-centric

Compromise?

Eco-centric

Proposed UK lynx
reintroduction



- Conflict with local pastoral culture; lynxes kill sheep
- Potentially problematic for getting a reintroduction license
- Lynx UK Trust propose compensation, but...
- *“I don’t think anyone is interested in compensation”*
(Interviewed farmer #4)

Lynx and the public

Slightly wilder
cultural landscapes

Rewilding project makes
little provision for culture

Anthropo-centric

Compromise?

Eco-centric



Proposed UK lynx
reintroduction

- In a survey of 448 members of the public:
 - 70% thought lynx would increase their enjoyment of the countryside
 - 84% supported lynx reintroduction
 - 94% thought at least occasional *compensated* sheep losses were acceptable

Understanding compromise in rewilding projects

- We propose that considering these tensions in rewilding projects:
 - Helps to identify what compromises might need to be made
 - Clarifies the specific *interpretation* of rewilding
 - Predicts more extreme views that might create tensions or controversy
 - Demands recognition of the inherent tensions in the *implementation* of rewilding

- A. How do humans and nature interact after rewilding?
- B. Should anthropogenic elements be removed from rewilding?
- C. Should rewilders intervene with wildness by reintroducing species?
- D. Should rewilding be undertaken when the outcomes are uncertain?
- E. Should rewilding prioritise historic species or dynamic processes?
- F. Is maintaining wildness more important than rare species?
- G. Is wildness acceptable if it is considered unscenic?
- H. Should rewilding include culture and heritage?

Conclusion

- Any vision of rewilding raises tensions
- We think that the definition of rewilding should be flexible; it permits compromises
- Our work aims to compile the key rewilding tensions into one decision-making framework
- However...it is work in progress and we would love to hear whether you:
 - Think identifying tensions and compromises might be useful in *practice*
 - If there are tensions we have missed

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