

REWILDING AND THE FUTURE OF HUMANKIND

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Restoring our proper relationship with the natural world, it must be asserted, does not entail a retreat from nature, but a renewed immersion in its mystery

and a humble submission to its laws.

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‘Rewilding,’ the initiative to return areas of farmland to the condition of a wilderness and to release once present species back into already established nature reserves, is currently very fashionable. The point is to restore ecosystems and reverse biodiversity decline by letting wildlife and natural processes reclaim areas whilst simultaneously reducing human management.

Soon, [a small herd of European Bison will be released in Kent](#), south-east England. Bison, which have not been present in Britain for several thousand years, will once again roam in one of the few ‘wild’ places left in these isles. For years, also, there has been talk of [releasing Eurasian lynxes across the British Isles](#), which died out here in the early Middle Ages, and [wolves in the Scottish Highlands](#).

In the newly established [Knepp Wildland](#) in West Sussex, Sir Charles Burrell, 10th Baronet, has overseen a rewilding experiment on 3,500 acres that has given rise to a remarkable abundance of turtle doves, different species of bat, various kinds of snake, a thriving population of nightingales, and the first wild White Storks that England has seen for six centuries. Sir Charles already had various deer grazing on his land—red, fallow, and roe—to which he added free-roaming herds of English longhorn cattle, Exmoor ponies, and Tamworth pigs as proxies for the [aurochs](#), [tarpan](#), and wild boar that long ago roamed British woods and scrubland. Knepp Wildland has also become a haven for rare birds of prey such as long-eared owls, hobbies, and peregrine falcons. Importantly, it has become a refuge for many insects that are threatened due to modern, industrialised farming methods, which use toxins and pesticides that cause grave damage to the whole natural world. The very rare Emperor butterfly and Vagrant Emperor dragonfly can now easily be seen at Knepp Wildland.

Rewilding projects are underway across the world, but they are especially common in Europe. Good work is being done to [prevent illegal logging in Romania](#), home to two-thirds of Europe's old temperate forests. Sadly, half of Romania's forestry production comes from this unlawful activity by what is known as the 'timber mafia.' Nonetheless, there are excellent initiatives to conserve the unique wildlife of the Carpathians, the Danube Delta, and the vast forests that cover the country. Romania is important due to its enormous, ancient forests and the astonishing number of large mammals—Carpathian lynx, grey wolf, European jackal, brown bear, chamois, bison, red deer, and others—that are found in impressive numbers there. But rewilding is taking place across the continent: the Oder Delta in Germany, the Greater Côa Valley in Portugal, the Central Apennines in Italy, the Oostvaardersplassen nature reserve in the Netherlands, and in many other places.

Rewilding and farming, however, are in tension. Many farmers, especially those whose livelihoods rely on the survival and health of their lambs and calves, worry about the releasing of large predators like lynxes and wolves into the countryside. Furthermore, many farmers feel that the whole rewilding movement calls into question their work of cultivating the natural world into a reliable source of food.

Some commentators have claimed that rewilders see humankind and human culture as fundamentally separate from the natural world. Environmental historian Prof. Dolly Jørgensen has remarked that rewilding "seeks to erase human history and involvement with the land and flora and fauna. Such an attempted split between nature and culture may prove unproductive and even harmful."

This dichotomy between nature and culture is perhaps the obvious consequence of a three-centuries old process of replacing historically conditioned, contextual, embodied man—existent in families, local communities, and nations—with the abstract, universal 'Man,' whose rights can be codified, purposes commodified, and desires satisfied by emancipation from concrete reality.

As it happens, my own knee-jerk instinct is that of enthusiasm for the rise of rewilding. As a young boy, I recall seeing masses of butterflies—red admirals, peacocks, tortoise shells,

cabbage whites, common blues, and others—every time I stepped out for a summer walk. Now, I am lucky if I see one red admiral butterfly all summer. I am deeply worried about the future of our wildlife as well as the countryside that we share with it. The dual scourges of urban growth and industrialised farming are putting at risk the world which is meant to be more a home and a source of meaning than a mere ‘resource.’

Counter-intuitively perhaps, it was my sympathy for wildlife and conservation that, besides my love for being outdoors, got me into hunting. [As I have argued elsewhere](#), hunting with hounds in particular entails a real love of the quarry-species that is hunted, the hunt calendar partly organised to procure the thriving of that species. One problem with the shift away from traditional methods of hunting with hounds to hunting with rifle or shotgun is the absence of *the chase*. This means that large herds or crowded populations of a particular quarry are not broken up and dispersed for the health and flourishing of the species, as they would regularly be if they had many predators living alongside them in the wild. Furthermore, hounds—like wolves—will naturally isolate and run down weak or sick quarry, and thereby protect the species from disease. Firearms, on the other hand, do not discriminate in this way.

One of England’s great conservation success stories is that of the red deer of Exmoor. The red deer there numbered around seventy by 1855. That year, the Devon and Somerset Staghounds (D.S.S.H) were founded. By 1870, through careful management by the pack, the deer reached around a thousand in number. Today, due to the hard work of the D.S.S.H., for which they have been so poorly thanked by England’s useless political class, the red deer of Exmoor number around 2,500, and large herds have spread west and also east to the Quantock Hills, where staghound packs have also been founded to manage the herds. Of course, those who oppose hunting with hounds on account of their sentimentalism ignore such cases.

Rewilding has already been coupled with hunting in the UK, as contracted deerstalkers have been brought into areas of Scotland to turn large numbers of red deer into venison, giving newly planted evergreen woodland a chance to mature. And it is not only in the British Isles that conservation successes have been brought about by hunting, as well as

disaster to conservation caused by unregulated, illegal poaching. Across much of Africa, I have witnessed how wildlife has been well-managed, and nature reserves both protected and expanded, due to big-game hunting, as well as the infrastructures established to guard more animals from poachers.

The world, before it is a resource to be mined, is a gift to be cared for. It is therefore regrettable that the 'green movement' has been appropriated by ideologues who see the world wholly as a 'sustainable resource' and 'renewable commodity.' These managerial toerags have teamed up with those on the extreme Left who see humankind as a disease in the world, a parasite that does nothing but take, thereby corrupting the health of the planet (a planet that would be better off, they hold, without us). These two ideological currents seem at odds, with one seeking to commodify the earth and the other seeking to free the earth from those who would subordinate it to pure use. The former, however, sees population growth to be a threat to the sustainability of the earth as a resource, and so instinctively sympathises with the misanthropy of the latter. Thus, together these two currents have allied the 'green' agenda with an aggressive population control ideology. This population control ideology long predates the 'green' movement with which it is now mingled, having a pedigree that includes Malthusianism and the 19th century eugenics movement. Today, most of those at the forefront of global 'green' initiatives hold to a worldview that comprises an admixture of these ideological approaches. And they see the success of their endeavours to require a dramatically reduced human population that is removed from the natural world, a world which they claim would thrive if only left alone by us.

Viewing 'green' as a category of the Left, too many conservatives have conceded all the political and cultural territory concerning nature conservation to their adversaries, and now have little to say on the topic. The exceptions are found only among some especially expansive conservative thinkers like [Sir Roger Scruton](#) and the now increasingly influential [Paul Kingsnorth](#).

Conservatives have largely failed to fight for their proper place as the *true* green-warriors, and they have been routinely embarrassed to propose the simple conservation activities

that actually work—localist initiatives like park-management, tree-planting, gardening, smallholding, pickling, beekeeping, and hunting. Having abandoned the ‘green movement’ to the Left, conservatives are instinctively suspicious of internationally coordinated rewilding projects. Anything advanced in defence of the world that we inhabit, they reason, must be driven by motives incompatible with their worldview, for such enterprises are now entirely in the hands of their enemy. Conservatives may not be wrong to have such intuitions, but the proper response should be that of forming a truly *conservative* ‘green movement,’ not stepping out of the ‘conservation conversation’ altogether.

It is undeniable that enthusiasm for rewilding has coincided with the rise of a certain vision of humankind as a ‘problem’ to be solved, rather than the summit of creation to be celebrated. It is easy to see why enthusiasm for rewilding has arisen with such a misanthropic vision. We must, many believe, re-create the world as if we had never been in it. We must undo the cultivated world and recover the wild world. We can then finally drive a sharp wedge between man and nature. Man will finally leave nature alone, being confined to his carbon-neutral cities where, when feeling starved of the natural world he used to inhabit, he may visit its substitute in the Metaverse. The interaction with the natural world found in farming will have been rendered unnecessary as we grow our food in colossal polytunnels in a well-irrigated Sahara, planted and harvested by robots. Meat, for those barbarians who still consume it, will be grown from protein cells in test-tubes and delivered in aluminium pouches by drones as we all conduct our work from home.

Given that the top 1% of the world’s rich, who own 40% of the world’s wealth, have hugely invested in the technology to move us onto [test-tube meat](#) and [insect-based proteins](#), such a diet now seems unavoidable. As we increasingly become unwell on our new diet and the vast amount of radiation and chemicals needed to run our technologized world—and are hit by the occasional Chinese bioweapon—we shall have to routinely turn to the pharmaceuticals that are owned by (guess who!) that same 1%. We might avoid this nightmare, of course, by unplugging ourselves, moving out of our urban apartments, and then smallholding on cheap, remote land—but let’s be honest, we’ll probably all choose comfort, bug food, and illness instead. Fortunately for our overlords, such a trajectory will likely lead to the reduced, moderately wealthy, population that they believe both the earth

and the market so desperately needs.

In this dystopia, in which a reduced human population of technologized *chosen* lives in a parallel urban world to the natural one from which they have been utterly severed, man will have achieved the antithesis of what he was always supposed to do, namely carefully turn this hostile world into a home. Having rejected the imperative to make a home out of this world, man will have fled the world altogether to enter a simulated world of his own making. Of course, that virtual world, in which he has made a virtual home, will reflect his heart from which it has come, and there is nothing darker and more twisted than the heart of a man who has fled his purpose.

It deeply worries me that rewilding harmonises so well with the construction of this Brave New World. It brings me no joy to reflect so pessimistically. As stated, rewilding is an enterprise with which I have instinctive sympathies. Rewilding could mark the beginnings of an escape from what Martin Buber called the 'It-world,' namely that vision of the world as something to be used and commodified rather than conserved and cherished. Rewilding is something that conservative-minded people could make their own, and thereby rescue this fashionable initiative from the dark ideological motives by which it is being shaped. Greater involvement by conservatives requires, as a fundamental prerequisite, the courage to claim that man has a role as steward and guardian over the natural world, of which he is an inseparable part. Restoring our proper relationship with the natural world, it must be asserted, does not entail a retreat from nature, but a renewed immersion in its mystery and a humble submission to its laws.

The ideologues who believe that humankind needs to enter into a completely different mode of life may not be wrong, they may only be mistaken about what shape that change must take. Rather than a globalised, technologized, urbanised, sterile, population of managers, ordering computerised proxy-workers about in the Metaverse, perhaps we need to restore a local, simple, domestic, less-industrialised, more *natural* way of life, that privileges human flourishing, the flourishing of the world we inhabit, and of the creatures we share it with, over productivity and commodification. That, however, will require rescuing the 'green movement' from the misanthropic Leftists, the globalist oligarchs who

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crave power, and, importantly, the fake 'conservatives' who fetishize the market as the highest possible good.