



SCOTTISH POLICY GROUP

BRITISH ECOLOGICAL SOCIETY

The place of people in rewilding:

**Notes from the BES Scottish Policy
Group Pie and a Pint, 26th October
2016, Inverness**

The place of people in rewilding.

This is a summary of a discussion held at British Ecological Society's Scottish Policy Group (BES-SPG) Pie and a Pint meeting in Inverness on the 26th October.

The event was open to all BES-SPG members and policy relevant people. About 40 people attended from wide range of organisations.

The event was opened by three short 10 minute talks from the following people presenting their own perspectives on rewilding:

- Adam Smith of the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust,
- Rob Brooker read a statement from Fenning Welstead from Alladale Estate as Fenning was unable to attend due illness
- David Balharry of Rewilding Britain

The group then split into four, with each group taking it in turns to address the four questions.

Summary – the three main themes emerging from each question are shown.

Q1. Is there anything special about rewilding or is it just the end of a spectrum of restoration?

- Large scale in time and space
- No defined end point, and about “letting go” and allowing natural processes to take over
- Huge potential as an engagement tool

Q2. Should we manage the rewilding process or is it just abandonment? i.e. does rewilding require human intervention?

- Early intervention to remove engineering and infrastructure will kick start the process.
- INNS and exotics are a worry. Could we end up with Sitka forest with a Rhododendron understory?
- We need to agree on a destination and accept the trade-offs.

Q3. Are local communities still part of a rewilded landscape?

- Where are local communities now? What are the relationships they have with the landscape and with other stakeholders, for example landowners, government, non-local communities
- Rewilding necessarily involves a long-term approach. Community involvement must match this. This brings both opportunities and challenges, for example cultural change can be achieved over the long-term but investment (economic, social, political etc.) must be on-going
- What does “Rewilding” mean to people in communities? Agency of individuals and communities relies on them being able to weigh up the pros and cons of rewilding as a vision.

Q4. What policies do we need to put in place for rewilding to occur?

- Before asking for policy change, need to be clear what society wants delivered on the ground, what role that rewilding could play in delivering that, and whether changes needed to legislation to assist the land management change required.
- The ‘who decides’ is a key question that needs to be dealt with on a case by case basis with it being unlikely that there will be any generic one-size-fits-all approach that can be applied anywhere in the country.
- There is a need for a better understanding of what rewilding delivers when applied at a large enough scale and in association with other land management and land use change in those landscapes

Note from Chair (Ruth Mitchell)

On writing up these notes it became apparent that there is an apparent conflict between the answers provided to Question 1 and the answers to the other questions. Question 1 acknowledges that rewilding is different from restoration, due in part, to there being no defined end point. Questions 2, 3 and 4 all suggest that we need agreement on the end point, need to be able to weigh up pros and cons of the choices, and have a better understanding of what rewilding will deliver. This apparent conflict between rewilding being an unknown end point or goal and the need to know what we are trying to achieve in order to a) manage rewilding, b) identify how local communities can be part of a rewilded landscape and c) define what policies we need to put in place; is perhaps one of the fundamental issues that needs to be discussed further with respect to rewilding.

Detailed notes from each discussion question

Q1. Is there anything special about rewilding or is it just the end of a spectrum of restoration?

- Restoration has set goals and management to achieve an end. In rewilding the outcome is not pre-defined, and there may be no end point.
- Rewilding is about letting go and allowing natural processes to operate, moving away from top down control.
- Although it can be applied to all sorts of different activities, generally it is thought of as being at a large scale in both space and time (i.e. results will be delivered over multiple human generations), although this may not be anything new (see the concept of Futurescapes)
- Post-glacial is commonly a part of the concept – that set’s a framework for what is and is not acceptable in terms of end points and e.g. species to reintroduce.
- Rewilding can be a fantastic concept for engaging the public in nature conservation; but for local communities it can also be an unnerving/frightening concept thanks to the “wild” bit.
- There may be a political element to rewilding that’s not in restoration: reclaiming control of the land.
- Top predators are a key component of the concept.
- Restoration can be “un-wilding”.
- You might be able to wild (i.e. bring in nature) in systems where you can’t restore (i.e. bring back what was there).

Q2. Should we manage the rewilding process or is it just abandonment? i.e. does rewilding require human intervention?

Background

- We are reinstating natural processes, so we will be working at larger scales than usual conservation actions.
- Should be done against a context of being paid for benefits produced and suffering penalties for poor management.
- We should get on with it as the environment continues to degrade.
- Needs to be supported by policy and there needs to be clear agreement on targets.
- If large carnivores are reintroduced, then there may have to be a change in the access legislation – akin to access to firing ranges.
- Need to accept losses of open ground species.

Actions required

- Will have to do first aid/kick start proceedings. This could entail reinstating drained waterbodies, removing fences, blocking ditches, re-meandering rivers, planting, deer control. Fence removal will allow for the free and natural movement of herbivores.
- Dispersal limitation may prevent many species from taking advantage of rewilding – need to intervene by reintroductions.
- INNS provide a clear risk if no management is carried out.
- May need to intervene to maintain access.
- Significant early intervention may be necessary to minimise the need for later intervention.
- Patience will be needed for initial lag phase and an initial loss of diversity – perhaps a temptation to over-intervene.
- Concentration on individual species may jeopardise the whole process.

Question 3 – Are local communities still part of a rewilded landscape?

Group 1

- They have got to be, it would be too hard otherwise
- It is possible to have a wild landscape with communities
- Current definitions may work against community integration of people and rewilding; Category II protected areas do allow communities, but Category I parks are “true wilderness”
- Natural processes don’t exclude people
- “Community” is not one body
- “Local” is misleading; e.g. National Parks are for the nation!
- We are actually trying to rewild ourselves; it is a process internal to each individual
- A wild view is different for different communities, e.g. rural & urban, and highly subjective
- There are economic opportunities beyond extraction; are they feasible opportunities for the people and place?
- Social change is possible (it has happened in the past); most resistance is from feeling threatened

- Local people need to be involved in a rewilded economy; for example through recruitment
- Convention on Biological Diversity already includes biodiversity and local communities
- Communities are numerous and diverse, not just restricted to “locals”
- Fences are a tool to manage leakage of natural and managed landscapes into each other

Group 2

- Why does conservation always have to get local agreement when other projects (e.g. motorways) don't have to do this?
- Landowners are disproportionately influential
- Buy-in of local communities is really important as they have been ridden rough-shod over before
- Rewilding should include “reconnection” between people and environment
- Long-term rewilding projects require ongoing community agreement
- Need to link the rewilding with a positive view of history
- Cannot rely solely on tourism as not a sustainable solution
- Communities are currently actively deterred from engaging with the landscape
- Young people have to believe change is possible and that their potential can be realised; this can include fast tracking young local people into jobs

Group 3

- Local communities should be involved both to start and ongoing
- The higher the population density, the harder rewilding will be
- Communities are “connected” to the landscape
- Economics reinforces existing bias, rather than convince people to support change
- Interactions with landscape maybe stronger than economics, but can these interactions be changed over the long term? It may only take a generation
- Gradual changes will work
- Landscape is very different from the 1800s
- It's hard for people to think beyond immediate threats; where do connections end?
- Need to involve as many people over as large an area as possible
- Could have a few experimental areas
- How much compromise is there in the rewilding movement?

Group 4

- Select sites for rewilding where there are no people, such as abandoned sites
- People abandon areas due to various pressures, including rewilding
- Rewilding needs to come from the bottom up, e.g. the community empowerment act
- Stakeholder engagement is fundamental, cf. the code for species translocations
- Engagement has to be long-term
- What could engage large landowners to be involved? Economic incentives?
- The pressure to change comes from urban communities
- “Change” is a constant thing, communities should decide whether they want to be involved or not
- Rewilding is not a black and white choice; there is a spectrum
- Communities are not as involved in existing management as they could be, although this is changing now

- What does rewilding mean for people in communities

Q4. What policies do we need to put in place for rewilding to occur?

The group felt that the immediate focus on 'policies' was putting the cart before the horse. Before considering policy need there is firstly a need to: know what 'we' [see next point] want to achieve from rewilding; then assess whether any current or new legislation is required to help deliver that; and then decide what existing and/or new policies might be needed to support that legislation

The question of 'who decides?' [the 'we' in the point above] proved an interesting debate. It was recognised that land managers AND local communities need to be involved in discussions about what is to be achieved from rewilding in an area. But it was also recognised that 'wider society' may want rewilding to achieve something from a catchment (e.g. more trees for natural flood management, or lynx reintroductions) that local land managers and/or communities do not want to see – or don't think they want to see - in 'their' area.

This need for a wider range of stakeholders to be involved in the discussions was seen by some in the group as making the task of 'deciding' impossible. It was, however, highlighted that people dealing with conflict resolution would say that the process of trying to reach some consensus by setting out everyone's views for all to discuss is part of the conflict resolution process – and can lead to an acceptance that option x might be the best way forward even if all individuals are not 'getting their own way'. That is understanding not just what someone's stance is but also why helps increase appreciation across any group as to where everyone is 'coming from'.

It was felt that this process may be 'easier' to achieve if there was some common understanding of what rewilded landscapes can achieve in practice. There were questions raised about how much is really known about how rewilding can be used as a tool to deliver wider benefits to society? But it was also felt that because of the long-term impoverishment of the uplands, then anything different delivered by rewilding could be a benefit!

The forthcoming Community Empowerment Act was seen as positive in helping local communities have more of a say in what happens around them. It was also highlighted that it will also be important to manage people's expectations as to what can be achieved and over what timescale – no part of Scotland is exactly the same as any other (in terms of history or scale of past and current land use) and so starting points (in terms of existing habitat structures, condition and potential to change) will differ from one part of the country to another.

Going back to the original question as to what more legislation/policies (if any) might be needed, the fact that Scotland has a Land Use Strategy was highlighted, as was the fact that currently that Strategy says nothing about rewilding. It was felt that rewilding could be incorporated into something based on the general principles of the Land Use Strategy, especially if the latter was being used to investigate what was feasible at different scales

This then opened up a wider question as to how was what can be delivered by rewilding and different from the current focus on the delivery of ecosystem services, i.e. how or what can rewilding deliver within that bigger picture? There was recognition that there is need for major land management and land use change to deliver many of those wider ecosystem services at a scale needed to make the difference – and that rewilding may have a role to play within such changed landscapes, but may not form the only focus of those changed landscapes

Interestingly, although the discussion actually started off by looking at existing grants and designations and asking if these helped or hindered rewilding, the discussions quickly focused on

these bigger picture questions as indicated above. There was an acceptance that those bigger questions would need answering before any judgement could be made on how to change the detail of incentives on the ground

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