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# NAVIGATING THE LANDSCAPES OF REWILDING

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A comparative case study of 'rewilding' in the  
Avalon Marshes and Wild Ennerdale



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Navigating the landscapes of rewilding: a comparative case study of 'rewilding' in the Avalon Marshes and Wild Ennerdale

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I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that any material that has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University has been acknowledged.

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Rwyf hefyd yn ddyledus i bawb a gynorthwyodd fi yn yr ymchwid hon, y rhai a gymerodd ran yn uniongyrchel, rhoi cyfweiliadau neu lenwi holiaduron, a'r rhai nad ydynt yn ymddangos yn y thraethawd ymchwil hwn ond a oedd serch hynny wedi cynnig eu harbenigedd, eu barn a'u hamser yn hael. Fe wnaethant i gyd gyfrannu at greu'r traethawd ymchwil hwn ac ni fyddai'r ymchwil wedi bod yn bosibl hebddyn nhw.

Mae cefnogaeth fy nheulu yn rhywbeth arall a wnaeth y fenter gyfan yn bosibl, nid yn unig dros y tair blynedd diwethaf, ond yn yr holl flynyddoedd a arweiniodd fi i Gaerwysg. Ac yn olaf, rwy'n ddiolchgar i'r rhai a oedd yng Nghaerwysg o fy mlaen ac a arhosodd yno ar fy ôl - gallwn fod wedi gwneud hynny heboch chi ond rwy'n falch nad oedd yn rhaid i mi wneud hynny.

## Abstract

Rewilding is a novel and radical conservation approach and while the concept is a broad one, without any set definition, broadly speaking it focuses on reducing human intervention and allowing natural processes to recover autonomously. This change to the location of agency in landscape, from human to other-than-human, coupled with the many ways that rewilding's lack of a distinct definition allows it to be interpreted, makes it contentious. Opponents see rewilding as a threat to established land use models and the social, cultural and economic systems associated with them. Proponents meanwhile see it as offering a positive and proactive future for environmental protection.

As a burgeoning movement rewilding requires, and is generating, considerable research interest. This thesis provides a case study of rewilding in England, examining the boundaries that human and physical landscapes present to rewilding, and how those boundaries are negotiated. A preliminary round of twelve expert interviews was conducted to further understandings of rewilding and to inform the research project as a whole. Subsequently, two field sites, the Avalon Marshes and Wild Ennerdale, were used to conduct a pairwise comparison – stakeholder interviews, visitor questionnaires, and field notes and photographs were conducted at each site. Analysis of the collected data was informed by theories of boundary work, companion species and biopolitics. Particular attention was paid to the way that human and other-than-human boundaries are (re)negotiated with and through rewilding, and to the way that rewilding's boundaries are negotiated with respect to existing land use.

Results demonstrated that ineffective communication was a significant factor in the negotiation of rewilding with its stakeholders. Rewilding was poorly understood and often poorly received, demonstrating failures to consult and engage with publics. Meanwhile, new biopolitical modes are being developed in relation to the other-than-human species involved in rewilding. These new modes of biopolitics can be problematic, especially when they result in changes to the status quo and/or when human and other-than-human interests conflict. This research advances the discourse relating to rewilding, particularly in England. I argue that a distinct form of rewilding is emerging, uniquely tailored to the English context – operating at smaller scale, permitting more human involvement, restricting the involvement of certain species, and, to a certain extent, limiting natural autonomy. This finding assists in furthering the debate about what role rewilding can play in cultural landscapes. More broadly this knowledge can also advance the way we negotiate conservation, land use, and human relationships with the environment and with other-than-human species.



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# Chapter 1: Into the (re)wild

## 1.1 Research context

Never in Earth's four-billion-year history has one species had such an impact on the planet and its ecosystems as humans are now having. The profound and apparently enduring influence of human activity on the global environment has led to the current geological epoch being described as the 'Anthropocene' (Lewis and Maslin, 2015). Linked to this, the Earth is experiencing its 'sixth mass extinction event', sometimes referred to as the 'Anthropocene extinction' to highlight the way in which the extinctions are anthropogenically mediated (Leakey and Lewin, 1996; Pievani, 2014; Trischler, 2016). A 'mass extinction event' is one in which extinction rates are significantly above background levels and in which biodiversity, and consequently ecosystem services, are diminished (Ceballos *et al.*, 2015) i.e. the loss of *individual* species leads to the loss of interactions *between* species and, ultimately, to a breakdown in ecosystem function (Janzen, 1974).

The European Commission has warned that this biodiversity loss is 'the most critical global environmental threat alongside climate change' (Pillai and Heptinstall, 2013). Yet, given the continuing loss of species and habitats, existing conservation strategies appear to be failing, resulting in calls for 'intensified conservation efforts' (Ceballos *et al.*, 2015). Alternatively, other theorists argue that current conservation models are flawed and that rather than intensifying existing methods, alternative approaches are needed (Carver, 2007; Gillson, Ladle and Araújo, 2011). 'Rewilding' has been heralded as just such an approach – a novel conservation method which, by taking a *proactive* rather than *reactive* stance, can counter biodiversity loss, combat 'trophic downgrading'<sup>1</sup>, and redress the decline in ecosystem function associated with extinctions. Rewilding, it is argued, could succeed where traditional conservation methods have failed, protecting, and even restoring, the natural environment (Soule and Noss, 1998; Estes *et al.*, 2011; Arts, Fischer and van der Wal, 2016; Jepson, 2016).

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<sup>1</sup> Trophic downgrading is the removal of 'large apex consumers' and the consequent effects on related ecosystems (Estes *et al.*, 2011).

Indeed, Jepson (2016) argues that traditional ‘conservation’ is in fact (too) often ‘preservation’ (i.e. the (attempted) maintenance of the environment in an ‘unaltered condition’ (Katz, 1997)) and that this is not only a losing battle (in the face of, for example, climate change) but that it celebrates impoverished ecosystems. Rewilding, by contrast, has been described as ‘a process of (re)introducing or restoring wild organisms and/or ecological processes to ecosystems where such organisms and processes are either missing or are ‘dysfunctional’” (Prior and Brady, 2017, p. 34) i.e. it emphasises *changing* rather than *maintaining* the status quo by (re)introducing organisms and restoring processes. Prior and Brady’s (2017) interpretation is one of many definitions of rewilding, a term for which there is no generally accepted meaning, such that Gammon (2018) has described it as a ‘cluster concept’. This notion is certainly evident in that several recurring themes can be identified among the proposed definitions. Rewilding is, for example, suggested to focus on: restoring ecological functioning<sup>2</sup>, increasing biodiversity<sup>3</sup>, reintroducing species<sup>4</sup>, increasing ‘wildness’<sup>5</sup>, increasing ecosystem resilience<sup>6</sup>, promoting natural / non-human autonomy<sup>7</sup>, restoring ecosystems<sup>8</sup>, reducing human intervention / using ‘passive

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<sup>2</sup> Navarro and Pereira, 2012; Sandom and Macdonald, 2015; Lorimer *et al.*, 2015; Arts, Fischer and van der Wal, 2016; Prior and Ward, 2016; Carver, 2016a; Jepson, 2016; Nogués-Bravo *et al.*, 2016; Crowley, Hinchliffe and McDonald, 2017a; Tanasescu, 2017; Tsing, 2017; Fernández, Navarro and Pereira, 2017; Prior and Brady, 2017; DeSilvey and Bartolini, 2018; Sandom *et al.*, 2018; Wynne-Jones, Strouts and Holmes, 2018; Gammon, 2018; Pettorelli *et al.*, 2018.

<sup>3</sup> Hintz, 2007; Brown, McMorran and Price, 2011; Navarro and Pereira, 2012; Lorimer *et al.*, 2015; Tsing, 2017; Sandom *et al.*, 2018.

<sup>4</sup> Soule and Noss, 1998; Hintz, 2007; Jørgensen, 2014; Sandom and Macdonald, 2015; Lorimer *et al.*, 2015; Carver, 2016a; Jepson, 2016; Nogués-Bravo *et al.*, 2016; Prior and Ward, 2016; Fernández, Navarro and Pereira, 2017; Crowley, Hinchliffe and McDonald, 2017a; Tanasescu, 2017; Tsing, 2017; Prior and Brady, 2017; DeSilvey and Bartolini, 2018; Wynne-Jones, Strouts and Holmes, 2018; Pettorelli *et al.*, 2018.

<sup>5</sup> Arts, Fischer and van der Wal, 2016; Corlett, 2016.

<sup>6</sup> Navarro and Pereira, 2012; Prior and Ward, 2016; Tanasescu, 2017; Gammon, 2018; Deary and Warren, 2018; Pettorelli *et al.*, 2018; Sandom *et al.*, 2018.

<sup>7</sup> Navarro and Pereira, 2012; Arts, Fischer and van der Wal, 2016; Prior and Ward, 2016; Tanasescu, 2017; DeSilvey and Bartolini, 2018; Gammon, 2018; Deary and Warren, 2018; Wynne-Jones, Strouts and Holmes, 2018.

<sup>8</sup> Soule and Noss, 1998; Jørgensen, 2014; Nogués-Bravo *et al.*, 2016; Prior and Brady, 2017; Crowley, Hinchliffe and McDonald, 2017a; Gammon, 2018.

management<sup>9</sup>, and being a process or practice<sup>10</sup> (rather than being, or working towards, a fixed result).

There are two important points to consider from this list, first of which is the emphasis on reintroduction<sup>11</sup> (note the number of scholars who reference it as key element of rewilding); it is little wonder therefore that the two concepts are often conflated in media representations and public understandings of rewilding (Townsend, 2016; Deary and Warren, 2018). Second, there is an overwhelming emphasis on ecological functioning. Only two of the papers listed here (Tanasescu, 2017; Pettorelli *et al.*, 2018) allude to the functioning of socio-ecological systems, with Tanasescu proposing that rewilding ‘comprises the idea of *economic rejuvenation, in order to allow the people that still live on the land to make a better living*’ (2017, p. 337 emphasis added). Tanasescu’s (2017) interpretation offers an optimistic view of what is often, as will become clear in the course of this thesis, a tension of rewilding – the desire to balance areas of ‘wildness’, which prioritise the ‘natural’ environment, with areas of land-use which privilege the more prosaic needs of humans such as food, fuel, water, transport and housing (Linnell *et al.*, 2015).

While these recurring themes exist within the plethora of definitions of rewilding there are also incompatibilities and contradictions. For example, rewilding is described as ‘a *future-orientated pursuit*’ (Deary and Warren, 2018, p. 20, emphasis added) versus being a ‘conservation approach that attempts to restore *historical ecosystems and species*’ (Crowley, Hinchliffe and McDonald, 2017a, p. 1848, emphasis added) i.e. in some instances rewilding is backward looking, taking its reference points from the past, and in some instances it is forward looking, aspiring towards emergent and novel ecosystems. Similarly rewilding is sometimes described as ‘an *audacious conservation approach aiming at restoring wild species interactions and their regulation of ecosystem processes*’ (Fernández, Navarro and Pereira, 2017, p. 276, emphasis added) and

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<sup>9</sup> Jørgensen, 2014; Lorimer *et al.*, 2015; Nogués-Bravo *et al.*, 2016; Prior and Ward, 2016; Tanasescu, 2017; Gammon, 2018; Pettorelli *et al.*, 2018; Sandom *et al.*, 2018.

<sup>10</sup> Jepson, 2016; Tanasescu, 2017; Gammon, 2018.

<sup>11</sup> Reintroduction is ‘the intentional movement of an organism into part of its native range from which it has disappeared or become extirpated in historic times as a result of human activities or natural catastrophe’ (JNCC, 1996). Refer also to Appendix 1 for a list of terms related to rewilding.

sometimes as ‘the *passive* management of abandoned agricultural lands to encourage regeneration of natural habitats’ (DeSilvey and Bartolini, 2018, p. 5, emphasis added) i.e. attitudes vary as to whether rewilding can, or should, be active and ambitious or quiescent and patient. Debate also extends beyond the term’s meaning to its relative merits; rewilding’s proponents claim that it offers a positive and proactive conservation approach as a means of countering and reversing environmental damage (Brown, McMorran and Price, 2011; Navarro and Pereira, 2012; Ceausu *et al.*, 2015; Carver, 2016a; Jepson, 2016; Jepson and Schepers, 2016) while its opponents describe it variously as detrimental to property, land and livelihoods,<sup>12</sup> a threat to human safety,<sup>13</sup> damaging to heritage landscapes,<sup>14</sup> conflicting with property and access rights,<sup>15</sup> giving too much control to conservationists while distracting from the conservation of vulnerable species, potentially causative of biodiversity loss,<sup>16</sup> morally questionable with regard to the treatment of animals<sup>17</sup>, and even neo-imperialist<sup>18</sup>.

While these theoretical debates over what rewilding does or should mean, and its relative merits continue, rewilding projects are already underway, operating within this environment of controversy and the boundaries it imposes. In the United Kingdom (UK), where I direct my attention, newspapers frequently report on what rewilding means in the British context, often with an emphasis on the controversy, contradictions or uncertainty that this entails. A 2015 article in ‘The Independent’ bore the headline “‘Rewilding’ would create a theme park, not a return to nature’ and spoke of rewilding as ‘eco-nostalgia’ belonging ‘just as much to post-modern culture as to pre-modern ecology’ and of attempts at rewilding in Britain being ‘bio-engineered pastiche[s], not a feat of natural

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<sup>12</sup> Cronon, 1995; Brown, McMorran and Price, 2011; Arts, Fischer and van der Wal, 2012; Navarro and Pereira, 2012; Stohr, 2012; Adams, Hodge and Sandbrook, 2014; Harrison, 2016; Jepson, 2016; Deary and Warren, 2018.

<sup>13</sup> Arts, Fischer and van der Wal, 2012; Stohr, 2012; Jepson, 2016.

<sup>14</sup> Navarro and Pereira, 2012; Harrison, 2016; Jepson, 2016.

<sup>15</sup> Cronon, 1995; Adams, Hodge and Sandbrook, 2014; Harrison, 2016; Jepson, 2016; Deary and Warren, 2018.

<sup>16</sup> Arts, Fischer and van der Wal, 2012; Navarro and Pereira, 2012; Jepson, 2016; Fernández, Navarro and Pereira, 2017.

<sup>17</sup> von Essen and Allen, 2016.

<sup>18</sup> Navarro and Pereira, 2012; Fairlie, 2013.

renewal' (Tonkin, 2015). It is also pertinent to note that this article was accompanied by a large photograph of a wolf – evidence not only of the way media coverage focuses on the reintroduction aspect of rewilding but also how, within that emphasis, the focus is usually on large carnivores generally and wolves specifically (Townsend, 2016; Deary and Warren, 2018)<sup>19</sup>. More recently, an article in 'The Guardian' much more sympathetic to rewilding still acknowledged the way in which rewilding is aesthetically challenging to people accustomed to managed landscapes who might see rewilding sites as a 'real mess' (Barkham, 2017). More seriously, the article highlighted that rewilding can be associated with zoonotic disease and threats to food security (Barkham, 2017). It also drew attention to the controversy surrounding rewilding, noting that in some circles rewilding is referred to as 'the R word', is seen as 'alienating to landowners', and 'can't be mentioned to farmers' (Barkham, 2017).

Perhaps the most significant recent example of such controversy related to rewilding in the UK is that surrounding the Summit to Sea / O'r Mynydd i'r Môr<sup>20</sup> project. Summit to Sea / O'r Mynydd i'r Môr was initially billed as Rewilding Britain's<sup>21</sup> flagship project, an ambitious plan to rewild 10,000 hectares of land and 30,000 hectares of sea, stretching from the Cambrian mountains out into Cardigan Bay (Summit to Sea, 2020a). There was however strong opposition from farmers in the area, supported by the Farmers Union of Wales, with BBC News reporting on calls for the project to be 'scrapped' (BBC, 2019a). Rewilding Britain attempted to defend the project, maintaining that farmer opposition was due to 'misunderstanding' (BBC, 2019b) but, under sustained pressure, ultimately withdrew from the project (Forgrave, 2019). This example illustrates the contentious contexts of rewilding and sets the scene for my research in to this complex subject. In the following sections of this chapter I outline the justification for my research, the questions and methods adopted, the scope of the study, and its contribution to the mushrooming literature on rewilding. The final section lays out the structure of the thesis.

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<sup>19</sup> Somewhat related to this is the use of lupine symbology in rewilding discourse with Rewilding Britain (see Footnote 21) for example having adopted a wolf paw print as its logo.

<sup>20</sup> For details of the scheme see the project website (<http://www.summit2sea.wales/>).

<sup>21</sup> Rewilding Britain was established as a rewilding charity in 2015 and is one of the most vocal advocates of rewilding in Britain (<https://www.rewildingbritain.org.uk/>).

## 1.2 Research justification

Given rewilding's currency as a concept and practice it offers rich ground for research, and while there is a rapidly burgeoning body of work on the subject, in both the natural and social sciences, many gaps remain. Indeed, Jepson (2016) notes that there is a paucity of social scientific research since assessments of rewilding projects are most often centred on practical aspects such as the survival of reintroduced species. Of particular relevance here, Jepson (2016) has identified the exploration of rewilding's boundaries, particularly the practical limits that society and politics place on rewilding, as suitable areas for study. In addition, several authors have highlighted the need to explore the complex socio-ecological and socio-political conditions that surround rewilding (e.g. Redpath *et al.*, 2013; Merckx and Pereira, 2015; Sandom and Macdonald, 2015; Crowley, Hinchliffe and McDonald, 2017a). Further, Sandom and MacDonald call for research which 'weds ... the environmental and human dimensions of the countryside' (2015, p. 291). I respond to these calls by approaching rewilding holistically, via the wide angle lens of landscape, to examine 'the complex entanglings of human-animal relations with space, place, location, environment and landscape' (Philo and Wilbert, 2000, p. 4). Indeed, taking a landscape approach recognises that rewilding, and even landscape itself, is not a solely human endeavour, or creation, but that rewilding is undertaken, and landscapes are created, by both human and other-than-human agents (biotic and abiotic). Considering rewilding from a landscape perspective allowed me to examine how human and other-than-human agents co-exist within, and co-create rewilding, to explore other-than-human agency and to investigate how negotiations regarding rewilding occur not only between human agents but also between human and other-than-human agents. I thus respond to a call from DeSilvey and Bartolini for researchers 'to pay more careful attention to the way that concepts of autonomy ... are evoked and applied in rewilding contexts' (2018, p. 2). In doing so I contribute to the expansion of 'a set of concepts and methodologies that addresses what matters for both human and nonhuman animal subjects in their various relational combinations and spaces' (Buller, 2015, p. 376). Rewilding, with its emergent properties and novel ecosystems, offers new opportunities for such relational combinations, and new spaces for them to occur in. At the same time, it offers new opportunities to explore these and other relationships, as I do in this thesis.

The landscape approach also enabled an investigation of how rewilding negotiates its position within landscapes, especially with regard to the way its key actors and stakeholders negotiate the boundaries by which it is surrounded. These boundaries can be conceptual, such as the those between nature and culture, the wild and the domestic, and native and non-native, or physical and cultural, including rewilding's interface with other land uses (e.g. farming, forestry), economic boundaries, ethical boundaries, political boundaries (including the boundary between life and politics which involves the biopolitical regulation of living things) social boundaries and temporal boundaries. Rewilding is also creating new boundaries in the world of conservation as it attempts to distinguish itself from established conservation modes, to define what is and is not rewilding, and to determine who or what (human and other-than-human) can participate in rewilding. Using 'boundary work' (Gieryn, 1983, 1985; Star and Griesemer, 1989; Star, 2010), which is a means of discussing and analysing the way concepts are demarcated from one another (and which I outline in Chapter 3), as the key stone of my theoretical framework provided an excellent way of examining how rewilding negotiates these boundaries and its position within landscapes, including enabling an interrogation of human involvement in rewilding specifically and landscape more generally. Boundary work is often employed in science and technology studies (it was originally developed to discuss attempts to demarcate science from non-science) and was particularly useful in this case since rewilding is evolving rapidly, hotly contested, and considerably confused in terms of definition and practice – the boundaries I studied were therefore under constant negotiation and being redrawn repeatedly. Since both landscapes and boundaries can be physical and tangible and also conceptual and metaphorical, I use each term in its most capacious sense in order to embrace the manifold meanings that the words can assume. This allowed me to explore, and seek to provide greater understanding of, the many and varied various contexts within which rewilding operates, and the multifarious boundaries (both material and conceptual) which it encounters. Redpath *et al.* (2013) emphasise that such knowledge of an issue's context is imperative when the issue has become contested, as is the case with rewilding, and this research illuminates the context of rewilding both within the field sites of the study itself and more widely by contributing to the body of literature on the subject.

## 1.3 Research questions

In order to explore these relationships, the guiding question for this research is: *What boundaries do human and physical landscapes present to 'rewilding' in England and how are these boundaries negotiated?*

This is addressed via the following research sub-questions:

### *Rewilding*

1. How is rewilding interpreted and conducted by practitioners?
2. How is rewilding perceived by stakeholders?

### *Landscape*

3. What human and physical landscapes are encountered by rewilding?
4. How are these landscapes valued by different stakeholders?

### *Boundaries*

5. What boundaries do these landscapes present to rewilding?
6. How are the boundaries of rewilding negotiated?

### *Cross case analysis*

7. What implications do these boundary negotiations have for other landscapes, including current and future rewilding projects?

## 1.4 Research methods

These questions were investigated via a 'comparative case study' (Yin, 2008) of two English 'rewilding' sites: the Avalon Marshes in Somerset and Wild Ennerdale in Cumbria. The Avalon Marshes are made up of five nature reserves (the Catcott Complex, Ham Wall, Shapwick Heath, Shapwick Moor and Westhay Moor) which are owned by three conservation charities (the Hawk and Owl Trust (H&OT), the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and Somerset Wildlife Trust (SWT)) and Natural England (a public body which advises the British government on environmental matters). The reserves were largely created on land which had previously been used for farming or peat production and, certainly in the case of land which was used for peat production, creation of the



reserves entailed wholesale ecological restoration and habitat creation. Wild Ennerdale lies in the Ennerdale Valley within the Lake District National Park and is owned and overseen by a partnership of Forestry England (the agency responsible for managing forests in England owned by the British government), the National Trust (a conservation charity), Natural England, and United Utilities (a water company). The partnership are shifting land management in Ennerdale valley from commercial forestry and sheep farming towards native forest restoration and naturalistic grazing with cattle. The case study was an ideal method to investigate these sites since it enabled the insight into rewilding's 'contexts' (Yin, 2008; Creswell, 2013) that scholars have called for (e.g. Redpath *et al.*, 2013; Sandom and Macdonald, 2015). The investigation of the praxis of rewilding at more than one field site was essential given that, as touched on earlier and as will be addressed in further detail in Chapter 2, interpretations of rewilding exist along a spectrum, meaning there is a high likelihood that different sites interpret, and therefore practise, rewilding differently. Following individual case analysis, a 'cross case analysis' (Yin, 2008) was performed to establish theoretical generalisability, meaning that findings from this research can be applied to other sites.

An initial round of interviews with rewilding experts was conducted to gain insights to inform the research. These insights were then applied both to case selection and to the research at the selected case sites. Data collection at the field sites comprised stakeholder and practitioner interviews, visitor questionnaires, and field notes and photographs. Interviews and questionnaires focused on how rewilding is interpreted, the landscapes that rewilding encounters, the boundaries that these landscapes present to rewilding, and how those boundaries are negotiated. Interviews were semi-structured, and were recorded and then transcribed for thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006, 2019; Gibbs, 2012; Guest, MacQueen and Namey, 2014; Nowell *et al.*, 2017). Where possible, stakeholder and practitioner interviews were 'walking interviews' (Jones *et al.*, 2008; Evans and Jones, 2011) and, in addition to audio recording, were recorded using a global positioning system (GPS) tracker, data from which was then uploaded to mapping software.

## 1.5 Research scope

Such is the proliferation of interpretations and understandings of rewilding that it is necessary to bound any study into the topic very clearly. In addition to specifying 'landscape' as the lens through which I viewed rewilding, and the theoretical concepts of boundary work, biopolitics and companion species which I used to approach the empirical analysis, it is necessary to specify what was beyond the scope of this study. Two interpretations of rewilding are clearly related to the topic at hand but are not directly relevant here. The first of these is 'urban rewilding', a concept which is very similar to rewilding but which, as the qualifier suggests, occurs in an oppidan context. A metropolitan setting, by its very nature, negates some of the factors that often contribute to a conservation project being considered rewilding e.g. being large scale (Soule and Noss, 1998) or involving the reintroduction of all trophic levels<sup>22</sup> (Jepson, 2016). Urban rewilding projects were therefore not considered when selecting field sites for this research and the findings of the study are not discussed in the context of urban rewilding.

The second interpretation of rewilding which was beyond the scope of this study is 'human rewilding' wherein a variant of the term, and practice of, rewilding is applied to humans (e.g. Kahn and Hasbach, 2013; Taylor, 2016) as a means of partially (or even wholly) undoing the process of civilisation by which humans have become divorced from the 'natural' world (Ingold, 2000). The (dis)entanglement of humans and nature is problematic and is discussed in detail in Chapter 3 of this thesis and, although the relationship between humans and nature is central to this research, 'human rewilding' is much more closely aligned to a political or philosophical agenda than a method of conservation (e.g. Kahn and Hasbach, 2013; Taylor, 2016). While some authors suggest that there is potential for links between the two (for example the restoration of 'natural wildness' affords opportunities for human rewilding (Kahn and Hasbach, 2013)) this research considers rewilding primarily from a conservation perspective.

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<sup>22</sup> Trophic levels are the 'hierarchical levels in a food chain' and are 'comprised of organisms that share the same function in the food chain and the same nutritional relationship to the primary sources of energy' (Reichle, 2020).

Having set out what I *exclude* from my research I can state that what I *include* is an understanding of the ‘boundaries’ and ‘landscapes’ of rewilding, how landscapes affect and are affected by rewilding, and how those landscapes are constructed, interpreted, valued and invoked during the negotiations of rewilding’s boundaries. In order to achieve this I examined rewilding within its broader context – that of human and physical landscapes. While the two field sites selected are both in England, they presented contrasting milieu. The Avalon Marshes are in Somerset, a low-lying county in south west England, portions of which, including the Avalon Marshes, are at or even below sea level. Wild Ennerdale is in the Lake District, Cumbria, an upland landscape in north-west England well known for its fell walking, being home to England’s highest mountain and many other peaks. The geographical boundaries of this research are loosely aligned to the geographical boundaries of the rewilding projects although, as with rewilding, the research has a tendency to cross those boundaries and spill out into the surrounding area.

## **1.6 Research contribution**

Sandom *et al.* (2018) have identified that the UK, and by extension England (indeed I argue, *particularly* England, as is demonstrated by the conclusions of this research in Chapter 9), provides an interesting geography within which to investigate rewilding for two key reasons. First, ‘centuries of increasingly intensive land use’ have resulted in the loss of many species and, given the country’s island nature, many of these species lack the opportunity for ‘natural recolonization’ thereby necessitating human intervention if they are to be reinstated (Sandom *et al.*, 2018). Second, the future of environmental policy in the UK is the subject of highly topical debate given the UK’s departure from the European Union (EU) (‘Brexit’) and therefore from its environmental regulation, perhaps most significantly the Common Agricultural Policy (Sandom *et al.*, 2018). While, with this justification, I used English field sites as the focus of this study, as I demonstrate, the themes identified are common to other situations, particularly in the UK and Europe but also globally, where conflict or the potential for conflict exists between conservation and other land use. The findings of this research provide broader insights into conservation and offer ways of mitigating or even avoiding environmental controversies and human-wildlife conflict, especially that related to rewilding.

Related to the current debate surrounding environmental policy in the UK, Pettorelli *et al.* (2018) highlight the difficulty for policy makers arising from a lack of social science research into rewilding, resulting as it does in a paucity of information with which to support evidence based policy making. They call for more social science research involving the monitoring and evaluation of the (likely) social impact of rewilding (e.g. disruption to rural businesses and communities, human-wildlife conflict, loss of public access to land) and this research helps to illuminate these impacts both at the field sites studied and, by extension, in the case of other rewilding initiatives. In doing so, this research contributes to addressing the gaps identified by Pettorelli *et al.* (2018) and facilitates the creation of a 'decision framework'<sup>23</sup> regarding rewilding and other (competing) land uses (Pettorelli *et al.*, 2018). I examine social impacts indirectly by investigating the boundaries that social landscapes present to rewilding, given that such boundaries are the result of reactions to real or perceived impacts. Research attention is also paid to other boundaries presented by landscape e.g. cultural, environmental, ethical, financial, historical and political; a greater understanding of these boundaries is beneficial in light of rewilding's ability to 'extend and reinvigorate' environmental policy (Jepson and Schepers, 2016) and such knowledge is likely to prove highly valuable in the changing policy environment precipitated by Brexit.

Our complex modern relationship with the natural world was also an important focus of this research since Lambert considers 'our rising anxiety about the preservation of nature and how we treat other animals' as a 'neglected but important theme' (2002, p. 450). I examine rewilding as a novel way of 'preserving', or rather *conserving*, nature and use the selected field sites to explore the contemporary context of this anxiety. In doing so I contribute to the literature on 'conservation conflict' (Redpath *et al.*, 2015) by identifying the frictions that can occur between humans and the natural world. In the case of rewilding these frictions arise at its boundaries with human and physical

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<sup>23</sup> Pettorelli *et al.* (2018) suggest that the difficulties involved in measuring rewilding (given its open ended approach) have made gauging its risks and benefits challenging. They call for further research in order to inform objective decisions relating to rewilding as a land management approach i.e. according to Pettorelli *et al.* (2018) a decision framework is a tool for performing objective appraisals.

landscapes and so an exploration of how these are negotiated follows Root-Bernstein, Gooden and Boyes in providing both 'pragmatic insights to practitioners, and theoretical insights relating to how people act to create and institutionalize new relations with the environment' (2018, p. 295). I contribute empirical evidence about how rewilding is understood, practised and negotiated and, in particular, how, through the process of those negotiations new 'natural-cultural' landscapes are (co)constructed and (co)inhabited by human and other-than-human animals and new relationships negotiated between them.

Biopolitics is a key way of mediating these relationships between humans and other-than-human animals and Lorimer and Driessen assert that research has 'a lot to gain from exploring biopolitics as multiple modes of living with nonhuman life' and 'map[ping] the connections, frictions and compromises between several modes of relating' (2013, p. 257). I am particularly interested in the connections, frictions and compromises that occur at or within the boundaries of rewilding and the way in which biopolitics allows us to 'trace and compare the parallel spatial and/or temporal emergence of multiple more-than-human formations, entangling human and [non]human bodies' (Lorimer and Driessen, 2013, p. 257). Lorimer and Driessen predict that 'thinking biopolitics schematically' 'could have wider applications for disentangling and critically comparing other typologies of forms of interspecies companionship centred on individual species, landscapes, process or other nonhuman entities' (2013, p. 257). I undertake this schematic thinking in order to disentangle and understand the interspecies, and *interagent*, companionships encountered in rewilding.

## 1.7 Landscape of thesis

Having set out the scope of this thesis it is important to outline the landscape of what follows. In Chapter 2, I discuss the concepts at the core of this thesis: rewilding and landscape. Both terms lack a single definition and, not unrelatedly, both are complex and sometimes contested. I explore the origins of the two terms, the various ways they are understood, and discuss the specific way I use them in this research. With respect to rewilding I also discuss its policy context, particularly with reference to the UK's departure from the European Union. With respect to landscape I look at its unique meaning in England and the way that nature and culture are entangled in landscapes and the process of their creation.

I then go on to examine the theoretical concepts which underpin my approach to this research: boundaries, companion species and biopolitics. Rewilding encounters many boundaries which it must negotiate and I explore these in Chapter 3. First, 'boundary work' is performed with respect to what is and what is not rewilding, second, the boundary between humans and nature dictates the extent to which humans can, or cannot, be involved in and with natural processes, and third, physical and conceptual boundaries have the potential to enable or constrain rewilding. Human relationships with the companion species of rewilding, including the biopolitical control of those species, are significant in rewilding's negotiation of these boundaries and I discuss the 'make live, let die' logic of biopolitics, and human attitudes towards the companion species of rewilding.

In Chapter 4 I set out the methods I used for this research. I adopted a pairwise comparative case study of two English rewilding sites, the Avalon Marshes and Wild Ennerdale, collecting data via interviews and visitor questionnaires at each field site. With respect to the interviews, I performed a preliminary round of twelve expert interviews which informed the subsequent stakeholder and practitioner interviews at the field sites. Selection of cases was via purposive sampling and I selected the Avalon Marshes and Wild Ennerdale to provide fertile ground for exploring the context of rewilding in England. The Avalon Marshes is a lowland site in southern England which does not use the term rewilding and which has relatively high levels of human intervention. By

contrast, Wild Ennerdale is an upland site in northern England which does use the term rewilding (albeit somewhat removedly) and has much lower levels of human intervention in its management.

Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8 all contain the findings of my research. In Chapter 5 I discuss the results from the twelve expert interviews including expert interpretations and perceptions of rewilding. I also discuss the key landscapes of rewilding which emerged from these interviews, namely cultural, political and economic, and temporal. In Chapters 6 and 7 I discuss the Avalon Marshes and Wild Ennerdale in turn. In each case I explore the way rewilding is interpreted and practiced by practitioners and perceived and received by stakeholders. In Chapter 6 I look at the unique context of rewilding in the Avalon Marshes as it relates to farming, peat production and the history of conservation conflict in Somerset. In Chapter 7 I take the a similar approach to Wild Ennerdale where rewilding again encounters farming, this time in the unique cultural landscape of the English Lake District which is a national park, a UNESCO world heritage site, and an extremely popular destination for national and international tourists. In Chapter 8 I discuss findings which were common to both field sites, *viz* negotiation with rewilding's stakeholders (either those resident in or near the Avalon Marshes and Wild Ennerdale, or visitors to the sites), negotiation with the companion species of rewilding, and negotiation with the abiotic factors involved in rewilding (predominately water and archaeology). In particular I propose a typology of the biopolitical modes of the companion species of rewilding, in which companion species may be viewed as animal machines / human proxies, analogue species, expendable objects or self-determining agents.

Lastly, in Chapter 9 I draw my findings together to offer answers to my research questions in relation to i. how rewilding is interpreted, conducted and perceived in England, ii. the landscapes of rewilding in England, and iii. how rewilding negotiates those landscapes. In conclusion I suggest that rewilding in England is being 'domesticated' and is taking on a unique meaning in the English context.

## Chapter 2: Where the wild things were

### 2.1 Outline

In this chapter I discuss the terms and concepts introduced in Chapter 1 in more detail. In particular I provide an exegesis of rewilding's origins and its multifarious definitions and interpretations. While I deliberately avoid contributing another definition to this melee, I do adopt a working definition for the purpose of this research. I also consider rewilding in the context of the UK's agricultural and environmental policy. I then turn my attention to landscape, discussing its definitions and understandings, particularly with reference to the English context. I explore the complex entangling of nature and culture in landscape and the concept of 'dwelling' as a way of coming to terms with this entanglement. Contrary to the discussion of rewilding, I do propose my own definition of landscape since it was not possible to locate an existing definition which was compatible with the approach of this research i.e. one which included humans and other-than-human agents (both biotic and abiotic<sup>24</sup>) in the creation of landscape.

### 2.2 Rewilding

#### 2.2.1 Origins and evolution of rewilding

Rewilding, as a term and a discrete concept, has been traced back to The Wildlands Project in North America in the late 1980s (Jørgensen, 2014; Lorimer *et al.*, 2015). In 1992 Martin wrote that '[t]o behold the Grand Canyon without thoughts of its ancient sloths, goats and condors is to be half-blind' (1992, p. 31). Although Martin (1992) did not use the term rewilding, his reference to absent species and prior ecosystem states touches on rewilding's central themes, and the editorial of the journal in which he was writing ('Wild Earth' – the journal of The Wildlands Project) does use the term, speaking of the 'living earth rewilding itself' (Foreman, 1992). The term 'rewild' had first appeared in print two years earlier in 'Newsweek' (an American weekly news magazine) which spoke of activists vowing 'to take back and 'rewild' one third of the United States' (OEDa, 2019). It was not until 2005 however, that the term gained serious traction in the scientific press (Lorimer *et al.*, 2015), and it would be another four years before there was a real increase in its use in the general media (Jepson, 2016).

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<sup>24</sup> Biotic refers to any living organism while abiotic refers to physical rather than biological factors.



Rewilding's origin was not a parthenogenesis – there are two widely used conservation terms which predate rewilding and which can be said to contribute to its conception: wilderness and translocation. Wilderness is perhaps a particularly important concept in the United States of America (USA), given its association with the 'wilderness movement' and the 'Wilderness Society', which was founded in the 1930s (Soule and Noss, 1998). In the USA, the term wilderness has distinct connotations of large areas of land from which humans are excluded (Hintz, 2007; Lorimer *et al.*, 2015; Pettorelli *et al.*, 2018), indeed the Wilderness Act defines wilderness as 'an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain' (1964, p. 1). What is notable in this definition is that it excludes humans from the Earth's 'community of life', relating the nature / culture debate to wilderness, and suggesting that humans and wild nature cannot coexist. Cronon identifies the crux of this debate as being that wilderness embodies 'a dualistic vision in which the human is entirely outside the natural' (1995, p. 79). This dualism, and its more nuanced alternative, have come to preoccupy the debates and practices of rewilding and I will discuss them in more detail in the following chapter.

This concept of wilderness evolved, at least in part, from 'monumentalism' which saw the creation of some of the USA's national parks to be 'national monuments' on the basis of their spectacular natural beauty (Soule and Noss, 1998). In turn, the wilderness movement evolved into 'biological conservation', whereby areas were recognised for their biodiversity and biological importance rather than simply their aesthetic appeal (Soule and Noss, 1998). Over time biologists (e.g. Frankel and Soule, 1981) realised that in order to maintain this biodiversity, species must be allowed sufficient space to insulate them from risk of extinction. In regions where wilderness or conservation reserves were not large enough to provide this, the need for 'connectivity' was recognised where '[i]nter-regional connectivity was seen as necessary for providing genetic and demographic rescue and for viability of wide ranging species' (Soule and Noss, 1998, p. 21). This idea then progressed into the 'cores, corridors and carnivores' concept of early rewilding theory in the USA (Soule and Noss, 1998, p. 22) which is discussed in the next section.

In contrast to the relatively subjective ‘wilderness’, ‘translocation’ is a more technical term. It is used by both the International Union for the Conservation of Nature<sup>25</sup> (IUCN) and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee<sup>26</sup> (JNCC) which define the term as the ‘human-mediated movement of living organisms from one area, with release in another’ (IUCN, 2013, p. 2) and ‘the transfer by human agency of any organism(s) from one place to another’ (JNCC, 1996, p. 13). The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) defines translocation simply as ‘[r]emoval from one place to another ... [e]sp. in reference to the removal of wild animals’ (OED, 2020b) and gives the first use of the term (in the context of wild animal removal) as an *Oryx* article from 1962 which opens with its own definition of translocation – ‘the transfer of wild animals from one area to another’ (Harthoorn, 1962, p. 215). In chronological terms this situates translocation as emerging at a historical midpoint between the wilderness and rewilding movements and its influence on the origins of the rewilding movement is self-evident, especially as Harthoorn goes on to explain that ‘[t]he term may be used in the positive sense of introducing animals into an area, for instance to enhance the value of a reserve by re-introducing species that have been exterminated there’ (1962, p. 215). Here, Harthoorn (1962) touches on one of the major arguments in favour of rewilding via species reintroduction – that it can be a means of ‘restor[ing] function to impoverished ecosystems’ (Sandom, Hughes and Macdonald, 2013, p. 336). This theory often rests on the impact of keystone species<sup>27</sup>; if keystone species are absent, then ecosystem processes can be ‘missing or ... dysfunctional’ (Prior and Brady, 2017) and many forms of rewilding seek to address this by reintroducing the species in question.

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<sup>25</sup> Established in 1948 the IUCN is an environmental network comprised of government and non-government organisations, providing advice on conservation, specialising in species survival, environmental law, protected areas, social and economic policy, ecosystem management, and education and communication (IUCN, 2019).

<sup>26</sup> Originally established in 1990 under the Environmental Protection Act, the JNCC was reformed by the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006. It is a public body which advises the UK government (and devolved administrations of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales) regarding national and international nature conservation (JNCC, 2015).

<sup>27</sup> Keystone species are those which ‘in proportion to their biomass have a disproportionately large impact in an ecosystem’ (Sandom *et al.*, 2013, p. 431).

Given that rewilding has evolved, at least in part, from the American concept of 'wilderness' and that it had its genesis in the USA, rewilding's transition from the USA to other parts of the world, specifically to England, is pertinent to this research. Brown, McMorran and Price (2011) note that rewilding's advent in the UK is more recent than in the USA and is more practical than theoretical. This practical emergence can be seen as arising from concerns that existing conservation techniques were failing to arrest biodiversity loss and the perception that an alternative approach was therefore needed (Taylor, 2005; Sandom and Wynne-Jones, 2019). Taylor (2004) also suggests that rewilding in the UK lagged behind the USA and that it emerged gradually as conservation modes shifted from habitat *protection* to habitat *creation*. Writing in 2004, Taylor considered that an inchoate rewilding network was visible in the UK, and this was bolstered by the founding of the Wildland Network in 2005<sup>28</sup>. Together with its networking activities, the Wildland Network produced *Beyond Conservation – a Wildland Strategy* (2005), a volume which collated information on rewilding-like projects in the UK and attempted to 'review, and address[...] the obstacles to further progress' (Taylor, 2004, p. 2) – a clear sign that a move to implement rewilding as a conservation approach was developing.

In 2006, members of the Wildland Network visited the Oostvaardersplassen, a Dutch rewilding project, to learn from the approach to wild land 'management' there, including Frans Vera's theory of grazing ecology. Vera's (2000) theory regarding the effect of grazing on landscape is credited with disrupting the received wisdom that the climatic climax vegetation in Europe would have been closed canopy woodland: rather he suggested, it was a network of trees and glades created by the combination of ecological succession<sup>29</sup> and the dynamic forces of large herbivores acting as disturbance factors<sup>30</sup>. Vera was

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<sup>28</sup> The Wildland Network is now defunct, having essentially been replaced by the Wildland Research Institute <https://wildlandresearch.org/>

<sup>29</sup> Ecological succession is the progressive change in structure and composition of an ecosystem over time towards a climax community (Vera, 2000).

<sup>30</sup> A disturbance factor is a stochastic element or agent which disrupts, and therefore drives change within, an ecosystem e.g. activity by humans or other-than-human animals (e.g. grazing, browsing and poaching by large herbivores), disease, fire, flood, natural disasters, weather etc. (Hodder *et al.*, 2009). In the case of cattle, or other large grazing herbivores, their grazing drives 'cyclical vegetation turnover' (Hodder *et al.*, 2005).

developing this theory, including the influential role that certain species play in ecosystems, independently of, but contemporaneously with, the development of rewilding in the USA. The development of his theory at the same time as similar ideas emerged in the USA led to Vera's work becoming highly influential for rewilding projects in Europe, commencing with the Oostvaardersplassen which he was instrumental in establishing (Lorimer and Driessen, 2014). The visit to the Oostvaardersplassen by the Wildland Network ensured that by 2006, rewilding's principles were becoming established in conservation practice in the UK, informed by American and European examples and by American terminology (Fisher, 2004).

Rewilding in the UK moved from academic and conservation circles to wider media and public debates circa 2013 with the publication of *Feral* by George Monbiot (Jørgensen, 2014; Linnell *et al.*, 2015; Carey, 2016; Jepson, 2016; Olwig, 2016; Tanasescu, 2017; DeSilvey and Bartolini, 2018; Wynne-Jones, Strouts and Holmes, 2018; Gammon, 2018; Deary and Warren, 2018; Pettorelli *et al.*, 2018; Sandom and Wynne-Jones, 2019). In *Feral*, Monbiot (2013) discussed rewilding as a 'positive environmentalism', while being highly critical of the current condition of the UK's environment. He was particularly censorious regarding the uplands, describing them as 'sheepwrecked', i.e. denuded of flora due to overgrazing by sheep, and suggested that the lack of flora translates to an absence of fauna, since the foundations of the food web are missing. This description of the uplands, and the proposal of rewilding as a solution, was highly unpopular with farmers who disputed both the diagnosis and the remedy. The book served as a catalyst for public debate on the topic, which Monbiot continued to engage with in the media, including his own newspaper column (Piesing, 2016). This, ongoing, debate has become highly polarised and contentious with Sandom and Wynne-Jones (2019) noting that *Feral* has antagonised stakeholders, and other scholars suggesting that rewilding became 'toxic' as a term and a concept following the book's publication (Jørgensen, 2014; Jepson, 2015; Prior and Brady, 2017; Tanasescu, 2017; Deary and Warren, 2018; Gammon, 2018; Pettorelli *et al.*, 2018; Sandom *et al.*, 2018).

While perhaps in the vanguard of popular writing on rewilding, *Feral* was not alone. *The New Wild* by Fred Pearce, published in 2015, examined the novel ecosystems created by assemblages of 'exotic' and 'invasive' species, usually

derided by traditional conservation but which, Pearce (2015) argued, could find a new acceptance in rewilding. Although arguably not as influential as Monbiot's book, *The New Wild* exposed its readers to new ways of thinking about ecosystems and nature commensurate with some of the ideals of rewilding. Then, in 2018, Isabella Tree published *Wilding*, an account of the rewilding journey at the Knepp Estate where she lives. *Wilding* was a 'Sunday Times' best seller in 2019 and while its impact may not yet be fully appreciated it certainly builds on and may even outstrip that of *Feral*. As a further sign of how fully rewilding has entered the media consciousness, in the UK at least, it was, as of 2019, a storyline on *The Archers*, a long running BBC Radio 4 soap opera centred on farming and rural life. Also in 2019, rewilding was one of ten words shortlisted to be the Collins word of the year although the word ultimately chosen was 'climate strike'<sup>31</sup> (Collins, 2019).

### **2.2.2 Definitions and interpretations of rewilding**

Despite, or perhaps because of, its prevalence rewilding lacks a single, cohesive definition within academic discourse (Prior and Brady, 2017; Hayward *et al.*, 2019)<sup>32</sup> which has led to it being called a 'slippery' (Cloyd, 2016), and 'plastic' (Jørgensen, 2014) term, highlighting its ineffable nature. Rewilding has been defined broadly as 'returning a managed area back to the wild' (Corlett, 2016) or as aiming 'to maintain, or increase, biodiversity, while reducing the impact of present and past human interventions through the restoration of species and ecological processes' (Lorimer *et al.*, 2015, p. 39). While definitions such as these are sufficiently general as to encompass most applications of rewilding, by necessity they avoid some of the more specific, and often debated, implications and applications of the term e.g. whether rewilding can, or *should*, involve human intercession (Linnell *et al.*, 2015) and whether it is forward or backward looking (Crowley, Hinchliffe and McDonald, 2017a; Deary and Warren, 2018).

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<sup>31</sup> 2019 was the year that saw Greta Thunberg's 'school strike for the climate' gain global momentum so it is perhaps hardly surprising that 'climate strike' was chosen over rewilding. The other short listed words of 2019 were: bopo, cancel, deepfake, double down, entryist, hopepunk, influencer and nonbinary (Collins, 2019).

<sup>32</sup> Refer to Appendix 2 for a collection of definitions of rewilding from within the academic discourse.

Rewilding is therefore something of a contested word, but while several authors have identified the confusion and lack of consensus over its definition as problematic (e.g. Fisher and Parfitt, 2016; Nogués-Bravo *et al.*, 2016; Sandom *et al.*, 2018), others see it as an opportunity for rewilding to be inclusive (e.g. Jørgensen, 2014; Jepson and Schepers, 2016). Similarly, some scholars call for a universally accepted definition of rewilding (e.g. Pettorelli *et al.*, 2018) while others call for the term to be replaced rather than redefined, highlighting its 'toxic' nature (Sandom *et al.*, 2018), and suggesting that it is a 'threatening' term (Carver, 2016a). Still others call for its rehabilitation, arguing that rewilding as a concept offers a form of 'positive environmentalism' (Jepson, 2016), has 'caught the public imagination' (Deary and Warren, 2018) and has a 'pizzazz' which alternative terms lack (Carver, 2016a).

One of the foci of the debate surrounding rewilding centres on its prefix 're', with suggestions that this implies an intent to return to an earlier ecological state (Carver, 2016a; Tanasescu, 2017; Deary and Warren, 2018)<sup>33</sup>. Such an intent is considered problematic for two reasons. First, it is argued that any baseline<sup>34</sup> is 'arbitrary' and that it is therefore difficult if not impossible to justify the selection of one reference point over another (Seddon *et al.*, 2014; Deary and Warren, 2018). Second, critics highlight the impossibility of returning to a previous state due to changing conditions and changes in species (including extinctions) (Carver, 2016a; Deary and Warren, 2018). An alternative reading of the 're' prefix however, is that of returning control rather than returning to a specific time period. Corlett's (2016) definition of rewilding as 'returning a managed area back to the wild' could be interpreted in this sense, in that agency is transferred from human 'management' to 'wild' autonomy. Debates such as this are compounded by a

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<sup>33</sup> This is indeed the case with some rewilding projects, perhaps most obviously in 'Pleistocene rewilding' which 'actively promote[s] the restoration of large wild vertebrates into North America ... [and] would be achieved through a series of carefully managed ecosystem manipulations using closely related species as proxies for extinct large vertebrates' (Donlan, 2005).

<sup>34</sup> Baselines are historical reference points which some advocates suggest should be used as ecosystem targets for rewilding (Toledo, Agudelo and Bentley, 2011; Sandom *et al.*, 2013; Seddon *et al.*, 2014; Sandom and Macdonald, 2015; Pettorelli *et al.*, 2018).

multitude of similar and qualified terms (e.g. reintroduction, active rewilding,<sup>35</sup> and passive rewilding<sup>36</sup>), so that various understandings of rewilding do not always correspond. This is then exacerbated by the way the term is employed in practice.

Since its inception the term rewilding has been co-opted by a variety of movements, many of which have redefined it in keeping with their specific agendas, with different organisations setting divergent benchmarks<sup>37</sup> and/or adopting disparate approaches while nevertheless using the same term. Three examples from the UK demonstrate how much diversity there can be in a single nation<sup>38</sup>. Knepp Estate in Sussex, England is a project involving the conversion of an intensive dairy farm to an extensive beef farm. The estate has also (re)introduced other animals as ‘surrogates<sup>39</sup>’ for extirpated species to act as ‘disturbances factors’ in the newly evolving ecosystem (Knepp Wildland, 2020). By contrast, Glenlude in the Scottish Borders is working to return a former sheep farm and conifer plantation to ‘native habitat’ (John Muir Trust, 2020). In Ceredigion, Wales, meanwhile, the Summit to Sea / O’r Mynydd i’r Môr project aims to ‘restore flourishing ecosystems’ across an area stretching from the

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<sup>35</sup> Active rewilding is an umbrella term used by e.g. Carver (2016a) and Sandom *et al.* (2018) to describe a range of rewilding approaches all of which involve human intervention to a lesser or, more usually, greater extent.

<sup>36</sup> While passive rewilding can also be a collective term (again employed by Carver (2016a) and Sandom *et al.* (2018)) it has been specifically described by Navarro and Pereira as the ‘passive management of ecological succession with the goal of restoring natural ecosystem processes and reducing human control of landscapes’ (2012, p. 10).

<sup>37</sup> Benchmarks, like baselines, are often used as reference points or targets in rewilding. Unlike baselines however, benchmarks offer the possibility of being forward looking rather than purely regressive and therefore allow for the creation of novel ecosystems (Hodder *et al.*, 2009; Keulartz, 2009; Toledo, Agudelo and Bentley, 2011; Pettorelli *et al.*, 2018). Benchmarks and baselines are however equally problematic with regard to the rewilding approaches which reject any kinds of goals or targets.

<sup>38</sup> Differences can become even more pronounced between continents e.g. the reintroduction of wolves to Yellowstone National Park in the USA is often held up as the quintessential rewilding project and yet bears little or no resemblance to the examples given here.

<sup>39</sup> A surrogate is something which acts, stands for, or takes the place of another. In relation to zoology surrogates are more properly known as analogues, being species which have the same general form and role, or occupy the same ecological niche, as a different species in another region, ecosystem, or time period (OED, 2020c).

Pumlumon massif down (and even into) Cardigan Bay<sup>40</sup> (Summit To Sea, 2020b). That these three projects all use the term ‘rewilding’ and yet have very different practices and aims illustrates the diversity with which the term is applied. It also suggests that Jørgensen’s (2014) criticism, wherein rewilding’s plasticity means that it no longer signifies anything, at least not anything *specific*, may be justified.

Another broad distinction in rewilding approaches is between those which focus on species and those which focus on the land. The former tend to centre on the reintroduction of ‘keystone species’ (contributing to the conflation of the terms rewilding and reintroduction), one of the earliest iterations of which was the ‘cores, corridors and carnivores’, or ‘three Cs’ concept (Soule and Noss, 1998). This approach focused on the ‘regulatory roles of large predators’ with core populations of these species connected by a system of corridors (Soule and Noss, 1998). This was followed by the idea of ‘Pleistocene rewilding’ whereby the notion of reintroduction was extended in terms of species and also time, so that large vertebrates (not only carnivores) were considered for reintroduction, as were species which could act as analogues for those that became extinct at the end of the Pleistocene epoch<sup>41</sup> (Donlan, 2005). More recent rewilding initiatives have focussed on replacing extirpated species with extant populations from other locations with an emphasis on increasing numbers of vulnerable or threatened species before they become extinct at a global level (Brown, McMorran and Price, 2011; Stanley Price, 2011). The common theme in these species centred approaches is that the species themselves are considered important and are seen as crucial to the rewilding agenda.

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<sup>40</sup> As mentioned in the introduction, the Summit to Sea / O’r Mynydd i’r Môr project has been embroiled in significant controversy, and, over the period during which this research was conducted has undergone major refocussing from being branded as a rewilding project associated with Rewilding Britain to disassociating itself from both the term rewilding and from Rewilding Britain. Nevertheless, it remains an example of landscape scale ecological restoration, and still serves as an example of one of the many ways in which rewilding has been interpreted in recent times.

<sup>41</sup> The Pleistocene was considered a suitable, and significant, benchmark for rewilding because humans were implicated in its mega-fauna extinctions (Sandom *et al.*, 2013). This identification of human impact on the environment as somehow ‘inappropriate’ marks a natural / cultural boundary in which humans are seen as *acting on nature* rather than as *acting from within nature* (White, 1995; DeMello, 2012).



The alternative interpretation of rewilding places more emphasis on the land rather than the species in it. In particular ‘land abandonment’ involves a process, whether intentional or unintentional, in which previously managed land is allowed or encouraged to assume a less cultivated state (Höchtl, Lehringer and Konold, 2005; Navarro and Pereira, 2012). There can, however, be areas of overlap between land abandonment and species reintroduction, particularly in projects which involve ‘the reintroduction of keystone species and ecosystem engineers<sup>42</sup> to restore function to impoverished ecosystems’ (Sandom, Hughes and Macdonald, 2013). In such cases, while the presence of the animals may be desirable, their species value is secondary to the value of the function they perform in the landscape.

As discussed in the introduction, despite this profusion of definitions, common themes did emerge from a review of the rewilding literature and this ‘clustering’ of concepts has also been identified by other research (e.g. Jørgensen, 2014; Svenning *et al.*, 2016; Prior and Ward, 2016; Prior and Brady, 2017; Tanasescu, 2017; Gammon, 2018; Sandom *et al.*, 2018; Wynne-Jones, Strouts and Holmes, 2018). Commonalities identified are: i. a focus on natural processes / ecological / ecosystem functioning, ii. the aim of increasing natural autonomy, iii. the (re)introduction of species, and iv. the interpretation of rewilding as a process and/or continuum. There is also an emphasis on reference points and human intervention. With reference points however, there are differences of opinion as to whether a past baseline (Hodder *et al.*, 2009) or desired future (Jørgensen, 2014; Lorimer *et al.*, 2015; Prior and Brady, 2017) should be the benchmark for rewilding. Similarly, there is disagreement in relation to human intervention as to whether rewilding necessitates human intervention or requires its absence (Linnell *et al.*, 2015). I also identified two further issues although these did not recur as frequently in the academic discourse as might be expected given their prevalence in the general discourse surrounding rewilding. These were the aim of increasing biodiversity (Lorimer *et al.*, 2015) and a focus on the spatial scale at which rewilding can / should operate (Soule and Noss, 1998).

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<sup>42</sup> Ecosystem engineers are ‘organisms that demonstrably modify the structure of their habitats’ (Wright, Jones and Flecker, 2002).

Offering yet another definition of rewilding to add to the proliferation of existing definitions would perhaps not only be unhelpful but actively counterproductive to achieving consensus regarding a common understanding of the term (if that is indeed possible or desirable), particularly in the face of calls for a 'formally agreed definition' (Pettorelli *et al.*, 2018); introducing a new, potentially competing, definition adds to this debate rather than assisting in resolving it. A working definition is however required for the purposes of analysis and an existing definition will therefore be adopted, namely that put forward by Prior and Brady of rewilding as a 'process of (re)introducing or restoring wild organisms and/or ecological processes to ecosystems where such organisms and processes are either missing or are 'dysfunctional'' (2017, p. 34). This definition is sufficiently precise as to include the cluster of concepts outlined above (e.g. it focusses on rewilding as a process, it speaks of restoring ecological processes, and it admits the reintroduction of species) and also sufficiently broad as to permit its application in cases where there is less consensus e.g. potential reference points, spatial scale, and levels of human intervention (which is linked very closely to levels of natural autonomy).

Having examined the origins and evolution of rewilding and the ways it can be interpreted and practiced, and identified a working definition for the purposes of this research, it is germane to consider the policy context within which rewilding operates. In the next section I discuss the political and policy contexts of the debate regarding rewilding in the UK.

### 2.2.3 Policy context of rewilding

As a nascent concept, rewilding in the UK is operating in a policy environment which was not designed to accommodate its disruptive potentialities: no legislation yet exists that relates specifically to rewilding and, as a result, rewilding is governed by legislation from several different areas<sup>43</sup> including biodiversity, agriculture, animal health and welfare, and public health and safety (Gooden, 2016; POST, 2016) (see Table 2.1 for a list of EU, UK and UN legislation that applies to rewilding in England). This lack of specific rewilding policy means i. that there is no clear, overarching strategy with regard to rewilding as a conservation or land use approach and ii. that rewilding is subject to the ‘multiple regulatory forces’ of different policies (Gooden, 2016). These different policies present contrasting and sometimes conflicting directives, contradictory not only to each other but also to the objectives of rewilding, precluding certain rewilding activities and often making it difficult for rewilding projects to commence or advance (POST, 2016).

Perhaps the clearest illustration of this has existed in the tension between rewilding and agriculture, agricultural policy, and agricultural support payments. Agriculture is the primary land use in the UK with more than 70% of the land farmed (DEFRA, 2011). This spatial dominance of agriculture means that farmland presents both the greatest opportunity for rewilding projects, in terms of area, and also the greatest challenge, in that rewilding projects on currently or previously farmed land naturally become subject to agricultural legislation. This legislation can constrain the ability of rewilding and agriculture to coexist, certain Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) agricultural support payments, for example, require land to be in ‘good agricultural condition’ which would be contravened by the kind of ecological succession that can occur during rewilding (POST, 2016). A not dissimilar situation exists with regard to conservation policy where legislation often exists to protect specific species or landscapes (POST, 2016).

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<sup>43</sup> Government departments and agencies involved in rewilding in England include: Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs, Animal and Plant Health Agency, Environment Agency, Forestry Commission, Forestry England, Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Natural England, National Forest Company, National Park Authorities, Rural Payments Agency.

Table 2.1: Legislation relating to rewilding in England

Legislation	Jurisdiction	Year
Agriculture Act	UK	2020
Animal By-Products Regulation	EU	2009
Bern Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats	EU	1982
Birds Directive	EU	1979
Bonn Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals	EU	1985
Common Agricultural Policy	EU	1962
Commons Act	UK	2006
United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity	UN	1993
Countryside and Rights of Way Act	UK	2000
Crofting Reform Act	UK	2010
Dangerous Wild Animals Act	UK	1976
Habitats Directive	EU	1992
Protection of Animals Kept for Farming Purposes	EU	1976
Renewable Energy Directive	EU	2009
Wildlife and Countryside Act	UK	1981
Zoo Directive	EU	1999

The unpredictable nature of rewilding and its divergence from the traditional conservation approach of target setting means that rewilding projects have the potential to contravene this legislation by failing to deliver specified outcomes (POST, 2016). Sandom *et al.* summarise the effect of such policy as ‘creat[ing] legislative and economic barriers to rewilding approaches’ (2018, p. 7). Significant changes to legislation (notably the CAP) are however occurring as a result of Brexit and new policy has the potential to enable rather than constrain rewilding as will be discussed in the next section.

Identifying the direct policy boundaries of rewilding is more straightforward than identifying indirect boundaries, those imposed at site level, or those that arise through the absence rather than the presence of policy. In relation to agricultural policy for example, agricultural support payments can have the unintended consequence of inflating land values, thereby making land acquisition for rewilding projects, which are often run by charitable organisations, prohibitively expensive (POST, 2016). Meanwhile, although policy is set at a national or international level, the way it is interpreted by regional or national authorities can vary, with markedly different consequences for rewilding projects. For example, as Gooden (2016) has identified, if a perimeter fence is interpreted by a regional body as an enclosure, a rewilding project may become subject the Zoo Directive 1999 and be obliged to segregate predator and prey species, whereas if another regional body interprets the policy differently, there will be different implications for the rewilding project. Similarly, Pillai and Heptinstall (2013) have conducted an extensive comparison of the way in which the 1992 Habitats Directive is applied in Germany, Latvia and the Netherlands with regard to beaver, where ‘favourable conservation status’ and ‘derogations’ (exceptions to special conservation status) are interpreted very differently, again with very different outcomes for the animals involved. Lastly, quantifying the boundaries which relate to the absence of policy is particularly challenging, but Gooden (2016) has suggested that the lack of policy leaves rewilding in ‘politically uncharted territory’, without national goals or resources, and lacking the legitimacy that formal policy would afford it.

Another criticism of current policy with respect to rewilding, and one that has been identified as a root cause of ‘the tensions between rewilding projects and the regulatory environment in which they operate’ (Gooden, 2016, p. 11), is the restrictive nature of existing policy and its inability to accommodate the dynamism of rewilding initiatives, something which applies to both agricultural and environmental policy. In particular, with respect to environmental policy, Cliquet has suggested that ‘nature conservation law and policy is too static, given the dynamics of ecosystems’ (2014, p. 722); since dynamism is something which rewilding actively embraces, this is of even greater relevance with respect to rewilding. The suggested corrective to this is that environmental policy becomes *adaptive* rather than *directive* and focuses on wider biodiversity, taking into account an ecosystem’s functional characteristics, rather than being oriented towards specific species and landscapes (Sandler, 2013). Criticism of agricultural policy is perhaps even more damning, with Thirtle, Palladino, and Piesse (1997) and Merckx and Pereira (2015) suggesting that agricultural incentives, including support payments can be actively detrimental to biodiversity; such payments are therefore counter not only to conservation generally but to rewilding specifically since rewilding aims to increase biodiversity.

The ‘barriers’ identified by Sandom *et al.* (2018), the ‘uncharted territory’ which Gooden (2016) notes, and the policy constraints which Cliquet (2014) and Merckx and Pereira (2015) highlight, present significant boundaries for rewilding to negotiate. On the other hand, the risks to conservation which current legislation presents (e.g. failure to value dynamism, negative impacts on biodiversity) and the opportunity to redesign this legislation as a result of Brexit affords rewilding considerable scope for *renegotiation* of those boundaries. The lack of specific legislation relating to rewilding, and the increase in interest and application of rewilding as a conservation method would also seem to call for the development of new legislation. While the non-goal orientated approach of rewilding and its lack of clearly defined targets leaves it difficult to measure, in turn rendering it problematic for policy makers seeking to reach evidence based decisions (Pettorelli *et al.*, 2018), changes in policy post Brexit offer an obvious opportunity to address this.

### **2.2.3.1 Windows of opportunity (a 'wild' Brexit?)**

Lobley, Winter and Wheeler have reflected on agriculture in the UK in the wake of the 2016 referendum in which the UK voted to leave the EU and suggest that Brexit has foregrounded policy debate around agriculture to an extent that has not been the case since the Second World War, giving rise to a discussion about 'the role of agriculture in the transition to sustainability and food security in the era of climate change and environmental degradation' (2019, p. 8). They suggest that post Brexit policy should seek to 'connect sustainability and agricultural production' (Lobley, Winter and Wheeler, 2019), something which could be seen as taking advantage of what Kingdon (2013) terms a 'policy window'. According to Kingdon, policy windows open due to 'the appearance of compelling problems or happenings in the political stream' (Kingdon, 2013) and are opportunities for 'advocates of proposals to push their pet solutions, or to push attention to their special problems' (Kingdon, 2013). Brexit can certainly be considered a 'happening in the political stream' and has opened a significant policy window for agricultural and environmental policy with departure from the CAP predicted to result in the decoupling of the compromise between agricultural and environmental interests which that policy engendered (Lobley, Winter and Wheeler, 2019). The 'policy entrepreneurs' (people 'willing to invest their resources in pushing their pet proposals' (Kingdon, 2013)) seeking to take advantage of this window include those interested in human health and nutrition, those interested in the removal of regulatory restrictions in order to allow farming to engage in more unfettered economic growth and, most pertinent for rewilding, those who are interested in the idea of public money being dependant on the delivery of public goods via environmental gains (Lobley, Winter and Wheeler, 2019).

This last point links directly to the concept of 'public money for public goods' which was first mentioned in the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs' (DEFRA) environmental strategy document, '25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment' (2018), commonly referred to as the Twenty Five Year Environment Plan (25YEP), and has been an oft quoted mantra in conservation discussions since then. The 25YEP states that '[t]he principal public good we [the government] want to invest in is environmental enhancement' and that a 'Green Brexit' will put 'environmental policy at the heart of England's domestic and

international priorities' (DEFRA, 2018). To achieve this, DEFRA proposed introducing a new 'environmental land management scheme' (ELMS) in England to 'incentivise and reward land managers to restore and improve our natural capital and rural heritage' (DEFRA, 2018). The new Agriculture Act (again, specific to England and passed on 11<sup>th</sup> November 2020) implements this strategy via a shift from the CAP's 'basic payment' model, whereby agricultural support payments were distributed according to the amount of land farmed, to a system where payments (i.e. 'public money') are linked to the provision of 'public goods' i.e. services that are nonrivalrous and nonexcludable, with a major focus on environmental improvements<sup>44</sup> (House of Commons, 2020). With the introduction of the ELMS (details of which were announced on 30<sup>th</sup> November 2020) there will be a period of transition from the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) of the CAP to the EMLS, over which time basic payments will be gradually reduced before being phased out altogether (DEFRA, 2020). Meanwhile three ELMS 'components' will be introduced, commencing with the 'sustainable farming incentive' which will reward farmers for measures which 'improve soil health, hedgerows and integrated pest management' (DEFRA, 2020). The second component will focus

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<sup>44</sup> According to the Agriculture Act:

The Secretary of State may give financial assistance for or in connection with any one or more of the following purposes —

- (a) managing land or water in a way that protects or improves the environment;
- (b) supporting public access to and enjoyment of the countryside, farmland or woodland and better understanding of the environment;
- (c) managing land or water in a way that maintains, restores or enhances cultural or natural heritage;
- (d) managing land, water or livestock in a way that mitigates or adapts to climate change;
- (e) managing land or water in a way that prevents, reduces or protects from environmental hazards;
- (f) protecting or improving the health or welfare of livestock;
- (g) conserving native livestock, native equines or genetic resources relating to any such animal;
- (h) protecting or improving the health of plants;
- (i) conserving plants grown or used in carrying on an agricultural, horticultural or forestry activity, their wild relatives or genetic resources relating to any such plant;
- (j) protecting or improving the quality of soil.' (House of Commons, 2020, p. 2).



on 'local nature recovery' and will reward 'actions such as creating, managing or restoring habitats, natural flood management and species management' (DEFRA, 2020). Lastly, the third component will focus on 'landscape recovery' and support projects to 'restore wilder landscapes' and those 'looking to achieve large-scale forest and woodland creation, peatland restoration, or the creation and restoration of coastal habitats, such as wetlands and salt marsh' (DEFRA, 2020). As is evident from the focus of each component, especially the second and third components, the ELMS is highly compatible with the aspirations of rewilding, for example taking significant areas of land out of agricultural production offers opportunities for rewilding at a large scale. Moreover, the change in policy theoretically renders rewilding politically and economically, viable.

The notion of a 'Green Brexit' perfectly encapsulates the idea of a policy window, with the 25YEP identifying leaving the CAP as a 'once-in-a-lifetime chance to reform our agriculture and fisheries management, how we restore nature, and how we care for our land, our rivers and our seas' (DEFRA, 2018). Not only is the departure from the CAP a significant happening in the political stream but environmental issues appear to have become a compelling problem for government. The 25YEP discusses 'landscape scale restoration', the creation of a 'nature recovery network' and the provision of 'opportunities for the reintroduction of native species', all of which align with the goals of rewilding. Perhaps most pertinently of all it expresses the ambition to 'to leave our environment in a better state than we found it' (DEFRA, 2018, p.6) something which tallies well with rewilding's proactive approach to ecological restoration.

Rewilding advocates (notably Rewilding Britain) have seized this moment to become 'policy entrepreneurs', exploiting the policy window afforded by Brexit and taking advantage of recent strategy documents (e.g. Lawton *et al.*, 2010; DEFRA, 2018) to make policy recommendations to DEFRA which they consider would facilitate rewilding (Driver, 2018). For example, in 'Making Space for Nature: A review of England's Wildlife Sites and Ecological Network', Lawton *et al.* claim that '[t]he essence of what needs to be done to enhance the resilience and coherence of England's ecological network can be summarised in four words: more, bigger, better and joined' (2010, p. viii) and 'more, bigger, better, joined' has become a favourite refrain of rewilding advocates. Given the significant

change in agricultural policy, and agricultural support payments, from the CAP to the ELMS it seems reasonable to conclude that such lobbying has had an effect, having ‘foreseen’ the emerging window and ‘responding’ quickly to it (Rose *et al.*, 2020). Such a conclusion tallies with work by Rose *et al.* (2016) which suggests that the ‘Making Space for Nature’ report itself (Lawton *et al.*, 2010) also contributed to conservation capitalising on the policy window presented by Brexit.

## 2.3 Landscape

Having reviewed the debates surrounding rewilding and its contexts, the second half of this chapter considers the discourse on landscape, being the lens through which this research will view rewilding. The following sections consider understandings of landscape, particularly the English landscape, and the way in which landscape can be seen as an intersection of the natural and the cultural.

### 2.3.1 Definitions of landscape

Landscape has been variously described as ‘elusive’ (Green, 1996), ‘spectral ... yet somehow clear and distinct’ (Wylie, 2007, p. 1) and ‘an ambiguous and multivalent term that resists a convenient definition’ (Zeller, 2007, p. 13). As is self-evident from these descriptions, the concept, like rewilding, is a problematic one and attempts to define it have led to a proliferation of definitions and interpretations. Part of the difficulty is that there exist two broad understandings of the term, one of landscape as a physical object and another of landscape as art<sup>45</sup>. These two categories are sufficiently related to impinge on and influence each other but sufficiently distinct as to defy a single, cohesive and reliable definition (Daniels, 1989; Green, 1996). In addition to creating an element of confusion, the two *definitions* mean that landscape takes on two *roles*, being ‘both the phenomenon itself and our perception of it’ (Wylie, 2007, p.7) which sets up a tension as to whether a landscape is a lived in world or a looked at scene.

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<sup>45</sup> This is illustrated by the dual meanings attributed to the term in the OED, that of ‘a tract of land with its distinguishing characteristics and features’ and that of ‘a picture representing natural inland scenery’ (2020d).

Different interpretations regarding the term landscape in the English language extend to its etymology. Green traces its origins as far back as Anglo-Saxon in which the notion of 'land' as a 'space with boundaries' combined with the idea of 'scapes' being 'composition[s] of similar objects' (1996, p. 12). This interpretation evolved to mean 'the patterns and processes characterising a specifically circumscribed tract of country' (Green, 1996, p. 12) and in modern usage gives us a general definition of landscape that can be applied to physical entities while still allowing considerable scope for interpretation. Zeller (2007) meanwhile suggests that the term arrived much more recently, in the sixteenth century, as a loanword derived from the German 'landschaft' which originally had connotations of 'political community' (Wylie, 2007). In this sense, landscape means a 'judicially defined polity, not a spatially defined area' (Olwig, 2002, p. 17), with landscape being the 'expression of the practices of habitation through which the habitus of place is generated and laid down as custom and law upon the physical fabric of the land' (Olwig, 2002, p. 226). While this use endures, somewhat more abstractly, to describe a political scene it can also be considered to describe a physical space – it is this broader interpretation of the term that enables us to approach landscape from a physical, environmental perspective or from a cultural, political and legal point of view (Wylie, 2007).

In the fifteenth century, the development of new techniques to afford perspective to paintings, and the advent of landscape painting, saw the meaning of landscape gradually shift from that of 'common *places* to scenic *spaces*' (Olwig, 2002 emphasis in original) until by the nineteenth century the dominant understanding of the term was that of the 'scenic, pictorial' definition i.e. landscape as art (Wylie, 2007). This association with landscape art led to the idea that landscape was something to be viewed, implying 'separation and observation' (Williams, 1975), setting 'us at a distance [turning us] ... into detached spectators, and the world into distant scenery to be visually observed' (Wylie, 2007, p. 3). This attitude has resulted in interpretations of landscape which assess it largely on its (natural) aesthetic value but, as Sheail points out, the landscape is 'more than scenery. It [i]s a place for social and economic activity' (2007, p. 324). This recognition of the multiple aspects that contribute to landscape sets up an important debate regarding its natural and cultural elements (which will be discussed in section 2.3.3) and is acknowledged, to a greater or

lesser extent, in various definitions. For example, Cosgrove extends Green's (1996) definition to make explicit the fact that Green's (1996) 'patterns and process' are 'the integration of natural and human phenomena ... over a delimited portion of the Earth's surface' (Cosgrove, 1984, p. 9) which is useful in terms of viewing a landscape holistically, a concept that is highly pertinent in the discourse surrounding rewilding given the human and other-than-human factors which contribute to shaping landscapes.

Similarly, for Wylie, landscapes are 'the product of interactions between sets of natural conditions ... and sets of cultural practices' (2007, p. 9) or, in a more culturally influenced state, the 'expressions of human responses to and modifications of natural environments over long periods' (2007, p. 9). This interpretation considers 'the holistic / ecological perspective of nature and humans interacting within the physical space of the landscape unit' (Wylie, 2007, p. 9). The European Landscape Convention's definition of landscape as 'an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors' (CELC, 2018) is a similarly inclusive definition of nature and culture in landscape and of landscape as something to be *in* while also referencing the notion that landscape is something to be *viewed*, and highlighting the importance of human perception in its creation. An important element is not captured by the foregoing definitions however – they include the natural, physical, social and cultural elements that construct and constitute a landscape but, while they encompass human influence, they do not admit influence from other-than-human species. For the purposes of this research then, landscape will be understood as *the physical environment and the way it is inhabited by humans and other-than-human species*.

### **2.3.2 Landscape in the English context**

While its definition is contested, one broadly accepted notion with regard to landscape is that its understandings can be highly location specific and that the term landscape has unique connotations in Western, European and English contexts (Green, 1996; Matless, 1998; Adams, 2003; Wylie, 2007). Given this importance of geographical context it is necessary to examine English interpretations and perspectives of landscape since that is the milieu within which this research will operate.

In his comprehensive book on landscape, Wylie (2007) identifies W.G. Hoskins as instrumental in setting the agenda for landscape studies in England in the 1950s. Wylie (2007) summarises Hoskins' approach in *The Making of the English Landscape* (1955) as 'nostalgic', exemplified by Hoskins' claim that 'since the year 1914, every single change in the English landscape has either uglified it, or destroyed its meaning, or both' (1955, p. 231). 'Uglification' and attribution of meaning are of course both highly subjective concepts. Uglification relates primarily to aesthetic qualities which are almost exclusively responsible for contributing meaning when we approach landscape from an artistic perspective, as something to be viewed. When encountering landscape as a physical entity however, there are multiple factors that constitute meaning, including aesthetics but also culture, ecology, economy, identity (individual, local and national), nature, history, politics and society. Further to this, several authors argue that landscape should be viewed as a process or a verb and that its meaning is therefore constantly being (re)constructed (e.g. Mitchell, 1994, 1996; Green, 1996; Schein, 1997; Cloke and Jones, 2001; Wylie, 2007). Following this logic, Hoskins' (1955) assertion that change can destroy a landscape's meaning is oxymoronic. If landscape is a product of the processes that take place within it, then change may alter its meaning but cannot destroy it. Hoskins' (1955) argument holds only if we accept his idea of a landscape as capable of being completed, as if the English landscape were, at the time of his writing in 1955, the end product of the historical process he describes in his book, rather than another stage in its evolution. This view supports Wylie's (2007) description of Hoskins (1955) as nostalgic – what Hoskins (1955) is bemoaning is the loss of a specific, pre-1914 landscape, and the landscape which he is romanticising has inevitably become historic with the passage of time.

The nostalgia that Hoskins (1955) expresses is, nonetheless, extremely important in relation to landscape, not least because there is a strong sense of this nostalgia in the public imagination, contributing significantly to popular ideas of landscape, and national and personal identity (see Shucksmith *et al.* who identify 'rural areas as idyllic places of peace, as repositories of national identity' (2018, p. 297) and Garrard (2020) who identifies ideas of rural idylls as part of the English national identity). In the English context this notion relates to ideas of a beautiful, pre-war landscape (before it was uglified) and both contributes to and

reinforces the 'long-standing and deep-rooted English discourse in which a certain rural idyll is represented as a source of aesthetic, social and ecological harmony' (Wylie, 2007, p. 34). The public imagination of this rural idyll is very strongly linked to Romanticism<sup>46</sup> and harks back to the 1800s when the English landscape, as it is nostalgically thought of, emerged, or rather was developed.

Romanticism was at its height during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and romantic perception and depiction of nature was particularly prevalent in landscape painting which, in addition to affording new ways of *showing* landscape, provided a new way of *viewing* it (Morrow, 2011). As was discussed in definitions of landscape, landscape painting has had an important influence in culturally conditioning ideas of landscape. Thus, when Romanticism developed the genre in the pastoral, picturesque and sublime styles, these styles contributed significantly to the discourse surrounding landscape. The pastoral style in particular tamed the natural environment from the 'classic' wilderness ('something to be feared, an area of waste and desolation inhabited by wild animals, savages, and perhaps even supernatural evil' (Light, 1995, p. 195)), to the 'romantic' landscape, contributing to English ideas about the 'proper forms of landscape and Englishness (neat fields, well-nucleated towns and villages, physically upright citizens)' (Wylie, 2007, p. 118). This view persists in the English national consciousness with the 'chocolate-box' perception of 'what constitutes "beautiful landscape"' (Short, 2002, p. 50). Indeed Short (2002) argues that the way in which rural existence was 'ennobled' by the Romantic movement is still clung to in England and is the root of English resistance to landscape change. In particular Short (2002) cites the work of Constable as reflecting an 'idyllic' past while Thompson (2010) points to the work of J.M.W. Turner (see Figures 2.1 and 2.2).

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<sup>46</sup> Romanticism, or the Romantic Movement, was prevalent in Europe in the early nineteenth century and centred on the notion that 'deep thinking' also required 'deep feeling' and hence embraced aesthetic as well as rational ideals (Morrow, 2011).





Figure 2.1: Wivenhoe Park, Essex, 1816, John Constable (source Wikimedia, <https://commons.wikimedia.org>, public domain).



Figure 2.2: Dartmoor – The Source of the Tamar and the Torridge, circa 1813, Joseph Mallord William Turner (source Wikimedia, <https://commons.wikimedia.org>, public domain).

As important as painting in English notions of landscape is landscape (or nature) poetry, particularly, and of particular relevance to this research, that of the 'Lake Poets'. The Lake Poets, William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Robert Southey, were writing during the Romantic Movement and, like Romantic landscape painting, their poetry, perhaps most notably Wordsworth's, has heavily influenced the public imagination regarding the English landscape, particularly the Lake District landscape (Thompson, 2010, p. 87). Like landscape art, landscape poetry changed the public perception of land as something wild, savage and dangerous to something ordered, peaceful and tranquil (Thompson, 2010). Significantly, Thompson describes Wordsworth's poetry as not simply nature poetry but as being 'about the organic relationship between human beings and the natural world' (2010, p. 87), presaging debates over the way in which humans and nature are intertwined in landscape, and the particular significance of this in England.

No discussion of landscape, particularly in the English context can be complete without reference to landscape gardening. Landscape gardening emerged in the eighteenth century and designed gardens to represent an idealised version of nature (Bouts, 2010). The work of key figures in landscape gardening (e.g. Capability Brown and Humphrey Repton) was so influential that the English landscape park has indeed come to be seen as *the* English landscape, or at least the *ideal* English landscape, so that it is not untrue to say that 'the English landscape was invented by gardeners imitating foreign painters who were evoking classical authors' (Stoppard, 1993, p. 34). Like painting and poetry, landscape design was part of the Romantic movement with the idealisation of a 'natural' landscape that was in fact intensely curated so that it presented a simulacrum of nature which came to be accepted as real. This entanglement of nature and culture in landscape is the subject of an ongoing debate which is given new relevance in light of rewilding.

### **2.3.3 Nature and culture in landscape**

The role and place of humans in creating and inhabiting landscape alluded to above leads on to the important topic of whether landscape is, or should be, natural or whether it does, or can, encompass cultural elements. This question links directly to the discourse surrounding nature and culture and the question of whether humans are part of, or apart from, nature, and could be viewed as the



practical manifestation of that philosophical debate (the nature / culture dichotomy is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3). Two subsets of landscape are referred to in the literature – ‘natural landscape’ and ‘cultural landscape’. Such is the indivisibility of nature and culture however that it could be argued that these subclassifications are not only unnecessary but unhelpful.

Like nature, natural landscapes are perhaps more easily defined by what they *are not* than what they *are*; a natural landscape is one which has *not* been modified or impacted by humans, with Hoskins (1955) calling them those ‘untouched by man’. Like ‘wilderness’ however, this renders the natural landscape extremely vulnerable. If landscapes are considered to be exclusively natural entities, ‘with no human mark’ (White, 1995, p. 175), then any human influence must be viewed as binary rather than graded. Thus, if natural landscapes are only those which have not been affected by humans, then a natural landscape which has been subject to *any* human influence immediately ceases to be so. The term ‘cultural landscape’ is therefore suggested to describe the way in which natural landscapes are ‘shaped’ and ‘altered’ by humans, recognising that this process has been occurring for millennia (Alagona, 2004; Zeller, 2007; Gillson, Ladle and Araújo, 2011). Even in 1955 Hoskins noted the scarcity of natural landscapes, writing that there remain ‘not many places where one can feel with ... complete assurance that this is exactly as the first inhabitants saw it in “the freshness of the early world”’ (1955, p. 17). Sixty-five years later, and with the designation of the Anthropocene to acknowledge the impact that humans are having on the world, there are surely even fewer, if any, such places. Human influence is now so far reaching that it is no longer possible, if it ever was, to distinguish between natural and cultural landscapes, and all landscapes are therefore to some extent cultural landscapes (Head, 2015). This argument is advanced particularly strongly in the case of Europe (where there is a ‘deep, complex, and ancient intertwining of nature and culture’ (Linnell *et al.*, 2015, p. 984)) and England where it is suggested that landscapes are the product of years of human activity to the extent that even those which look, ostensibly, *natural* have been shaped by human actions and are therefore *cultural* (Carver, 2007; Deary and Warren, 2018).

The counter argument to this, also put forward by Carver (2007), again stems from the nature / culture debate. Carver (2007) argues that if humans are a part of nature, then their impact on the landscape could be viewed as natural rather than cultural. This view is supported by Alagona (2004) who suggests that human shaping of a landscape does not necessarily render it unnatural. Both these positions blur, or arguably erase, any possible distinction between natural and cultural landscapes. Either all landscapes are natural or all landscapes are cultural meaning that the terms 'natural landscape' and 'cultural landscape' are redundant. For this reason, Matless states that landscape is 'impossible to place on either side of a dualism of nature and culture' (2003, p. 231), calling it a 'quasi-object'<sup>47</sup>. Indeed, landscape could, like rewilding, be considered a 'boundary object' (Star and Griesemer, 1989) given that, *inter alia*, it resides between social and natural worlds (boundary objects, and rewilding as a boundary object are discussed in the next chapter).

In light of such difficulties, current attempts to define landscape have largely abandoned efforts to separate natural and cultural landscapes, with definitions such as Ingold's overlaying one with the other as 'discursive worlds of culturally constructed significance, laid out upon the substrate of a ... physical terrain' (2000, p. 172). Even attempts such as this are however accused of 'assum[ing] and reproduc[ing] a duality of cultural mind and physical nature. And in doing so ... draw[ing] a line between human and natural worlds' (Wylie, 2007, pp. 155–6). Ingold acknowledges this when he says that 'to suggest that human beings inhabit discursive worlds of culturally constructed significance is to imply that they have already taken a step outside the world of nature' (2000, p. 14). Here it seems that attempts to acknowledge human involvement in, and contribution to, landscape does more to signal the way in which they are divorced from nature rather than a part of it.

Wylie's (2007) critique of Ingold's (2000) definition is however, a non-sequitur, while the definition of landscape highlights the twin attributes of nature and culture it does not, and arguably *cannot*, draw a line between the human and natural worlds. For instance, if humans attribute cultural significance to a physical

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<sup>47</sup> The term quasi object comes from Latour (1991): he uses it to refer to objects that are not quite social and not quite natural.

aspect of terrain e.g. a mountain (Uluru in Australia being an excellent example (Phillips, 1998)), then there is no way of distinguishing between the physical mountain and the cultural one. In cases such as this, the cultural and natural worlds are inextricably entangled to the point where it is *impossible* to draw a line between them (Lorimer *et al.*, 2015). By offering a complete and inclusive definition of landscape, Ingold (2000) is neither intentionally, nor unintentionally, drawing a line between human and natural worlds, rather he is offering a holistic definition of the term. Other holistic and inclusive approaches include those such as put forward by Cronon who calls for us to 'embrace the full continuum of a natural landscape that is also cultural' (1995, p. 89) and more recently by Corlett (2016) who sees 'biodiversity-rich multifunctional landscapes' as places of 'reconciliation' where nature and culture can coexist. Meanwhile, with respect to landscape's relationship to rewilding, Deary and Warren (2018) see the acceptance and appreciation of these 'hybrid, multinatural' landscapes as offering rewilding a 'broad international relevance' as a way of reconciling natural / cultural landscapes and the human relationship with nature, something which Ingold (2000) approaches via the concept of 'dwelling' which I turn to next.

### **2.3.3.1 Dwelling in landscape**

Heidegger (1962) introduced dwelling, as a phenomenological concept, as a way of 'being-in-the-world'. Ingold (2000) then extended it to stand for the way in which humans inhabit and 'dwell' within a landscape as a way of overcoming the difficulty of reconciling seemingly divergent natural and cultural landscapes. For Ingold this allows the possibility of a human being 'agent-in-its-environment' (2000, p. 173) which Wylie sees as explanatory of the 'ongoing, relational contexts of involvement' (2007, p. 158) that humans share with landscape. Ingold (2000) embraces Heidegger's (1962) notion of humans as 'being-in-the world' (2000, p. 168) and suggests that 'the coming-into-being of the person is part and parcel of the process of coming-into-being of the world as a whole' (2000, p. 168). At a world scale this perspective appears to position humans as an inherent part of nature. At a landscape scale however it could suggest that a landscape cannot exist without people i.e. if people are not 'in-the-world' does a landscape 'come-in-to-being' or does the environment remain simply land, or wilderness?

Further to Ingold's (2000) notion of humans as part and parcel of the coming-into-being of the world, it is widely accepted that humans influence and create landscapes (e.g. Green, 1996; Matless, 1998; Adams, 2003; Wylie, 2007). Wylie, however, suggests that 'we locate agency, will, creativity and the capacity for action *solely* within the human subject' (2007, p. 200, emphasis added), implying that humans are the *only* beings with the agency to create landscapes (and therefore that landscapes would not be created without them, reflecting back to my reading of Ingold (2000) of humans as part and parcel of the coming-into-being of landscapes). This raises interesting ideas with regard to agency and the question as to whether other-than-human beings could create landscapes. Ingold's (2000) notion of dwelling appears to extend agency to other-than-human beings and Latour (1993) and Haraway (1991) have challenged the anthropocentric view that humans are the sole possessors of agency, extending agency to biotic and abiotic other-than-human entities. If it is the case that other-than-human animals *are* imbued with agency<sup>48</sup>, then they are theoretically capable of producing landscapes. The problematic nature regarding their *level* of agency however, particularly in relation to humans, is illustrated very clearly by von Essen and Allen (2016).

Within landscape restoration projects such as rewilding, the agency of animals is often enrolled on behalf of humans, with these animals becoming human 'proxies' (von Essen and Allen, 2016). While credited with sufficient agency to perform certain roles on behalf of humans, the animals' agency is then impinged upon by 'ad hoc human intervention' (von Essen and Allen, 2016) to mould it to a standard acceptable to humans. Von Essen and Allen suggest that 'goldilocks standards' are applied to these animals which are permitted to be 'wild but not too wild' (2016, p. 82). The term 'goldilocks' is often applied to a situation in which ideal conditions exist, in this case goldilocks conditions with respect to the animals' wild but not too wild status exist for the humans and are maintained through strict management. For the animals involved however, the conditions are far from goldilocks. Perhaps 'bear conditions' would be a more apposite term for

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<sup>48</sup> Rees suggests that if agency 'is to be understood as the capacity to contribute to the future; as the ability through action, interaction or deliberate inaction to change the outcome of events; as possessing the facility – even under conditions not of their own choosing – to make history, then ... animals ... have done so' (2017, p. 9) and can therefore be said to possess agency.

the difficult position they occupy in which they fluctuate between being too wild, until a human 'correction' is imposed, and not wild enough, once the correction has taken place and they are faced with severe limits on their sovereignty without the compensations which are usually associated with human dominion over animals e.g. food, shelter, veterinary care.

If the other-than-human animals which share landscapes with humans *are* credited with agency, dwelling becomes an extremely useful means of discussing those shared landscapes, since dwelling erodes the nature / culture duality (Wylie, 2007). Cloke and Jones make this explicit when they say that '[d]welling is about the rich intimate ongoing togetherness of beings and things which make up landscapes and places, and which bind together nature and culture over time. It thus offers conceptual characteristics which blur the nature / culture divide, [and] emphasise the temporal nature of landscape' (2001, p. 651). The references in this quote to 'time' and the 'temporal nature' of landscape draw attention to its temporality and re-emphasise the way in which, as has been alluded to, landscape, like rewilding, is a process rather than a product. This is explored in greater detail in the next section.

### **2.3.4 Landscape as process**

Several authors concur with Cloke and Jones (2001) that landscape should be viewed as a process (e.g. Mitchell, 1994, 1996; Green, 1996; Schein, 1997; Wylie, 2007). Broadly speaking, these authors share the view, summed up by Schein, that 'landscapes are always in the process of 'becoming'' (1997, p. 662). They acknowledge however that this view sets up a tension within landscapes by suggesting, or recognising, that they can be both a process *and* a product with Mitchell pointing out that despite never being '*entirely* stable ... landscape is also a totality ... at once solidly material and ever changing' (1996, p. 30 emphasis in original). Mitchell (1996) also suggests that a landscape's form can 'mask' the process that informs it which offers an explanation for the way that landscape is often interpreted as a static object.

Unmasking that process allows us to consider the way in which landscape is 'produced' as well as how it is 'consumed' resulting in a more holistic understanding (Wylie, 2007). This perhaps becomes especially relevant when considering the social processes which (co)create landscapes given that (like

their natural counterparts) these processes can (subjectively) be 'destructive' as well as 'constructive' forces. Zeller (2007) takes a highly pragmatic view of this, especially as compared to more romanticised views of the past e.g. Hoskins (1955). He views landscapes not only as sites where meaning is constantly changing and being recreated but suggests that meaning can be constructed 'physically' as well as 'socially', not only as 'pictures in the mind, but ... with shovels, backhoes, tar, and concrete' (Zeller, 2007, p. 14). Shovels, backhoes, tar and concrete would, presumably, have been considered by Hoskins (1955) to be destructive to, rather than constructive of, landscape, uglifying it and destroying its meaning. Such a concept is an impossibility for Zeller (2007) and others who acknowledge that landscape is a process and so for whom meaning can never be destroyed, only changed, replaced and recreated. Similarly, Navarro and Pereira emphasise that our definition of landscape must change along with it; 'considering that landscapes result from the dynamic interaction of natural and cultural drivers ... they cannot be perceived as anchored in time and we should anticipate occasional changes that will force us to re-evaluate their definition' (2012, p. 909), something which rewilding forces us to do.

If change is viewed as the essence of landscape then it can be recognised that in attempting to 'preserve' landscape we render something which is dynamic, static and that attempts to 'arrest such dynamic change would be to destroy it' (Sheail, 2007, p. 324, also Zeller, 2007). Such an idea has important parallels with conservation – approaches which seek to preserve an ecosystem in a particular state when ecosystems are, like landscapes, dynamic processes are not only ineffective but actually counterproductive to conservation efforts (Prior and Brady, 2017). In certain instances however there are calls to preserve landscapes and their associated ecosystems in a particular state 'where the interaction of people and nature over time has produced an area of distinct character with significant ecological, biological, cultural and scenic value' (IUCN, 2018). While in some cases such an approach may be valid due to the acquired heritage value of a landscape as a result of the human processes involved in its creation, counter arguments would suggest that such a 'rose-tinted world view' is unhelpful (Carver, 2016a). This nostalgic, 'rose tinted' view denies the quality of landscape as a process and, similarly to some rewilding theories, appears to call for a 'baseline' approach to landscape. The trap which such reference point views

of landscapes and ecosystems fall into is the supposition that there is ‘a single ‘Garden of Eden’ baseline’ (Deary and Warren, 2018) which can be ‘recovered with the correct techniques, theories or ideologies’ (Cosgrove and Daniels, 1988, p. 8). As Cosgrove and Daniels (1988) point out with regard to landscapes, (and as applies equally to ecosystems), the fact that they are constantly changing means that they cannot be considered to have ‘real’ or ‘authentic’ states, rendering the return to any previous state not only impossible but a fallacy, since there is no such thing as a reference landscape or ecosystem.

### **2.3.5 Landscape as used in this research**

Wylie (2007) asserts that both understandings of landscape (as a ‘way of seeing’ *and* as a ‘way of being’) are important, and Matless (1998) suggests that this ‘duplicity’ is what gives landscape its analytical potential. I will therefore employ both interpretations in this research – landscape will be used as a way of seeing rewilding, in order to focus the research gaze, and ways of being in landscape will be investigated from the perspective of research participants. Wylie also states that while landscape has come to be more usually interpreted as a ‘way of seeing’, its earlier meaning, of a ‘way of being’, should not be overlooked, since ‘defining landscape historically in terms of locality, community, polity and law is one way of granting the term a distinctive and enlarged purpose in the present day’ (2007, p. 196). I will utilise this ‘distinctive and enlarged purpose’ in order to understand the landscapes of rewilding.

In ‘ways of being’ in landscape, Mitchell (2003) sees a ‘struggle’ for landscape that is at the same time a ‘struggle for justice’. This struggle becomes apparent when examining the landscapes of rewilding (see for example Deary and Warren, 2018), as rewilding negotiates its interface with other land use. Olwig’s caution not to overlook the community and sense of place aspects of landscape is therefore extremely pertinent with regard to rewilding, with Olwig warning that those ‘who think only in terms of the power of scenic space, ignoring the exigencies of community and place, run the risk of producing landscapes of social inequality like those of the great eighteenth-century British estates’ (2002, pp. 226–7). I will investigate how rewilding negotiates all these aspects of landscape thus responding to a call from Jepson (2016) who has suggested that investigating the way landscapes can ‘limit’ rewilding would be beneficial. Conversely, it will also be illuminating to consider the way landscapes can *enable*

rewilding with Matless suggesting that landscape's power in this regard 'resides in it being simultaneously a site of economic, social, political and aesthetic value, with each aspect being of *equal* importance' (1998, p. 12 emphasis added). Deary and Warren however, have identified the way in which rewilding 'provokes controversy, as its ecological values *clash* with other values – aesthetic, socioeconomic, social justice and environmental preservationist' (2018, p. 3 emphasis added). This suggests either that, contrary to Matless' (1998) suggestion, we do not give these aspects equal importance or, that their having equal importance is problematic, and leads to clashes. Deary and Warren (2018) ask what rewilding should mean in 'a context, in which every landscape is profoundly cultural' whereas Jepson's (2016) question seems to be, what *can* it mean. I aim to address an approximation of both questions while attempting to avoid their normative implications.

## 2.4 Summary

In this chapter I have discussed the many interpretations of rewilding as it is understood and practiced, and adopted a working definition for the purposes of my research. I have also considered the way rewilding developed and evolved as a concept and the implications that this has for policy given that the emergence of rewilding as a conservation approach has outstripped the legislation to guide it. I have also examined landscape as the means by which my research as a whole will approach rewilding. In particular, given the context of my research, I have considered the *English* landscape and the way that humans and other-than-human species dwell within it. Landscape and rewilding nonetheless remain broad and often unwieldy subjects, requiring a robust theoretical framework with which to approach them – the theoretical framework developed for this research is therefore discussed in the next chapter.



## Chapter 3: Hunt for the wilderpeople

### 3.1 Outline

Having established rewilding and the landscapes that it operates within as the subject of this research, this chapter sets out the theoretical framework used to focus the research and to analyse data gathered at field-sites. The theoretical framework draws together three concepts: 'boundary work', 'companion species' and 'biopolitics'. The intersections of these three concepts offer fertile crescents from which to explore the way humans 'dwell within' landscapes (Cloke and Jones, 2001) and 'dwell with' / 'become with' (Haraway, 2007) the other biotic, and abiotic, entities involved in rewilding. In particular this theoretical framework offers a way to investigate the *boundaries* of rewilding and how rewilding is negotiated in relation to those boundaries. The concept of 'boundary work' (Gieryn, 1983) illustrates how, during the process of that negotiation, rewilding is crossing, dissolving and moving boundaries, and creating 'boundary objects' (Star and Griesemer, 1989) with regards to, *inter alia*, other-than-human species and its biopolitical approach to them. The concept of 'companion species' (Haraway, 2003) is used to explore human relationships with these other species, including the frailty, especially the *temporal* frailty of the relationships. New ways for humans to dwell with companion species are called for by rewilding and this is explored through Foucault's (1976) idea of 'biopolitics', with its logics of approaching living beings as populations ('massifying'), and controlling life via a system of 'making live and letting die'. These ideas are discussed in relation to conservation generally and rewilding specifically, building on work by Lorimer and Driessen (2013, 2016).

### 3.2 Boundaries of rewilding

Many boundaries were encountered during the course of this research, and while the term appears frequently in this thesis I use it in three broad senses which are distinct but related. First, there is a 'boundary' between what is, and what is not, rewilding. It is this conceptual boundary that different actors are negotiating when they conduct 'boundary work' (Gieryn, 1983) regarding what does or does not constitute rewilding. Second, there is the 'boundary' between nature and culture, which influences, and is influenced by, the previous boundary in that it is a significant factor in the debate regarding what constitutes rewilding

and also regarding what is *permissible* in rewilding. For example does rewilding have to occur in a 'natural' landscape in the absence of 'unnatural' humans or can rewilding occur in culturally influenced landscapes and admit human presence and intervention. Third, there are the boundaries within which rewilding operates (which includes the boundary between nature and culture). These human and physical boundaries have the potential to constrain or enable rewilding and it is rewilding's negotiation of them which determines the form it takes.

The concept of boundary work was developed by Gieryn (1983) to discuss attempts to demarcate 'science' from 'non-science', and to highlight that such 'boundaries' were in fact indistinct, unstable and subject to change. Boundary work has since been used to discuss attempts to delineate many other concepts, including rewilding (e.g. Tsing, 2012; Arts, Fischer and van der Wal, 2016; DeSilvey and Bartolini, 2018). When applied to disordered reality, boundary work spawns two related concepts; boundary objects and boundary maintenance. Boundary objects cross or bridge boundaries (Cassidy, 2012; Lorimer and Driessen, 2013; Linnell *et al.*, 2015; DeSilvey and Bartolini, 2018), are 'hybrids' that defy clear demarcation (von Essen and Allen, 2016), or 'exist in the margins' between marked boundaries (Tsing, 2012). Boundary *maintenance* is an essential part of boundary *work*; it is not sufficient to simply create a boundary, it must constantly be shored up against erosion, or attacks by boundary objects that threaten to blur its distinctness. Boundary maintenance is highly relevant to conservation in which interminglings between the wild and the domestic, natives and non-natives, and the natural and the unnatural threaten not only to undermine individual conservation efforts but to destabilise the very foundations on which they are based. Milton (2000) illustrates this clearly by pointing out that conservation depends on the maintenance of categories, without boundary maintenance therefore, conservation is meaningless.

In this light, rewilding can be seen as something of a threat to traditional conservation; since its radical approach does not necessarily respect the, often very rigid and strictly regulated, boundaries traditionally honoured by conservation, rewilding can allow or even encourage them to be undermined or erased. In the case of the nature / culture divide for example, rewilding's advocates celebrate the way in which 'wildness' can tolerate human presence

and artefacts (Prior and Brady, 2017; van Horn, 2017) as opposed to 'wilderness', more conventionally the goal of conservation movements, which is 'defiled' by any trace of humans (Whatmore and Thorne, 1998). Equally, whereas traditional conservation usually seeks to avoid hybridisation on the grounds that the wild gene pool is diminished or polluted by domestic genes (von Essen, 2017) rewilding can and does embrace 'hybrids' of the wild and domestic. Heck cattle<sup>49</sup>, the subject of Lorimer and Driessen's (2013, 2016) work, and which are commonly employed in rewilding projects, provide an excellent example of this. Their back breeding<sup>50</sup> to resemble the auroch<sup>51</sup> and their subsequent deployment as its analogue results in repeated crossings of the wild / domestic boundary (Lorimer and Driessen, 2013, 2016).

Clear distinctions are also often made in classical conservation between native and non-native, and invasive and non-invasive species. Native species are privileged over non-native species, often to the active exclusion of non-native species, and invasive species are usually viewed as pests to be eradicated while non-invasive species are considered in much more benign terms (Subramaniam, 2001; Helmreich, 2005). Rewilding can fail, or even refuse, to make either of these distinctions and can therefore afford equal status to native and non-native and invasive and non-invasive species alike (Pearce, 2015). A further boundary, not mentioned previously, which orthodox conservation values highly is the distinction between rarity and abundance, with the protection of rare species being prioritised, sometimes to the detriment of more common species (van Dooren, 2014). Rewilding by contrast can refuse to discriminate between common and uncommon species (Sandom *et al.*, 2018). This neglect, or lack of maintenance, of traditional boundaries is something which rewilding must negotiate within the discourse and practice of conservation as the debate over the best way to protect nature proceeds (Gillson, Ladle and Araújo, 2011). It must also be negotiated within the wider public sphere – debates over the level of care

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<sup>49</sup> Heck cattle are a cattle breed which has been back bred to resemble (phenotypically if not genotypically) the now extinct auroch.

<sup>50</sup> Back breeding or breeding back is a method of de-domestication which attempts to recreate an extinct subspecies by artificially selecting for its genes which are still present in the gene pool (Gamborg *et al.*, 2010).

<sup>51</sup> The auroch, *Bos primigenius*, was a wild ox which became extinct approximately 3250 years ago and was the ancestor of domestic cattle (Hodder *et al.*, 2005).

that is, or should be, extended to the other-than-human species that participate in rewilding projects, depending on whether they are considered to have wild or domestic status, provides an excellent example of this as was seen very clearly in relation to the Oostvaardersplassen rewilding project.

Rewilding at the Oostvaardersplassen involves, *inter alia*, the grazing of large herbivores (Heck cattle, Konik ponies and red and roe deer) on an enclosed polder<sup>52</sup>, bound on one side by water and fences on the others. Following the introduction of pioneer populations the animals bred and a series of fair summers and mild winters, which ensured an abundant food supply, saw numbers rise steadily. The winter of 2004 / 2005 was markedly harsher than those preceding it and saw a severe food shortage for the by now large populations of cattle, ponies and deer, resulting in mass starvation (Keulartz, 2009; Lorimer and Driessen, 2013; Lorimer and Driessen, 2014). Those running the rewilding project had adopted a staunchly non-interventionist approach and declined to intervene either to offer supplementary feeding or to instigate a culling regime, as would usually be the case in conventional conservation (Keulartz, 2009; Lorimer and Driessen, 2013; Lorimer and Driessen, 2014). Their policy was that the animals were wild and that their death, as a result of population boom and bust having exceeded the carrying capacity of their habitat, was a natural process (Keulartz, 2009; Lorimer and Driessen, 2013; Lorimer and Driessen, 2014). Opponents and publics were outraged, countering that the animals were domestic and that they were owed a duty of care, especially since their ability to move to find food at a time of shortage was artificially constrained by the fences (contributing to arguments against their status as wild) (Keulartz, 2009; Lorimer and Driessen, 2013). This boundary between the wild and the domestic, and the associated boundaries of ethics, care and responsibility, is a topic of ongoing negotiation for the Oostvaardersplassen, and other rewilding projects. Indeed, because the companion species of rewilding can fall between the boundaries of the wild and the domestic they can also fall between boundaries of care, with Keulartz (2009) noting that we lack a 'third way' of viewing the hybrid status of these species.

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<sup>52</sup> A polder is low-lying land which has been reclaimed (in the case of the Oostvaardersplassen from the sea) and is protected by dykes.

In addition to these conceptual boundaries, there are the physical boundaries of rewilding to consider – the spaces which projects occupy and the borders around those spaces. Physical and spatial boundaries are somewhat antithetical to rewilding which advocates uncontrolled and untrammelled life (Jørgensen, 2014; Gammon, 2018), and yet, perhaps somewhat counterintuitively, are often an important, almost inescapable aspect of it. Fences become necessary to rewilding because of the need to keep species either in or out. If species are (re)introduced as part of a rewilding project it may be necessary to contain them to prevent their spread to areas not involved in the project and where they might encounter conflict with humans (Tanasescu, 2017; Bull *et al.*, 2019). Conversely, if attempts are being made to rewild a landscape, it may be advantageous to keep certain species *out* in order to prevent disturbance (Sandom, Hughes and Macdonald, 2013; Tanasescu, 2017; Bull *et al.*, 2019). Associated with such physical boundaries is the legislation involved in maintaining and enforcing them. The question then becomes whether the boundaries of rewilding are hard borders or ‘soft spaces’, where ‘place-shaping’ can occur ‘in the context of new modes of governance’ when ‘territorial forces and relational forces meet’ (Shucksmith, 2018, p. 165). I therefore turn next to the geographical and political boundaries of rewilding to examine the place shaping that occurs in rewilding’s boundary negotiations.

### **3.2.1 Geographical and political boundaries**

Physical geography presents a host of different boundaries to rewilding, perhaps first and foremost of which are spatial boundaries. Opinion is divided as to whether rewilding needs to operate at ‘landscape scale’ in order to be considered ‘true’ rewilding or whether it can operate at any scale (Sandom *et al.*, 2018). If the former argument is accepted, availability of space presents a very tangible boundary to rewilding. If on the other hand the latter argument is accepted, the lack of requirement for vast tracts of land works to enable rewilding, opening up possibilities for rewilding in smaller spaces. Space is often constrained by physical objects, which may be natural (e.g. mountains, oceans, rivers) or artificial (e.g. fences, roads, urban areas), and which present boundaries to both the human and other-than-human participants of a rewilding project. From the human point of view, a rewilding project may not be able to extend through, past or into one of these objects, therefore presenting a boundary

to the size and shape of the project. Other-than-human species face similar challenges when they encounter these objects which imposes boundaries on their ability to 'auto-rewild' (Tsing, 2017; Ward, 2020). Similarly, more gradual changes in landscape, or, more specifically habitat, can act as boundaries to rewilding. Boundaries can be(come) present if species are at the limit of their range, if landscape conditions change, due to ecological succession or climate change for example, or if there is a change in habitat due to different topographical features, all of which require negotiation by rewilding and its participants.

Rewilding projects which do not encounter physical boundaries are still likely to encounter conceptual boundaries on maps, often designating land ownership or legislative authority. In some ways these boundaries are more difficult to negotiate than those on the ground. Not only are they unseen and unrecognised by the other-than-human participants of rewilding projects but they can offer considerable scope for interpretation (Jørgensen, 2016). With respect to legislation and legislative boundaries this can result in significant differences in the way legislation is applied, as was found by Pillai and Heptinstall (2013) in their comparison of the way the 1992 Habitats Directive is interpreted in relation to beaver in Germany, Latvia and the Netherlands. In such cases, where different jurisdictions abut, human and other-than-human participants of a rewilding project may be presented with a very real yet invisible boundary to negotiate which can be particularly problematic for the other-than-human participants given that they do not recognise such boundaries. Even when legislation is uniformly applied however, legislation which does not allow for, or conflicts with, the objectives of rewilding, or even which conflicts with other relevant legislation, can present a barrier to rewilding (Gooden, 2016; POST, 2016; Sandom *et al.*, 2018). On the other hand, rewilding's malleability, something which I argue makes it a 'boundary object' and which I discuss later in this chapter, allows it to exploit different areas of policy (e.g. agricultural policy or environmental policy) to its best advantage, and policy can therefore enable rather than constrain rewilding.

### 3.2.2 Ethical and care boundaries

Four distinct notions must be considered when discussing care in the context of rewilding. The first is that, in conservation, 'care' can be 'violent', with species sacrificed if they are not valued for their rarity, or exterminated if they are classified as 'alien' (van Dooren, 2014). While violence seems contrary to common notions of care, van Dooren points out that caring 'is a complex and *compromised* practice' (2014, p. 92 emphasis added) i.e. we make concessions regarding what we care *for* and *how* we care, these concessions often being necessary in order to reconcile conflicting interests. Second, the 'logic of care' (Mol, 2008) with regard to other-than-human animals is usually considered to be the avoidance of suffering even at the cost of curtailing life, as opposed to the logics of care for humans which focus on prolonging life even at the expense of suffering. For example, in the Oostvaardersplassen opponents to the death of animals from starvation expressed their 'care' by calling for these animal to be culled – their life would be curtailed but their suffering would be prevented (Lorimer and Driessen, 2013; 2014). Third, it is argued that, in rewilding projects, the 'duty of care is inversely proportionate to the size of the rewilding area' (Linnartz and Meissner, 2014, p. 32) i.e. if the area is not sufficiently large for the other-than-human animals involved to be considered truly wild / autonomous, and therefore be responsible for their own survival, humans retain a duty of care for them (again, this attitude was evident in the case of the Oostvaardersplassen). Lastly, in rewilding projects care is usually extended at the ecosystem level as opposed to the species level (more common in traditional conservation) or individual level (which is almost always the case for captive or domestic animals and which can also, less commonly, be the case in traditional conservation). This approach, is almost inseparably linked to scale, with Linnartz and Meissner making the connection that in 'smaller areas, animals are approached at the level of the individual, and in larger areas at the species level, whilst in unlimited wilderness, at the ecosystem level' (2014, pp. 31–32). They note however that the change in approach is not linked only to scale but that an important conceptual shift occurs: 'a radical transition from an ethical domain of individual care to a concern for the ecological whole, where individual suffering is insignificant' (Linnartz and Meissner, 2014, p. 6). This approach exemplifies the 'massifying' of biopolitics, with its approach to species as a mass rather than as

individuals – with respect to rewilding the ‘mass’ is the ecosystem assemblage (massifying is discussed further in Section 3.4 of this chapter).

A highly pertinent ethical boundary is linked to notions of care, being that of autonomy versus dependence, and the trade-offs which often accompany dependence. Some kind of ‘contribution’ (voluntary or involuntary) is usually expected, or even extracted, in return for the ‘benefits’ (i.e. care) of being in a dependant relationship, and in extreme cases these ‘contributions’ can amount to exploitation. While rewilding claims to seek to restore autonomy and self-will to landscapes, ecosystems and species (Arts, Fischer and van der Wal, 2016; Prior and Ward, 2016; Tanasescu, 2017) the same ideology discusses the reintroduction of species to restore missing or dysfunctional ecosystem processes with, in some cases, these species acting as ‘proxies’ for humans (Sandom, Hughes and Macdonald, 2013; Seddon *et al.*, 2014; Nogués-Bravo *et al.*, 2016). Since such cases employ the agency of these companion species to act on behalf of humans their agency can be seen as being simultaneously allowed and encouraged but also exploited and constrained (von Essen and Allen, 2016).

Von Essen and Allen (2016) highlight the predicament of species in this situation, drawing attention to the fact that the delegation of ecosystem engineering tasks (in order to effect ecological restoration) to other-than-human species while asserting their ‘wild’ status leaves them in an ethical limbo. In a genuinely wild environment they would possess autonomy, which von Essen and Allen (2016) describe as ‘sovereignty’<sup>53</sup>, i.e. they would be responsible for decisions relating to their movement, feeding and reproduction and the attendant opportunities and risks to their health and welfare. Conversely, in a domestic or captive environment, humans assume this responsibility on behalf of their charges. The difficulty for companion species performing ecosystem engineering tasks on behalf of humans in rewilding projects is that humans diminish their sovereignty to a considerable degree (e.g. altering their movement patterns, restricting their ability to reproduce, and even limiting their access to food if resources are scarce and their ability to move to locate fresh resources is

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<sup>53</sup> Sovereignty is the concept that an agent holds exclusive power within its territory; in the case of non-human species this is often linked to ideas of autonomy (von Essen and Allen, 2016).



constrained, as seen in the example of the Oostvaardersplassen) without replacing it with provision of care – these animals, then, are getting the worst of both worlds, loss of sovereignty without compensatory care (von Essen and Allen, 2016).

### 3.2.3 Temporal boundaries

One of the major considerations for rewilding projects is ‘baselines’ – times in the past that serve as reference points for how ecosystems were and therefore, arguably, could or should be again (Hodder *et al.*, 2009; Gillson, Ladle and Araújo, 2011)<sup>54</sup>. There is considerable lack of consensus within rewilding discourse however as to whether or not rewilding should take a baseline approach and, if so, which baseline in Earth’s 4.5 billion year history should be chosen (Goedeke and Rikoon, 2008; Toledo, Agudelo and Bentley, 2011; Sandom *et al.*, 2013; Seddon *et al.*, 2014; Sandom and Macdonald, 2015). Nonetheless, if a baseline approach is adopted, it can offer a very clear boundary for rewilding, using a distinct point in time as a benchmark. The unidirectional nature of time presents another boundary to rewilding however, with part of the debate around the baseline approach centring on the difficulty or *inability* of returning to a previous state (Goedeke and Rikoon, 2008; Toledo, Agudelo and Bentley, 2011; Sandom *et al.*, 2013; Seddon *et al.*, 2014; Sandom and Macdonald, 2015).

This is particularly relevant if, for example, species have become extinct and are therefore irreplaceable<sup>55</sup>. Even extant species could have moved or been extirpated and may be ‘unwilling’ or unable to return to previous territories (sometimes but not always due to changes in the condition of that habitat over time, which is sometimes but not always due to the effects of climate change,

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<sup>54</sup> This boundary is not necessarily unique to rewilding – conventional conservation approaches face similar questions regarding which ecosystem state to attempt to conserve.

<sup>55</sup> Back breeding, and even de-extinction, may offer a solution to this but there is considerable debate over these processes (not least concerning the ‘authenticity’ of such species), especially de-extinction, which is beyond the scope of this research,.

anthropogenic or otherwise<sup>56</sup>). Still others may be the subject of debate by humans as to whether or not they are native to a particular location and therefore whether or not they should be allowed, encouraged or even compelled to dwell there. This presents a significant boundary to rewilding and it may be more useful to consider species as native to a time rather than a place, or ideally, as native to a 'chronotope'<sup>57</sup> (Bakhtin, 1981).

Further to this, the *passage* of time can also present a boundary to rewilding. Rewilding projects are often long-term, operating over decades rather than years and while 'wheels can be set in motion', if there is a genuine desire to allow natural processes (rather than human intervention) to influence landscape development it is necessary to wait for that occur without attempting to expedite the process. This not only requires patience, as landscape scale change may occur only gradually, but will also require *sangfroid* in the meantime when, as will almost certainly happen, successional species arrive and successional habitats form that may appear less favourable than the initial habitat and/or the habitat which could be achieved through more active management. Deary and Warren identify that in such instances 'active management which swiftly creates positive, visible landscape changes can be helpful in maintaining the support of stakeholders' (2018, p. 487) – this clearly runs counter to some ideals of rewilding however, which advocate total non-intervention.

### 3.2.4 Relational boundaries

A major boundary of rewilding projects is the relationship boundary between humans and other-than-human species. Modern, westernized humans have a very low tolerance for other species and this is perhaps nowhere more noticeable than in England and the UK, from whence all large predators were

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<sup>56</sup> This statement is in no way intended to repudiate the reality of current anthropogenic climate change, it is intended to acknowledge that, over the timescales at which landscape changes occur, significant climate variation occurs as a result of non-anthropogenic factors.

<sup>57</sup> Bakhtin's (1981) concept of chronotope literally means 'time-space coordinates', thus chronotopes 'are places of intersection of temporal and spatial sequences'. I borrowed this concept from Bakhtin (1981) via Folch-Serra (1990), who applies the concept to landscape and describes chronotopes as producing 'timed-places' and 'placed-times'. For the purposes of this research such time-places or place-times are those which species can inhabit and to which they could be considered native.

extirpated centuries ago (Yalden, 2002). Murray identifies this as being related to 'a loss of tolerance in humans for ... self-will' (2017, p. 210) in other species, something which rewilding seeks to restore. Cloyd on the other hand suggests that while we 'celebrate the autonomy of nonhuman features ... when those elements spread into surrounding areas, aspects of rewilding prompt fear and can be viewed as a threat' (2016, p. 61). Two issues are raised by these quotes, one being human-wildlife conflict, or perhaps more broadly 'conservation conflict' (Redpath *et al.*, 2013), and the other being human fear of other-than-human animals, particularly large carnivores.

Redpath *et al.* (2013) identify two kinds of conservation conflict, those where the interests of conservation are in opposition to those of other land use and those where human actions or activities have an adverse effect on conservation, or vice versa. Human-wildlife conflicts are a subset of the latter, wherein conserved wildlife impinges on people or property and/or where people have negative impact on wildlife (Redpath *et al.*, 2013). There is potential for conservation conflict to arise in both of these areas with respect to rewilding but it is perhaps in relation to species reintroductions, particularly large predator reintroductions, where the greatest conflicts arise. For example Bauer, Wallner and Hunziker (2009) identify that discussions on the reintroduction of large predators evoke strong, often fear based, reactions. These (potential) relationships and the emotions associated with them are therefore a significant boundary for rewilding, complicated by the fact that, in the UK, unlike in continental Europe, there is no opportunity for large carnivores to self-reintroduce, meaning that any reintroduction would require human intervention.

A different, yet equally emotive, subject is the notion of 'man as manager'. Humans, particularly in England and the UK, have an extended history of intervention in landscape which has given rise to two views, one relating to nature and the other relating to culture. First, ideas of intervening in nature and managing the landscape are so ingrained that 'we now see nature as essentially only possible through human mediation' (Bowker, 2000). Second is the idea that 'wildland is frowned upon as the product of the idle' (Jeeves, 2006, p. 16; also Ayres and Wynne Jones, 2014). This reflects the way in which ideas of human management of land are so prevalent that *not* managing land is viewed as lazy and even wasteful, due to the perception that land should be productive rather

than existing simply for itself and that humans should take 'stewardship' of land. Both of these ideas present significant boundaries to rewilding since it advocates non-intervention in nature and celebrates wild land for its intrinsic properties.

### **3.2.5 Societal and cultural boundaries**

Societal acceptance of rewilding projects and their methods is related to the extent to which communities, particularly communities local to rewilding projects, are engaged with them. It is becoming increasingly recognised that rewilding projects are usually least accepted when communities see them as 'being imposed from "outside" with little consideration for local interests' (Lorimer *et al.*, 2015, p. 52; see also Redpath *et al.*, 2013). It is therefore apparent that negotiating rewilding's social acceptability may be best achieved by engaging with communities and taking their 'local interests' into account. In the UK and England, these local interests are frequently centred on the landscapes created by farming, which are highly valued by communities for their heritage and cultural worth (Jepson, 2016), with Carver noting the strong 'historical attachment' which communities (especially rural communities) have to the land, and their 'strong sense of place and local pride' (2007, p. 270). This value structure often leads to calls for the continuation of current land management regimes (as opposed to encouraging or allowing rewilding) in order to maintain cultural landscapes and preserve heritage sites (particularly in terms of visibility or access with respect to the latter) (Pettorelli *et al.*, 2018). Coupled to this is what Carver (2007) identifies as a 'fierce resistance to change' in rural communities. The changes associated with rewilding therefore present a complex boundary to negotiate given that they potentially challenge the pride and sense of place in, and corresponding community attachment to, cultural and heritage landscapes, and also confront community reluctance to accept changes to those landscapes.

The pride which rural communities have in the land is closely linked to the way that landscape change as a result of human activity is viewed in a positive light as 'progress', 'mastery over nature' (Ingold, 2000; Tsing, 2012) and the result of many generations of labour (Carver, 2007). Allowing this to be lost, whether intentionally or unintentionally, can therefore be perceived as a backward step and a betrayal of those previous generations. As Linnell *et al.* (2015) explain, rural communities see the interaction between humans and nature as what gives landscape its value, and thus regret the dissolution of this relationship which

rewilding advocates. Clearly farming is significantly implicated in this human interaction and investment of generations of labour in landscape, with many valued cultural landscapes being the product of centuries of sustained farming practices (Carver, 2007). The boundary between farming and rewilding is therefore one which involves significant negotiation.

### **3.2.6 The nature / culture boundary**

The role of people in landscape, and the role of farming in particular, provides an excellent illustration of the ‘boundary’ between nature and culture which is one of the most fundamental boundaries that rewilding encounters and which underlies, or is linked to, several of the boundaries already discussed. As was seen in the discussion relating to whether landscape is natural or cultural, a significant tension exists regarding the relationship between nature and culture and the extent to which these are distinct, separate and even dichotomous, or inextricably entangled entities. This debate over whether a clear line can be drawn between ‘pure nature’, which is *separate from* humans, and ‘pure culture’, which is the *product of* humans, is extremely pertinent to rewilding since it can help to demine whether humans can, or should, be included in or excluded from rewilding projects. The basis of the debate is whether humans are *part of* or *apart from* nature, with arguments lying anywhere on a spectrum from ‘humans are fundamentally a part of nature’ (Noss, 1994, p. 188) and ‘humans are natural and therefore everything we do may also be considered natural to some extent’ (Carver, 2007) at one end, to humans as ‘entirely outside the natural’ (Cronon, 1995) with the ‘stain of civilization’ tainting ‘pristine wilderness’ (Alagona, 2004) at the other. These opposing perspectives will be considered as will the part which rewilding plays in reinforcing or reconciling these positions.

#### **3.2.6.1 Humans as apart from nature**

Those authors who consider it necessary to ‘draw a line’ between humans and nature seek to pinpoint the moment in time at which humans diverged from nature. This is proposed to have occurred when humans ceased to be hunter gatherers and began cultivating crops and domesticating animals i.e. the Neolithic period (Carver, 2007; DeMello, 2012). Indeed, the word ‘culture’ derives from the same root as ‘cultivate’ – the Latin ‘cultura’ (OED, 2020e). DeMello sees the resultant separation as being due to the changing quality of the relationship between humans and nature, with the hunter-gatherer method of food acquisition

'entail[ing] an intimate *interaction* with nature' while farming systems 'entail *intervention* with nature' (2012, p. 37 emphasis added). Thus, according to DeMello (2012), the development of agriculture was the point at which humans began to *control* animals and nature and therefore 'transcend' them. Carver likewise suggests that 'removing post-hunter-gatherer humans and their effect on landscape from the definition of natural is probably the most acceptable solution' (2007, p. 268) in resolving the nature / culture debate. For both Carver (2007) and DeMello (2012) then, *pre*-hunter-gatherer humans can be considered natural, or at least sufficiently natural to be allowed to remain in a 'natural' landscape. While this distinction can be argued to have a temporal basis (circa the Neolithic period) it is also activity based i.e. hunter-gathering is natural while farming, is not. Such efforts to differentiate between nature and culture are however problematic, first in terms of identifying a distinct boundary and secondly in the questions that any such boundary raises (Wylie, 2007). The first problem is illustrated by Hodder *et al.* (2009) who suggest that even the actions of Mesolithic hunter-gatherers *should* perhaps be recognised as separating them from nature. The second is seen in attempting to apply the distinction suggested by Carver (2007) and DeMello (2012). If, as they suggest, the shift of humans from within to outside nature occurred with the move from a hunter-gatherer lifestyle to a farming lifestyle, does this imply that modern day hunter-gatherer communities are a part of nature in a way that non-hunter-gatherer communities are not? And does it therefore imply that the transition from part of, to apart from nature is still occurring in some societies (Wylie, 2007)?<sup>58</sup>

A second suggestion for the segregation of nature and culture is the distinction between 'archaic' (i.e. traditional) and 'modern' work, in which archaic work is viewed as '*instructive*' (i.e. a means by which to know nature) and modern work is viewed as inherently '*destructive*' to nature (White, 1995). Thus, White's (1995) argument allows for pre-modern work *within* nature but considers modern work to be *outside of*, or in *opposition to*, nature. White (1995) goes on to identify the way in which archaic work is 'always ... vanishing' and highlights the 'romanticisation' and 'sentimentalisation' associated with it. This is reminiscent of

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<sup>58</sup> Such a debate is well beyond the scope of this research but, self-evidently, is highly problematic given its potential to allow some humans to be viewed, and therefore treated, as different from others.

Hoskins' (1955) nostalgia for disappearing landscapes and suggests that it is the very fact that these systems are disappearing which gives them their value. This theory is supported by the existence of initiatives which seek to preserve certain (created) landscapes, or 'semi-natural habitats<sup>59</sup>', (i.e. those in which a pre-technological, as opposed to a post-technological, human presence is appreciable) due to their perceived heritage value and threats to their existence (for a discussion of this see Harrison, 2016; van der Zanden *et al.*, 2017). Gillson *et al.* interpret this 'as a desire to protect and restore *pre-industrial* baselines (as opposed to 'natural' habitats that are presumably *pre-human*)' (2011, p. 39 emphasis added) which presents an interesting comparison to the benchmarks which baseline approaches to rewilding take (Hodder *et al.*, 2009; Gillson, Ladle and Araújo, 2011) and also to the Romantic pastoral landscapes that are considered idyllic (Short, 2002).

### 3.2.6.2 Humans as a part of nature

The counter position, that humans are part of nature, can be made from three possible starting points: i. that humans were, are and always will be natural irrespective of their interventions in nature and advances in their technology ii. that humans were initially part of nature, diverged from it (possibly for the reasons given above, or for some other reason(s), the cause of the separation is not important in this scenario), and have now re-merged with it due to the extensive and pervasive effects of previous and current technologies, or iii. that nature and culture, and (therefore) the divide between them are purely human constructions. All three of these positions result in the same conclusion – that humans and nature are inextricably intertwined with an 'entangled ... organic and social history' (Helmreich, 2005, p. 124) that cannot be separated.

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<sup>59</sup> The European Investment Bank defines semi-natural habitats as 'ecological assemblages that have been substantially modified in their composition, balance or function by human activities. They may have evolved through traditional agricultural, pastoral or other human activities and depend on their continuation to retain their characteristic composition, structure and function' (2018, p. 26). This definition is extremely useful for the nature / culture debate since its use of the term 'traditional' implies a distinction between semi-natural habitats and those which have 'evolved' through technologically (i.e. non-traditionally) mediated human activities.

The first position is a relatively straightforward, if descriptive rather than explanatory, argument with scholars simply asserting that humans are ‘an integral part of, not apart from, nature’ (Seddon *et al.*, 2014), ‘all equally part of nature’ (Helmreich, 2005, p. 124) and that ‘to be human is to be part of Nature’ (Saunders, 2016, p. 49). This argument would consider humans as ‘integral members of the ecological community ... one member of an inter-reliant ecological system’ (Brown, McMorran and Price, 2011, p. 293) and can be extended to take ‘Gaia-like’<sup>60</sup> view wherein humans as a ‘species tak[e] on the role of managing the planet as a whole’ (Bowker, 2000, p. 644). Another facet of this argument addresses the issue of modern technology as separating humans from nature by saying that technology, being the work of humans, i.e. natural organisms, is therefore also natural and therefore that ‘technology is not alien to nature, but integral to it’ (Nye, 2000, p. 10). Saunders takes this argument to its apparently logical conclusion saying that ‘once one decides that human beings, including their ‘works’, are part of Nature, one quickly slides down the logical slope to the conclusion that, ergo, everything is Nature and hence nothing is. So it becomes a rather redundant notion’ (Saunders, 2016, p. 53). This is a similar argument to the one made regarding ‘natural’ and ‘cultural’ landscapes and the impracticality of attempting to distinguish between the two (see Chapter 2, Section 2.3.3).

In the case of the second position, the argument suggests that the human-nature relationship has come full circle and that, assuming humans did diverge from nature through their actions, these same actions have now precipitated their re-convergence since human influence is now so extensive that it is impossible for any part of the globe to be untouched by it. This global reach of human influence is most often illustrated by reference to anthropogenic climate change (McKibben, 1990; Cronon, 1995; Cassidy, 2012) and it is suggested that since this is having planetary scale effects it is not possible for any species to remain unaffected by it (Cassidy, 2012). Given that this argument was first put forward as much as thirty years ago (e.g. McKibben, 1990), if we accept that it was the

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<sup>60</sup> The Gaia hypothesis postulates that all elements on Earth combine synergistically to form a self-regulating system. According to the hypothesis humans are not only part of this system but constitute an *important* part of it, providing a consciousness of and for the system as a whole (Lovelock, 1979).



case then, it must be even more so now with the recognition of the Anthropocene which Head claims 'surely disrupts any lingering notion that we can think of the environmental and social realms as separate and separable' (Head, 2015, p. 318). This refutation of the possibility of the continued existence of 'pure' nature (if it ever existed) brings humans and nature back into the same fold, re-entwining them after a (debatable) period of separation.

Thirdly, it has been argued that the divide between nature and culture is a human construction which is socially and historically contingent – humans and their practices are considered part of or apart from nature depending on their social and historical context (DeMello, 2012). Similarly, elements of nature are considered wild or domestic / cultivated depending on which side of the (literal and metaphorical) fence they are on. The European rabbit (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*) is an excellent example of this since the 'wild' rabbit is genetically indistinguishable from its 'domestic' counterparts (DeMello, 2012). That social convention allows humans, and their artefacts, and other-than-human species to cross and re-cross the 'boundary' between the natural and the cultural again illustrates how entangled organic and social history is, and therefore argues for the inseparability of humans and nature.

To a certain extent this issue of humans as either part of or apart from nature is irreconcilable and this research cannot and does not hope to resolve it. Indeed, as with landscape, many scholars are now rejecting the idea that they are separate or separable, given that the boundary is 'blurry, diverse, and dynamic' (Linnell *et al.*, 2015) and also 'porous and permeable' (DeSilvey and Bartolini, 2018). As a result they are refusing 'the boundaries that cordon nature from culture' (Tsing, 2012) and suggesting alternative concepts such as 'hybrid landscapes' (Fiege, 1999) 'nature-cultures' (Latour, 1993; Haraway, 2003), 'biocultures' (Maffi and Woodley, 2010; Linnell *et al.*, 2015; Fisher and Parfitt, 2016), 'human–natural systems' (Merckx and Pereira, 2015) and 'social–ecological systems' (Pettorelli *et al.*, 2018) all of which are, arguably, valuable and should therefore be valued in their own right. What this leads on to is a very important debate with respect to rewilding concerning the role of humans in nature.

### 3.2.6.3 The role of humans in nature

As part of the debate regarding whether or not humans are part of nature, their role in nature needs to be examined. For instance, humans play a significant part in, intentionally or unintentionally, (re)introducing other-than-human species to old / new areas. Tree (2018a) identifies that when this function is performed unintentionally it leads to the classification of a species as 'alien' to the site of introduction. Tree (2018a) draws attention to the fact that this 'delegitimises' or 'denies' the human role as 'vectors' in a functioning ecosystem; if introductions carried out by humans, albeit unintentionally, become aliens the implication is that we do not consider ourselves a valid member of the ecological community. Head makes a similar point, saying that the term 'human impact' is a 'profound contradiction' in that 'it positions humans as outside the system under analysis, as outside nature' (2007, p. 837). Deary and Warren go on to extend this argument to include the 'terminology of intervention and non-intervention' which they say is 'inherently flawed because it rests on a conceptual separation of humans and nature which is no longer tenable' (2018, p. 486). This links back to claims which state that because of the pervasive reach of their influence humans are in effect *constantly* 'intervening' in nature. An additional, very important point needs to be made here in that *non-intervention*, when conscious and deliberate, can still be a form of intervention. To return to the case of the Oostvaardersplassen for example, the decision to neither feed nor cull the starving animals, despite not involving direct action, was very much an act of human intervention.

Disavowing the role of humans in nature becomes problematic in relation to rewilding which has been accused of perpetuating a 'discourse [which] frequently separates humans from nature and seeks (explicitly or implicitly) to erase human history by valorising the wild without people' (Deary and Warren, 2018, p. 468) and of being conducted in a way that 'disavows human history and finds value only in historical ecologies prior to human habitation' (Jørgensen, 2014, p. 6). This is evident in rewilding's ambition to reduce human intervention in landscapes and increase natural autonomy. In doing so rewilding devalues human involvement with ecosystems and privileges natural over human processes, casting natural processes as inherently good and human processes as inherently bad. Saunders points out that this can be disenfranchising, not only

for those who live and work in or near rewilding areas but for those who value human processes and the role of humans in the landscape; 'I *don't* think that the simple fact of being human is inherently worse than the simple fact of being non-human (i.e. wild) ... And I find myself increasingly alienated by a conservation narrative which lauds the wild and demeans the human, *per se*' (2016, p. 53 emphasis in original). From this perspective, something which is achieved via a 'natural' process is not necessarily better than the same result achieved by a human process. Likewise, seeking naturalness or wildness purely for its own sake is a vain pursuit, it must achieve something *more* than the 'equivalent' human process to be valuable. Conversely, if a human-process can offer something over and above that which a 'natural' process can achieve, it may be preferable and would, according to Saunders (2016) offer a 'better' outcome.

Rewilding does however seek to resolve this tension and to avoid reinforcing the nature / culture duality, asserting that *wildness*, as opposed to *wilderness*, *admits* humans and *permits* their presence in the landscape, potentially even 're-coupling' people and nature (DeSilvey and Bartolini, 2018). Indeed Seddon *et al.* suggest that 'rewilding acknowledges that humans are an integral part of, not apart from, nature and recasts the retrospective goals of restoring "wilderness" as future-oriented visions of creating "wildness" in which ecological processes ... are managed within landscapes shared by humans and wildlife' (2014, p. 411). Rewilding then, may enable the crossing or bridging of the natural cultural divide when negotiating its boundaries.

### **3.2.7 Boundary negotiation and rewilding as a boundary object**

While rewilding as a *concept* sets out to escape boundaries, rewilding as a *practice* is bound by the factors set out above and needs to negotiate its role with respect to existing conservation strategies and other land uses (especially farming and/or cultural or heritage landscapes). The properties of the boundaries themselves can facilitate or inhibit this process. First, boundaries vary with respect to how 'hard' or 'soft' they are, with the softer boundaries being more 'porous and permeable' (DeSilvey and Bartolini, 2018) allowing rewilding's actors (human or other-than-human, biotic or abiotic) to cross, bridge, or slip through them. Secondly, while boundaries can be limits, constraints or impediments (Smith *et al.*, 2005, 2007; O'Brien, 2009; Dow *et al.*, 2013) they can also present opportunities and provide spaces for unexpected flourishing (Tsing, 2012).

Thirdly, boundaries can be made, unmade or disrupted and it is this making, unmaking and shaking, as part of the negotiation process, that reveals the nature of the boundary and its potential to inhibit or enable (Gieryn, 1995; Eden, Donaldson and Walker, 2006).

Not only does the *process* of rewilding challenge boundaries, and offer, a novel and radical way of negotiating them, the *word* rewilding is itself a 'boundary object' (Star and Griesemer, 1989). I introduced boundary objects earlier in this chapter but return to them here in more detail to discuss how they can be used to enable collaboration without consensus necessarily being reached, as is the case with rewilding. Boundary objects<sup>61</sup> are those which i. demonstrate 'interpretive-flexibility' (Star, 2010), ii. which can 'reside between' (Star, 2010) or inhabit 'intersecting social worlds'<sup>62</sup> (Star and Griesemer, 1989) by being well or ill structured and iii. which, because of this, allow those using them to 'tack back-and-forth' (Star, 2010) between their more and less well structured interpretations. Each of these points are evident with respect to rewilding. First, it exhibits interpretive flexibility, evinced by the proliferation of definitions and understandings of the term. Second, it inhabits the intersecting social worlds of the diverse actors involved in rewilding practice (e.g. academics, conservationists, volunteers and landowners) and is at times ill-structured (for example when rewilding is discussed at international level specific understandings can be very different but a shared appreciation of the general concept exists) and at other times well-structured (e.g. in relation to a specific rewilding project or location). Third, rewilding's actors do 'tack back-and-forth' between the different structures of the term, depending on the context, to allow them to collaborate without fully agreeing with regard to the term's meaning.

This flexible structuring, whereby boundary objects are 'adaptable to different viewpoints and [yet] robust enough to maintain identify across them' (Star and Griesemer, 1989, p. 387) enables 'boundary work', where 'entrepreneurs' 're-interpret ... concerns to fit their own programmatic goals and

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<sup>61</sup> For Star an 'object' does not necessarily refer to a single item but can, as with rewilding, be 'a set of work arrangements that are at once procedural and processual' (2010, p. 604).

<sup>62</sup> In this sense, social worlds refer to 'universes of discourse' i.e. 'shared discursive spaces that are profoundly relational' in which 'meaning-making' occurs among 'groups of actors ... working with shared objects' (Clarke and Star, 2008).

then establish themselves as gatekeepers' (Star and Griesemer, 1989, p. 389) i.e. they define an object in a way that fits their agenda. A key feature of boundary work is that 'entrepreneurs from more than one social world are trying to conduct such translations simultaneously' (Star and Griesemer, 1989, p. 389). Again, boundary work is apparent with respect to rewilding as is the fact that it is being conducted by entrepreneurs from more than one social world. The proliferation of definitions, understandings and practices of rewilding is indicative of the way 'entrepreneurs' are recruiting the concept to 'fit their own programmatic goals' and establishing themselves as 'gatekeepers' of the term. Meanwhile, it is evident from the literature that there are several entrepreneurs 'conducting such translations simultaneously', see for example Jørgensen (2014), Cloyd (2016) and Prior and Ward (2016).

Boundary work is often a form of 'local tailoring' where a boundary object is 'worked on by local groups who maintain its vaguer identity as a common object, while making it more specific' (Star, 2010, p. 604) i.e. boundary objects are modified at individual sites to meet the distinct needs of that site while retaining the object's general meaning so that it can be related to other applications. Again, this is evident with respect to rewilding, with its meaning being reinterpreted in discourse and practice depending on the needs and agendas of the individuals or organisations involved, while still preserving its general qualities. As a boundary object then, the term rewilding itself must be negotiated, in addition to the boundary negotiation that rewilding praxis must perform in relation to the boundaries outlined above. Actors invest in this boundary work because, despite the risks inherent in rewilding as a term (associated for example with its toxicity (Sandom *et al.*, 2018)), there are significant rewards related to using it – for example the cachet it offers via its 'pizzazz' (Carver, 2016a) and 'positive' environmental message (Jepson, 2016).

Part of this cachet comes from rewilding's status as a 'buzzword' i.e. a 'stylish or trendy word or phrase' (Bensaude-Vincent, 2014). With rewilding's rapid surge in the academic literature since 2005 (Lorimer *et al.*, 2015) and news media since 2009 (Jepson, 2016) it can justifiably be described as 'trendy'. Bensaude-Vincent points out however that the fashionableness of buzzwords belies their power in 'generat[ing] a medium-term present, a state of affairs, a trend, a mainstream ... urg[ing] toward a desirable future ... that shapes the

present' (2014, p. 240). Rewilding is certainly generating a, new, state of affairs in conservation, and is urging us towards a desirable (read 'wilder') future, which is shaping current conservation practice. It does this, in the manner of buzzwords, by i. 'generat[ing] matters of concern' (for example rewilding draws attention to biodiversity loss, breakdown of ecosystem function and the failure of traditional conservation to address this), ii. 'mobilis[ing] people by setting attractive goals and agendas' (rewilding offers an optimistic solution to the crisis it identifies which inspires people to action), and iii. 'creat[ing] unstable collectives through noise' (the rewilding movement is certainly an 'unstable collective' of diffuse and eclectic projects that have sprung up under the heading of rewilding, which all co-opt the term in different ways and which are generating considerable noise in conservation and public discourse) (Bensaude-Vincent, 2014).

Bensaude-Vincent (2014) emphasises that this 'shaping of the present' means that buzzwords can have a significant influence on practice and this is certainly the case with respect to rewilding. The 'fuzziness' of its meaning and the 'buzziness' (Bensaude-Vincent, 2014) of its connotations have led to many organisations embracing the concept of rewilding and employing it in their practices. For example Somerset County Council (SCC) have changed their policy of mowing road verges, choosing instead to 'rewild' them (McEwan, 2019; North Somerset Council, 2020). Examples such as this demonstrate that rewilding is having a tangible impact on attitudes to environmental management in the UK and are illustrative of the way it is reshaping conservation practice as part of its negotiation of its boundaries. Bensaude-Vincent (2014) suggests that this can happen when a buzzword is 'powerful enough to achieve its mission' and becomes a 'dispositif' (Foucault, 1977). A dispositif 'enables or allows something to happen, but without determining it' (Bensaude-Vincent, 2014) and has 'the capacity to discipline thought and action in particular ways' (Cairns and Krzywoszynska, 2016). Proponents of rewilding would argue that this is what the concept offers – an optimistic message for environmentalists to communicate, and a positive conservation approach, but without any set targets or goals (Jepson, 2016; Gammon, 2018; Sandom *et al.*, 2018).

### 3.3 Companion species of rewilding

Haraway (2003) developed the idea of 'companion species' to acknowledge the many *species* (as well as the more commonly considered companion *animals*) that share some kind of mutual association with humans. The term companion species therefore includes animals but also embraces plants, fungi and microorganisms. The idea of mutual association between humans and their companion species is perhaps particularly relevant in light of the Anthropocene; human influence on the world is now so far reaching that our actions and activities have repercussions for all species, rendering them our companions by default, without the need for any (further) conscious or voluntary action on their, or our, behalf. Haraway (2003) uses 'love' to describe the root of this mutual association, although she does not use love in a positive sense but rather calls it a 'nasty developmental infection', an 'historical aberration' and a 'naturalcultural legacy'<sup>63</sup>. This love is the result of the way companion species mutually 'constitute' each other: '[t]hrough their reaching into each other, through their "prehensions" or graspings beings constitute each other and themselves' (Haraway, 2003, p. 6). This notion of co-constitution emphasises the mutuality of the relationship between humans and their companion species and also attributes agency to these other-than-human species. Haraway goes on to insist that '[b]eings do not pre-exist their relatings ... There are no pre-constituted subjects and objects, and no single sources, unitary actors, or final ends ... there are only "contingent foundations;" bodies that matter are the result' (2003, p. 6). Haraway's premise is that species are so entangled, entwined, and interdependent that they need to 'live well together' and in her *Companion Species Manifesto* she asks how we might love each other 'less violently' and notes that interspecies love might enable us to learn an 'ethics and politics committed to the flourishing of significant otherness' (2003, p. 3). Given rewilding's ambitions to reassess, and even redress, the relationship between humans and the natural world, ideas of 'companion species', interspecies 'love', and 'living well together', are all highly relevant to it. In an era where humans have lost much of their tolerance for other species and where there are calls for this tolerance to be restored, rewilding could offer new opportunities for human

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<sup>63</sup> Haraway (2003) uses 'natureculture' (and its extensions e.g. 'naturalcultural') when discussing the relationship between humans and nature, which she sees as inseparable.

relationships with the environment and with companion species, in line with Haraway's calls for a 'multispecies flourishing on earth, including human and other-than-human beings in kinship' (2016, p. 1). I therefore use the concept of companion species to explore the way humans and other-than-human species 'dwell' together (Cloke and Jones, 2001) in landscapes where rewilding is taking place.

Tsing (2017) does this in examining what she calls 'auto-rewilding' by the 'weeds of the Anthropocene'; Tsing's (2017) 'weeds' imperfectly correlate to Haraway's (2003) companion species – they are species which have sprung up alongside humans in the disruption and disturbance of the Anthropocene. Tsing notes our human attempts to suppress such autonomy given that the human, anthropocentric, view of the world thinks in terms of 'human mastery' and, consequently, 'human control' of nature, overlooking 'species interdependence' (2012, p. 144). Tsing (2012) further notes that this 'mastery' and 'control' can be relaxed at 'margins' (i.e. pockets of land which humans do not trouble to master) or in the case of land which is, in itself, considered 'marginal' (i.e. too difficult or costly to master) and sees these marginal spaces as places which weeds can invade and where they can flourish. The relaxation which Tsing (2012) identifies is one of neglect rather than design (akin to some forms of land abandonment rewilding for example) and a *deliberate* relaxation of other land could allow more space for diversity. Tsing (2012) calls this deliberate relaxation, which seeks to provide a more sanctioned space for previously marginalised biologies to flourish, 'unmapping'. As a 'radical' conservation approach (Jepson, 2016; Tanasescu, 2017), deliberate unmapping is something which rewilding calls for in order to provide new spaces for biological diversity, and new opportunities for it to flourish. Such spaces require humans and other-than-humans to discover (or *rediscover*) new ways of being as companion species. Thus, Tsing's (2012) notions of marginal land and unmapping of other land are considered as part the concept of dwelling with companion species in rewilding projects. With respect to ways of dwelling, it should be noted that while these margins can offer opportunities for companion species to flourish they can also represent dangerous rather than safe spaces; by existing in or at margins the companion species of rewilding live within and between the boundaries of wildness and domestication, autonomy and



exploitation, care and detachment. Thus, the exploration of these boundaries and their negotiation with respect to rewilding becomes very important.

Another very important aspect of companion species is particularly germane to rewilding. In discussing the way in which companion species co-constitute each other, Haraway (2003) goes into detail on a traditional, and now reviving, companion species relationship between humans and Pyrenean Mountain Dogs – a giant dog breed originally developed in France as livestock guardians. Traditionally, guardian dogs lived with livestock (without a shepherd necessarily being present) and guarded the flock (usually sheep or goats) from predators, having developed an attachment to their ovine or caprine ‘pack’. The role of these guardian dogs diminished commensurate with the local extinction of the animals they were originally developed to guard against (Haraway, 2003). With the advent of rewilding, however, and the return of wolves to parts of Europe and North America from which they were previously extirpated, the role of livestock guardians has been revived (Haraway, 2003).

Guardian dogs act to deter predators, with their responses highly attuned to the level of threat, attacking only when necessary, i.e. when deterrent strategies have failed (Haraway, 2003). Part of the strategy harnesses the highly territorial nature of dogs, placing it in direct opposition to the equally territorial nature of wolves. For example, a livestock guardian dog having an established territory on a farm and/or around its pack / flock is, in itself, a deterrent to predators (Haraway, 2003). Where predators are already in proximity however, territoriality can exacerbate rather than deter predation, thus if a wolf pack has established territory near a farm the introduction of a livestock guardian dog can antagonise the predators and provoke wolf / dog aggression (Haraway, 2003). Anecdotal evidence suggests that wolves actively seek conflict with newly introduced livestock guardian dogs and that therefore, once a wolf pack is established in an area, livestock guardian dogs may not be a viable method of predator deterrent given dog / wolf dynamics (Haraway, 2003).

This human / livestock / guardian dog / wolf companionship illustrates the complexity of interspecies relationships and their potential frailty, especially their *temporal* frailty. Temporal boundaries and their frailty, and indeed the possibility that in crossing a temporal boundary one may in fact be crossing a Rubicon, pose a significant challenge to rewilding. As human and other-than-human animals coevolved they developed highly complex interspecies relationships, as described above, often based on mutual understanding, trust and respect (Smuts, 2001). If this knowledge is lost, it may be impossible to regain. So, while rewilding projects can seek to promote tolerance, they may not be able to offer the harmonious coexistence that humans and other-than-human animals once shared. An example of this can be seen in Smuts' description of the way 'members of two different species can co-create shared conventions that help to regulate interspecies encounters' (2001, p. 302). Using the lions and people of the Kalahari as an example, Smuts describes that the Ju/wa and the lions had a 'truce' 'such that neither harmed the other' (2001, p. 302). This truce held to the extent that when unarmed Ju/wa hunters tracked a wildebeest that they had wounded with an arrow and found it surrounded by a pride of lions they were able to approach, and claim, the dying 'beest, by moving slowly and 'explaining' to the lions that the wildebeest was their prey (Smuts, 2001). The Ju/wa were however removed from the area and the relationship was lost; the new human inhabitants of the area didn't understand the lions and instead of a relationship of understanding and trust there was one of fear and *mistrust*. Smuts (2001) sees this as a breakdown of an 'ancient interspecies tradition' which, arguably, once lost is lost forever. Smuts also sees the potential for a more optimistic outcome however, in that, if we value other species, we may be able to go some way to 're-establishing peaceful understandings with them, at least in places in which the animals are fully protected from human hunting and harassment' (2001, p. 302), something which rewilding claims to offer.

A criticism of Haraway (2003), which she acknowledges herself, is her reliance on dogs as illustrative of her notion of companion species since they are also a companion *animal*, in the more traditional sense (Cassidy, 2003). The potential shortcomings of a companion species model based on domestic canines begins to become apparent with attempts to apply the concept to rewilding, and indeed are partially revealed in these accounts of wolves

(Haraway, 2003) and lions (Smuts, 2001). While humans and domestic dogs can reasonably be viewed as companions, humans and wolves, and humans and lions are more likely to behave antagonistically than companionably towards each other. For this reason 'biopolitics', as a way of humans 'controlling' companion species, becomes very useful when discussing rewilding.

### 3.4 Biopolitics of rewilding

Foucault's (1976) twin notions of 'biopolitics' and 'biopower' are concerned with the regulation of, and exercise of power over, living things. This intersection of life and politics presents another of the many boundaries that recur throughout this research and, as with most boundaries, is one which changes and shifts as new biopolitical spaces, such as those created by rewilding, emerge. Lemke predicts, and justifies, this mutability saying that life 'presents a border to politics – a border that should be simultaneously respected and overcome, one that seems to be both natural and given but also artificial and transformable' (2011, pp. 4–5). The language here is particularly appropriate for the study of rewilding, dealing as it does with concepts of the artificial and the natural.

Biopolitics is concerned with the administration, optimisation and multiplication of life, seeking to 'exert a positive' influence that will 'ensure, sustain, and multiply' it (Foucault, 1978, p. 138). The exertion of power in an attempt to 'order' life, albeit with benign intent, subjects life to 'precise controls and comprehensive regulations' (Foucault, 1978). This is highly relevant to rewilding which is concerned with increasing biodiversity (Brown, McMorran and Price, 2011; Navarro and Pereira, 2012; Lorimer *et al.*, 2015; Svenning *et al.*, 2016; Sandom *et al.*, 2018), i.e. the optimisation, multiplication and sustainability of life, but which seeks to *escape* control and regulation (including the controls and regulations of conventional conservation) (Navarro and Pereira, 2012; Jørgensen, 2014; Nogués-Bravo *et al.*, 2016; Prior and Ward, 2016; Svenning *et al.*, 2016; Gammon, 2018; Pettorelli *et al.*, 2018). Such control or regulation would impose the order on rewilding which biopolitics seeks while simultaneously calling into question the fundamental ethos of rewilding which resists such impositions.

Two concepts in particular emerge from Foucault's (1976) biopolitics which are pertinent to this research; 'massifying' and 'making live and letting die'. Massifying refers to the way biopolitics approaches living things as a collective mass rather than as individuals; 'biopolitics deals with the population, with the population as a political problem, as a problem that is at once scientific and political, as a biological problem and as power's problem' (Foucault, 1976). In particular, with regard to mass care, biopolitics intervenes in processes such as birth, death and illness / injury at a species level (Genel, 2006) with Foucault explaining that massifying is 'directed not at man-as-body but at man-as-species' (Foucault, 1976, p. 243). This approach makes biopolitics particularly relevant to rewilding given the way in which rewilding prioritises wider ecological functioning over the success of the individual (Lambert, 2002; van Dooren, 2014; DeSilvey and Bartolini, 2018). With regard to biodiversity conservation (one of rewilding's key aims), Lorimer interprets massifying as a 'way[...] of securing life at the scale of the population (or other aggregations of individuals)' (2015, p. 58). Meanwhile, in discussing the boundary work of ecological restoration (again a key motive of rewilding) Keulartz (2009) describes how care moves from the 'specific' to the 'non-specific' as animals move from the domestic domain to the wild – specific and non-specific can be viewed as analogous to individual and mass.

Making live and letting die emerges from Foucault's (1976) conceptualisation of the way political power evolved from 'sovereignty' to 'biopolitics'. Whereas a sovereign had absolute power over their subjects, a government would make more allowances for the agency of its citizens. So while sovereignty held the power to 'take life or let live', a notion which centers on *death* and the ability to evoke or postpone it (Foucault, 1976), the 'make live and let die' of biopolitics are interpreted as 'strategies for the governing of *life*' (Rabinow and Rose, 2006, p. 195 emphasis added). Make live, let die is however, arguably more coercive than take life, let live since it has a focus on life and the ability to compel or deny it (Foucault, 1976). This logic of coercive control well encapsulates current human attitudes to other-than-human species and it therefore follows that this concept is highly applicable to conservation generally and rewilding specifically.

Conventional conservation, with its target driven approach and its concentration on specific species and habitats, focuses very strongly on the make live, let die ethic (van Dooren, 2014). For example, species which are considered desirable, and are targeted for conservation, can be *made* to live by ‘forcing’ the individuals which constitute the species, to exist / continue to exist via coercive means, e.g. managed breeding programmes (van Dooren, 2014). On the other hand, species which are *not* considered desirable<sup>64</sup>, and are therefore not targeted for conservation, are excluded from such care programmes and are ‘let’ die, through sacrifice or neglect (van Dooren, 2014). The sacrifice / neglect may be intentional or unintentional, deliberate or accidental, or even conscious or unconscious; individuals may be compelled to perform roles which expose them to risk of death, or entire species may be allowed to perish due to lack of intervention if conservation efforts are directed elsewhere (van Dooren, 2014). Van Dooren (2014) describes both of these modes (making live and letting die) as ‘violent care’, a concept reminiscent of the ‘violent love’ which Haraway (2003) suggests we need to avoid, and which draws attention to their extreme pragmatism.

Rewilding, with its open-ended approach and its avoidance of targets or goals, has no such commitment to making live. Conversely, its ‘hands-off approach’ (Corlett, 2016) aligns very strongly with the ‘let die’ ethic. This has earned it criticism over a lack of care for its companion species, as occurred for example at the Oostvaardersplassen. In addition, rewilding’s uniform application of the let die approach earns it further criticism from those who fear that vulnerable species will fare less well during rewilding than under conventional conservation regimes (Sandom *et al.*, 2018). The therefore somewhat unsatisfactory mapping of rewilding onto current modes of biopolitics, given that it does not demonstrate a clear position with respect to life, necessitates the development of new modes of biopolitics with respect to rewilding. Lorimer and Driessen have done this in relation to Heck cattle in the Oostvaardersplassen but call for further research which explores ‘biopolitics as multiple modes of living with nonhuman life, rather than solely as the control over nonhuman life’, and which

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<sup>64</sup> It should be noted that not being considered desirable is very different in conservation terms from being considered *undesirable*. Species which are specifically considered undesirable are often subject to targeted persecution rather than simply (benign) neglect.

maps 'the connections, frictions and compromises between ... modes of relating' (2016, p. 257). Again, this makes biopolitics a highly relevant concept with which to approach rewilding, and this research illuminates the modes of biopolitics evident at the Avalon Marshes and Wild Ennerdale which, in turn, sheds light on the biopolitics of rewilding more generally. In particular, mapping the 'connections, frictions and compromises between modes of relating' assists in understanding the boundaries of rewilding and how they are negotiated.

A discussion of biopolitics cannot be complete without a discussion of agency, defined by Rees as 'the capacity to contribute to the future; as the ability through action, interaction or deliberate inaction to change the outcome of events; as possessing the facility ... to make history' (2017, p. 9). A very important aspect of agency with respect to rewilding is its link to wildness, with Woods describing wildness as 'the autonomy of the more-than-human world where events, such as animals moving about, plants growing, and rocks falling occur largely because of their own internal self-expression that is independent of civilized forces' (2005, p. 177). This definition clearly connects wildness and agency, with wildness giving other-than-human actors the freedom to express their agency, independent of 'civilized forces'. Extrapolating from this, domestication and captivity (as modes of biopolitics) curtail other-than-human agency while rewilding seeks to restore / enhance it, requiring new modes of biopolitics to deal with the relationships which emerge. This becomes extremely pertinent since agency can be exercised at individual, species and interspecies (i.e. ecosystem assemblage) level. Given rewilding's focus on ecosystem function, the balance of other-than-human agency in rewilding projects rests at interspecies level rather than at the level of the individual. Thus, when humans involved in rewilding care about, and for, ecosystems they are reacting to and interacting with *ecosystem agency*.

### 3.5 Summary

This chapter has outlined the theoretical framework with which I approach the landscapes and boundaries of rewilding and their negotiation: boundary work, companion species and biopolitics. If boundary work is conducted as a means of distinguishing what 'is' from what 'is not' (Gieryn, 1983), and if companion species are those which share a relationship, even a *kinship*, with humans, based on 'contingent foundations' (Haraway, 2003) then, in relation to rewilding, boundary work is used to determine which species 'can' or 'cannot' be companions of rewilding. As such, boundary work determines which species are, or are not, 'companionable' and can therefore share in the labour of rewilding. A species' 'companionability' hinges upon which side of a boundary it is placed on (something which is, in itself, subject to boundary work), relevant boundaries being wild / domestic, native / non-native, invasive / non-invasive, abundant / rare. Biopolitics, as a way of regulating life (Foucault, 1976), then becomes a means of regulating the companion species of rewilding, and boundary work, as applied to biopolitics, determines what biopolitical mode a companion species falls into and, consequently, determines the logics of ethics and care applied to it. Evidently considerable boundary work is conducted, and boundary objects created, in the negotiation of rewilding's boundaries, and companion species and biopolitical approaches serve an important function in negotiating these boundaries, in boundary work, and in creating boundary objects of their own. The combination of these three concepts thus affords a powerful analytical framework with which to approach the negotiation of rewilding's boundaries. The next chapter describes the methodological approach I took to exploring these boundaries.

## Chapter 4: Take a walk on the wild side

### 4.1 Outline

This chapter sets out the methodological approach used in this research, describing the research design in detail, explaining the selection of field sites and introducing those field sites; I conducted a preliminary round of expert interviews followed by a pairwise comparative case study of two English ‘rewilding’ sites to identify the boundaries which landscapes present to rewilding and to explore the complex and contingent processes by which those boundaries are negotiated. The preliminary round of interviews informed both the purposive, theory guided selection of case sites and the research as a whole, affording an overview of current debates around rewilding in the UK. I used findings from the interviews, alongside my review of the literature, to develop a typology of rewilding and to compile a list of factors which, in combination, can confer ‘family resemblance’ to rewilding. This categorisation and classification of rewilding illuminates the way I understand rewilding in the context of this research and was used to inform the selection of field sites for case study; sites were chosen to present a range of attributes in relation to rewilding and the boundaries which landscapes present to it. Data collection at these field sites took a mixed methods approach, involving stakeholder interviews (including walking interviews), visitor questionnaires, and field notes and photographs.

### 4.2 Research design: case study

As a nascent and amorphous, and experimental and open-ended topic, rewilding presents something of a research challenge. First, identifying cases of rewilding is difficult, given the term’s lack of a precise definition. Second the bounding of identified cases can be difficult given that they often lack (sometimes resist) clear temporal or even spatial boundaries. Temporal boundaries can be unclear due to the lack of a distinct genesis in some rewilding projects and/or due to the open ended nature of rewilding. Spatial boundaries are equally problematic, with rewilding’s boundaries often ill-defined on maps, indeed rewilding is often defined by the *crossing* of boundaries (e.g. large carnivores ‘auto-rewilding’ in Europe (Linnell *et al.*, 2015; Linnell and Cretois, 2018)). This apparent difficulty of bounding makes rewilding an excellent candidate for case study research which, as Yin explains, is an appropriate method for studying ‘a



contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident' (2008, p. 18). Yin (2008) particularly notes the power of the case study in facilitating the understanding of complex phenomena by viewing them *holistically* and *within their wider setting*, as this research does with respect to rewilding and its landscapes

Further to this, Yin (2008) suggests that three conditions govern decision making regarding the adoption of the case study as a research approach: the type of research question, the degree of control the researcher has over the research subject, and the extent to which the research subject is a contemporary phenomenon – I address each of these conditions with respect to this research project. First, in relation to types of research question, Yin (2008) proposes that case studies are useful for *exploratory* research in which questions focus on *how* phenomena occur and unfold. Since I take an exploratory approach to investigating the boundaries that exist in relation to rewilding and how they are negotiated, case study is an appropriate method. Second, Yin (2008) asserts that the case study approach is appropriate when the researcher has no control over the subject being studied and cannot manipulate events. Again, this was true of my research which examined rewilding projects over which I had no influence. Third, Yin (2008) contends that case studies should be used to examine contemporary events, which makes case study a particularly appropriate method with which to investigate rewilding. Rewilding as a conservation approach, with its genesis circa 1990 and subsequent rise in profile from the mid-2000s is a contemporary, and highly topical, phenomenon (Lorimer *et al.*, 2015; Jepson, 2016), and both of the rewilding projects selected for this study are ongoing. By studying these sites I shed light on rewilding in its current context and also on the wider conservation context.

#### **4.2.1 Validity in case studies**

The extent to which theories formulated within one case study can be transferred to other cases (i.e. their external validity or generalisability) is a key issue in case study research and is often questioned on the grounds that generalisations are based on findings from only a single or small number of cases (Yin, 2008). This assumption, that a single or small number of cases in a case study is an inadequate sample, is however based on the fallacious comparison

of case studies to survey research, which can offer representative samples and allow *statistical* generalisations to be made. By contrast, case study research provides insight into context(s) from which *analytical* generalisations can be made i.e. researchers apply the findings of case studies to broader theories (Yin, 2008). This theory application is what gives case studies their analytical power, and the development and testing of theories is a key element of case study design, with circumstances under which specific conditions will or will not be replicated, identified and tested for (Yin, 2008). In 'typical' (Gerring, 2007) cases where a finding is reproduced, literal replication is said to have occurred (Yin, 2008). In 'deviant' (Gerring, 2007) cases where a finding is neither reproduced, nor expected to be, a theoretical replication is said to have taken place. The confirmation of a theory via literal replication in multiple cases can be viewed in the same way as the replication of results between multiple experiments; just as the more experiments that replicate a result the more established a theory, the more cases that a theory is generalisable to, the more robust the theory. As a result, the findings of studies involving multiple rather than single cases are usually considered more convincing and therefore more rigorous (Yin, 2008). In addition to this, case studies which analyse multiple cases are beneficial because of the opportunities they afford for comparison. Comparative case studies enable similarities and differences between sites to be identified, and for commonalities to emerge, thus furthering the transferability of the study. The identification of such commonalities was particularly useful with respect to rewilding given the plethora of ways in which the term is deployed both in discourse and practice.

While being alert to any such commonalities I first approached the two field sites using an 'embedded' case study design (Yin, 2008). Doing so allowed data from each site to be collected and analysed separately and enabled the generation of results specific to each individual rewilding project. Due to the context specificity of the boundaries of rewilding this yielded more informative results than would be provided by a 'holistic' approach (Yin, 2008), in which the results from each study site are amalgamated. Once individual case reports were completed however it was possible to draw wider conclusions across the cases, which are transferable to other rewilding sites and also to conservation projects more generally, particularly those which are controversial and/or those involving human / wildlife conflict.

## 4.2.2 Case selection

The selection and delineation of cases is central to case study research, particularly when selecting cases for comparison. Gerring highlights that cases may be ‘more or less representative of some broader phenomenon’ and therefore ‘may be considered better or worse subjects for *intensive* analysis’ (2007, p. 145 emphasis added), drawing attention to the fact that cases will be analysed intensively. Since a single or small number of cases are chosen to investigate a phenomenon it is important to identify cases which will be ‘better’ subjects for detailed, in-depth analysis – consequently, random case selection is of limited benefit in case study research. Case study research therefore often employs ‘purposive’, theory guided case selection whereby cases are deliberately included or excluded to ensure selection of suitable subjects for study (Seawright and Gerring, 2008). This selection approach is obviously distinct from sampling techniques where random methods can offer advantages and are sometimes preferred in other research designs. Given the emphasis in case study research on analytical generalisability however, and the degree to which a case may conform to or deviate from a theory, purposive case selection enables a researcher to study cases that are most appropriate to illustrate this (Seawright and Gerring, 2008). Selection of suitable case sites was therefore a very important element of this research and was aided by findings from the expert interviews in concert with a review of the literature. From these sources I created a typology of rewilding and a list of factors capable of conferring family resemblance to rewilding (outlined in the next section), both of which informed my case selection, as did explicit comments from the expert interviews.

### 4.2.2.1 Classifying and categorising rewilding

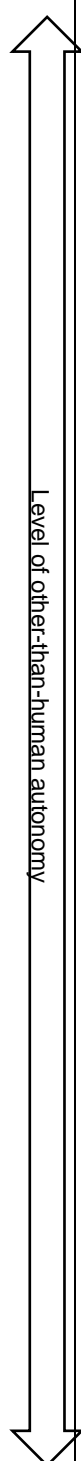
My typology of rewilding and list of ‘family resemblance’ factors (Wittgenstein, 1968) perform dual roles in this research. Developed as they were from a review of the literature and findings from the preliminary round of expert interviews they both inform the research *process* (particularly with respect to case selection) and are a *product* of it (offering new ways of understanding rewilding as a conservation approach, and *types* of rewilding specifically). Wittgenstein’s (1968) concept of family resemblance refers to the notion that members of a group may share different combinations of a common group of traits. Thus, while all members of the group may be different, they possess broad similitude by virtue

of the way their traits overlap. Given rewilding's multifarious interpretations and applications, family resemblance is an extremely useful concept to apply to its classification. No single factor is individually either 'necessary' or 'sufficient' to confer rewilding status, yet combinations of these factors may be considered 'jointly sufficient' for a project to be considered rewilding (Barrenechea and Castillo, 2019). Conservation initiatives then may display different, though partially overlapping, combinations of these factors such that they possess family resemblance to the broader concept of rewilding. The derived list of factors is i. large scale, ii. increase in biodiversity, iii. reduction of human intervention / management, iv. increase in other than human / natural autonomy / agency, v. increase in ecological functioning / resilience / natural processes, vi. self-identification as rewilding. (Two or more of these factors are considered jointly sufficient for a conservation project to be classified rewilding, a conservation project need not demonstrate all six factors.) Self-evidently, the application of these factors is useful in determining whether or not a conservation project can be considered rewilding, and while such application entails a degree of boundary work, given the importance of case selection for case study research, the selection of *suitable* cases was imperative – given that I aimed to investigate rewilding it was essential to select case sites which could justifiably be described as rewilding.

Leading on from this, the typology of rewilding further aided case site selection and has wider utility in categorising ecological restoration / rewilding projects on a spectrum of landscape types and human / other-than-human autonomy. I developed the typology following an evaluation of the existing literature on typologies of rewilding, which represent previous attempts to categorise its various interpretations. Mapping these typologies against each other and according to levels of other-than-human autonomy (a key factor in the categorisation of rewilding (e.g. Arts, Fischer & van der Wal, 2016; Carver, 2016; Deary and Warren, 2018; Sandom *et al.*, 2018) illuminated the profusion of, and confusion surrounding, understandings of rewilding: while the typologies overlapped, their correlations were imperfect (see Table 4.1). I therefore drew on these typologies to create one which attempts to recognise the full spectrum of rewilding and is sufficiently broad such that existing typologies and rewilding initiatives map on to it cleanly (see Figure 4.1).

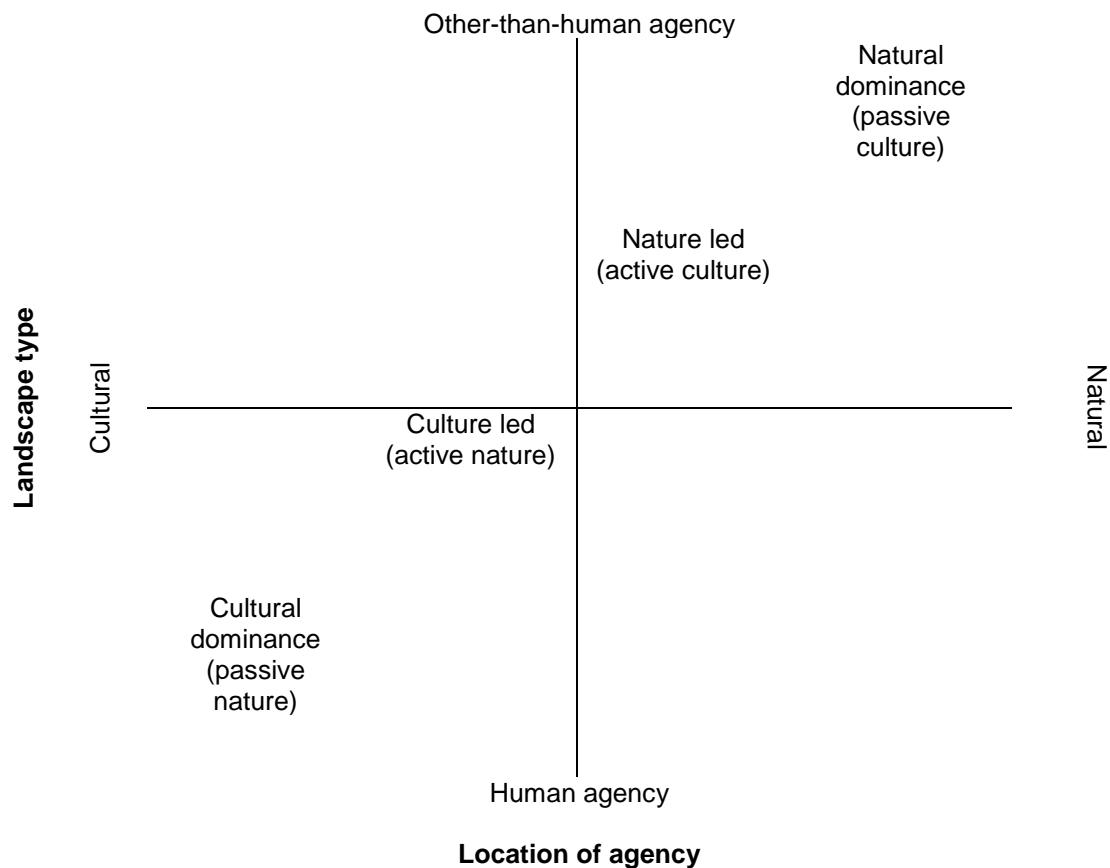
Table 4.1: Summary of existing typologies of rewilding

Arts, Fischer & van der Wal, 2016	Carver, 2016	Corlett, 2016*	Jørgensen, 2014	Nogués-Bravo et al., 2016	Deary and Warren, 2018	Sandom et al., 2018
Wilderness experience						
Natural autonomy	Nature gardening	Ecological rewilding			Wilderness enhancement**	
	Nature decides	Passive rewilding	Productive land abandonment	Passive rewilding		
	Giving nature a hand		Landscape restoration through species reintroduction	Translocation rewilding	Semi-natural restoration	Passive rewilding (patch, landowner or landscape scale)
Restoring ecological functioning		Trophic rewilding	Cores, corridors, carnivores	Rewilding		Species translocation reinforcement removal or management to restore processes
		Pleistocene rewilding	Pleistocene mega-fauna replacement	Pleistocene rewilding		Species translocation reinforcement or removal to restore functional communities
			Island taxon replacement			
			Releasing captive-bred animals to wild			
	Nature engineering					
					Sustainable land management	
						Wild naturalistic grazing



\* Corlett (2016) also discusses 'restoration' and 'conservation translocation' but classifies them separately from rewilding hence their exclusion from this matrix despite apparent opportunities for overlap e.g. with translocation rewilding (Nogués-Bravo et al., 2016).

\*\*It should be noted that in this sense 'enhancement' does not refer to human action to 'improve' wilderness, rather it means that the aspect of wilderness is improved by the absence / removal of humans and their activities.



Type	Description	
Natural dominance (passive culture)	Allows natural, ecological processes to resume / continue without human intervention. Can include land abandonment or the deliberate exclusion of humans / human activities (i.e. there is no human intervention).	<div style="text-align: center;"> <p>High</p> <p>Level of rewilding</p> <p>Low</p> </div>
Nature led (active culture)	Encourages natural, ecological processes to resume / continue with human intervention to facilitate, accelerate or moderate this process (i.e. there is low human intervention).	
Culture led (active nature)	Compels / forces natural, ecological processes to resume / continue via human intervention possibly involving the removal of previous signs of human intervention. Levels of human intervention may be an interim, remedial, restorative step during which more significant interventions occur and then cease, allowing nature to become (more) active, or they may be planned to continue throughout the project (i.e. there is moderate human intervention).	
Cultural dominance (passive nature)	Permits some natural, ecological processes to resume / continue within the bounds of culturally dominated land use. NB this may not strictly be rewilding but may also include landscape preservation (as opposed to conservation) usually as a result of culturally or historically significant landscapes or structures (i.e. there is high human intervention).	

Figure 4.1: Typology of rewilding developed by and for this research

The developed typology catalogues rewilding according to whether agency within a conservation project is predominantly human or other-than-human (i.e. degree of wildness), and the extent to which the landscape is 'natural' or cultural' (i.e. degree of 'naturalness'). Rewilding is thus classed as: cultural dominance (passive nature), culture led (active nature), nature led (active culture), or natural dominance (passive culture). These categories are placed along a scale from cultural dominance (passive nature), which operates in more cultural landscapes and with more human agency, through culture led (active nature) and nature led (active culture), to natural dominance (passive culture), which operates in more natural landscapes and with more other-than-human agency. Rewilding initiatives orbit around these two axes and mapping initiatives against them enables comparisons between rewilding sites, and between levels of rewilding, to be drawn.

It should be noted that both axes represent sliding scales, or spectrums, rather than binary poles. This is particularly important to acknowledge since, as discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.3.3 and Chapter 3, Section 3.2.6, any distinction between natural or cultural landscapes is highly problematic. Notwithstanding this debate however, residents in or visitors to rewilding sites are inclined to perceive landscape as more or less natural or more of less cultural depending on the level of human intervention and the presence of human artefacts, both of which rewilding seeks to reduce. While this is not as critical for *wildness* as it is for *wilderness* it is still of considerable significance, and other scholars have used level of human intervention as a factor in their rewilding typologies (e.g. Arts, Fischer & van der Wal, 2016; Carver, 2016; Deary and Warren, 2018; Sandom *et al.*, 2018). It should be remembered however that human intervention can be overt or covert: human intervention in rewilding projects often seeks to conceal itself, and/or to undo the work of previous interventions (Hall, 2014), while human intervention in other types of landscape use (e.g. farming or even conventional conservation) tends to celebrate its effects. Indeed, depending on the extent to which it is accepted that human intervention endures in landscape, even apparently 'wild' landscapes may have been fostered by human activity which is now obscured and are therefore, arguably, 'artificial'. It should also be acknowledged that the categorisations offered by the typology apply to rewilding initiatives as a whole – it is entirely possible, indeed probable, that there will be elements within a rewilding initiative

where nature or culture, or human or other-than-human autonomy are more dominant or more passive at any given time. This does not detract from the usefulness of the typology to assess rewilding initiatives, both so that sites can be categorised holistically and so that they can be compared and contrasted with other sites.

#### **4.2.2.2 The Avalon Marshes case site**

The Avalon Marshes is a network of nature reserves in Somerset in the south-west of England (see Figures 4.2 and 4.3 for location maps). They are operated via collaboration between the Environment Agency, Hawk and Owl Trust (H&OT), Natural England, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), Somerset Wildlife Trust (SWT) and South West Heritage Trust (SWHT) who are ‘driven by a joint recognition of the area’s rich natural and cultural heritage and by the potential opportunities for creative conservation provided by the worked-out peat voids’ (Avalon Marshes, 2020b). This ‘rich natural and cultural heritage’ includes the area’s mythological associations with King Arthur, its Bronze and Iron Age archaeology, and its abundance of birdlife. It could be said that it is the peat soil of the Avalon Marshes which has fostered all these things which are now so highly valued by the conservation organisations: it co-created the lake and marshes in which lay the Isle of Avalon from the legend of King Arthur, it has preserved artefacts from the Bronze and Iron Ages, and it now co-creates the wetlands which attract and shelter birdlife.

The peat soil has however also attracted humans to exploit it as a resource, initially for burning and later for horticulture. It is the wholesale extraction of peat which results in the ‘peat voids’ cited above and which, in turn, provide opportunities for ‘creative conservation’. This creative conservation has seen the land now within the five reserves which make up the Avalon Marshes (the Catcott Complex, established 1968, Ham Wall, established 1995, Shapwick Heath, established 1967, Shapwick Moor, established 2007, and Westhay Moor, established 1971) restored from its previous use for intensive agriculture and peat production, to a mosaic of wildlife habitats and extensively farmed land. Habitats are predominantly reed bed and peatland but also include fenland, grassland, heathland, marshland, (wildflower and hay) meadows, mire, open water, raised bog and wet scrubland / woodland (Natural England, 2008; Avalon Marshes, 2019; H&OT, 2021; RSPB, 2021; SWT, 2021). The reserves were restored by



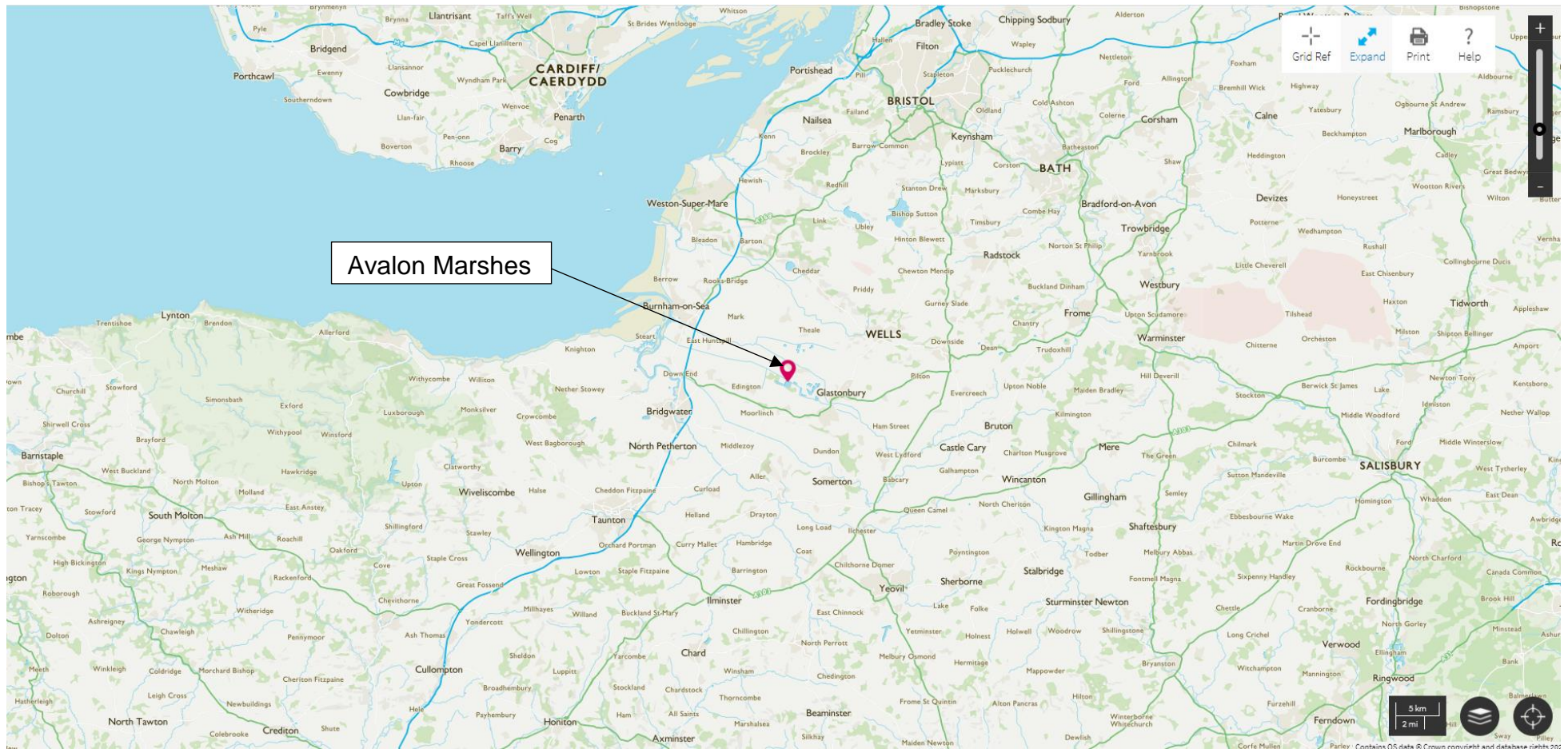


Figure 4.2: Location of the Avalon Marshes within the county of Somerset (source: OS maps, <https://osmaps.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/>).



Figure 4.3: Location of the Avalon Marshes in the South-West region of England and Wild Ennerdale in the North-West region of England (source Google Maps, <https://www.google.com/maps>).

the conservation charities and agencies which own and manage them (the H&OT, Natural England, the RSPB and SWT) with the specific aim of providing habitat for wetland (bird) species (particularly the bittern): their success can be seen in that Ham Wall, Shapwick Heath, and Westhay Moor are now National Reserves (i.e. they serve to protect some of England's most important habitats and species (Natural England, 2008)) and, collectively, the five reserves provide habitat for approximately 24 mammal species, 27 butterfly species, and 64 species of nesting birds (Natural England, 2008). As a result the Avalon Marshes are extremely popular with ornithologists, with some of the most notable birds being the bittern, the great white egret and the marsh harrier, which the Avalon Marshes describe as 'the big three' (Avalon Marshes, 2020c). In addition to this, tens of thousands of starlings overwinter in the reserves and their roosting behaviour at dusk creates a 'starling spectacular' which draws large numbers of visitors (Avalon Marshes, 2020d).

Restoration is an ongoing process however, and given that the reserves are different ages, they are also at different stages of restoration. At Shapwick Moor, for example, work is ongoing to rehabilitate what was previously arable farmland, with the H&OT introducing management practices to restore habitat and increase biodiversity e.g. allowing 'rough margins' to form along ditches and in fields, avoidance of artificial fertiliser, damming of ditches, late season hay cutting, low intensity grazing (with native cattle), raising of water levels, and tree and hedge planting (Avalon Marshes, 2019). Meanwhile, at Ham Wall, having restored the habitat to reed bed, the RSPB carries out management activities to prevent the reed beds from drying out and vegetation succession occurring. To this end water levels are managed, reed beds are mechanically cut and 'conservation grazing'<sup>65</sup> is performed (RSPB, 2021).

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<sup>65</sup> Conservation grazing is predominantly a conservation technique wherein herbivores are used to maintain habitat in a particular condition (Hodder *et al.*, 2005). For comparison, naturalistic grazing is perhaps more closely aligned to rewilding strategies; again, herbivores are involved but the emphasis is on (re)instating grazing as a natural process and is an end in itself rather than a means to an end (Hodder *et al.*, 2005).

#### **4.2.2.3 Wild Ennerdale case site**

Wild Ennerdale lies within the Lake District National Park in Cumbria in the north-west of England (see Figures 4.3 and 4.4 for location maps). It is a collaborative project involving Forestry England, the National Trust, Natural England and United Utilities with a vision ‘to allow the evolution of Ennerdale as a wild valley for the benefit of people, relying more on natural processes to shape its landscape and ecology’ (Wild Ennerdale, 2019). Similarly to the Avalon Marshes, the Ennerdale Valley is home to many archaeological sites since humans have lived in, and interacted with, the valley for millennia. Most recently this interaction has been in the form of commercial forestry and sheep farming and, also somewhat similarly to the Avalon Marshes, the aim of Wild Ennerdale has been to restore this previously intensively farmed and forested valley to a more ‘natural’ state. The project commenced circa 2006 when Wild Ennerdale partners agreed their first stewardship plan which envisaged ‘a shift away from economic productivity as the primary output [of the Ennerdale Valley] ... towards lower input, more sensitive management whereby natural processes are given a greater hand in determining how the valley will evolve in the future ... and enhance the wild qualities of the valley’ (Wild Ennerdale, 2006). As such, intensive sheep farming for lamb production has been largely replaced by extensive, naturalistic grazing by cattle (with beef production only as a by-product of the cattle’s ecological effects), and commercial Sitka spruce plantation forestry is being replaced by the replanting and regeneration of native deciduous woodland. In addition to these key activities, the first Wild Ennerdale stewardship plan proposed several other actions to promote ecological restoration of the valley, including allowing a red deer herd to establish (albeit with some culling due to the absence of predators), removal of some non-native species (e.g. rhododendron), allowing forest tracks to become vegetated tracks, removal of revetments from Ennerdale Water, installation of fish passes in Ennerdale’s water courses, allowing sufficient water to flow out of Ennerdale Water into the River Ehen (despite the role of Ennerdale Water in holding water as a United Utilities reservoir), and protection and improvement of fish habitat and spawning grounds in becks within the Ennerdale Valley (specifically to benefit the Arctic charr) (Wild Ennerdale, 2006).



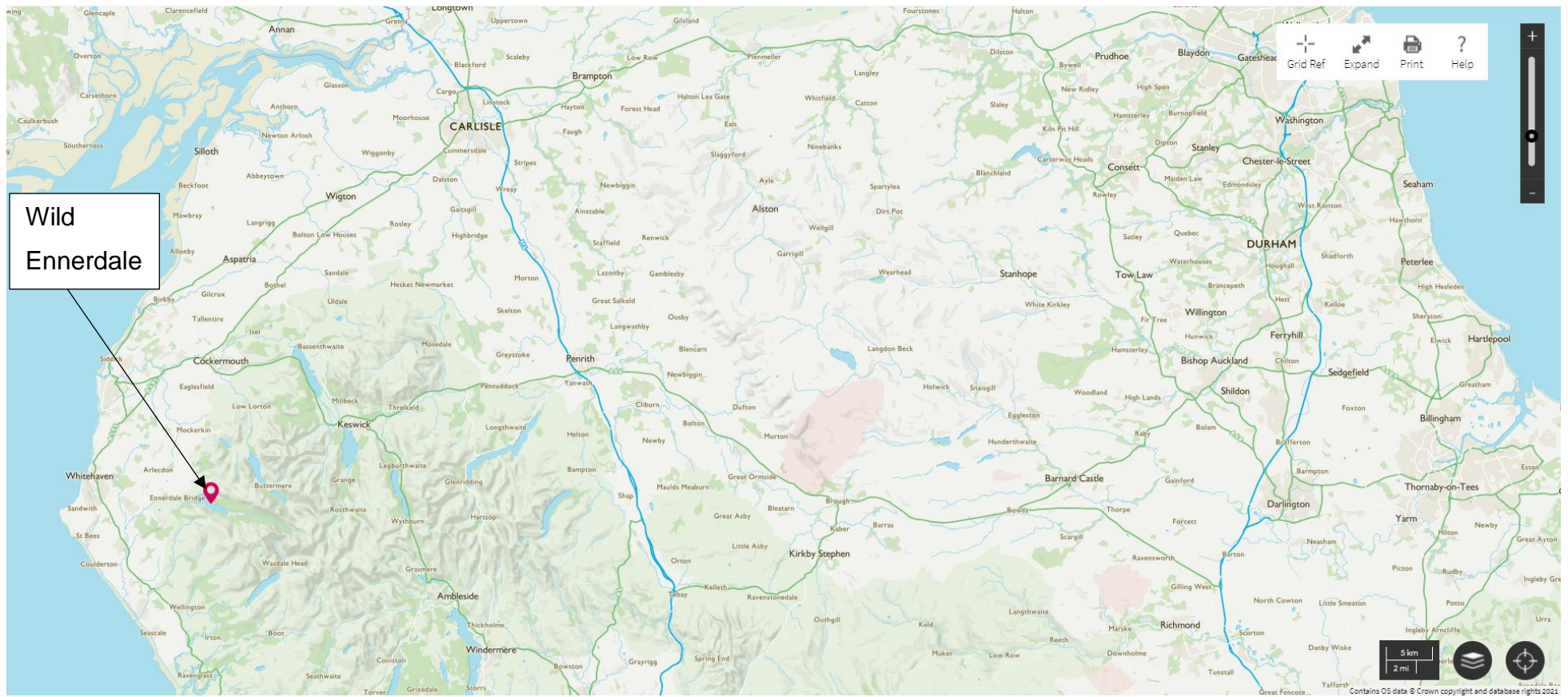


Figure 4.4: Location of Wild Ennerdale within the county of Cumbria (source: OS maps, <https://osmaps.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/>).

With the notable exception of the removal of revetments from Ennerdale Water (which became a lower priority once United Utilities committed to cease water abstraction from the lake (Wild Ennerdale, 2018), these actions have largely been instigated, with cattle having been introduced, 'over 35,000 native broadleaves and 5,000 juniper planted, 25ha of new heath land created and 6ha of bog in restoration, existing native woodlands expanding, [and] projects supporting survival of Arctic charr, marsh fritillary, [and] red squirrel' (Wild Ennerdale, 2013). The Wild Ennerdale Partnership emphasises however that its interventions are restricted to those which 'restore some balance to the range of 'natural' processes which operate', deliver 'SSSI conservation objectives for the designated areas', are 'complementary to the vision [of Wild Ennerdale]', or step in if 'a threat to the vision is posed' (Wild Ennerdale, 2006, 2018). In addition to this, Wild Ennerdale's second stewardship plan emphasises that while they do not wish to become 'too species focused' they will 'continue to intervene where a need is identified to help protect and expand missing or struggling species' (Wild Ennerdale, 2018, p.10). It should be noted here that the Wild Ennerdale stewardship plan and its approach to intervention / non-intervention is resulting in significant changes to the Ennerdale Valley landscape. While these changes are in-line with the Wild Ennerdale vision (i.e. a wilder valley which relies more on natural processes) they mark a radical shift from the 'classic' Lake District landscape of which Wild Ennerdale is a part and which plays such a role in the English collective imagination of landscapes (Thompson, 2010). By examining different perspectives, I explore how these different interpretations of Wild Ennerdale (e.g. as a classic Lake District valley or as a wild place), and the Avalon Marshes (e.g. as a mythical and historic landscape or as a place for nature), are enrolled to support different ideas about their future iterations. The way these different perspectives were gathered is described next.

#### 4.2.2.4 Logics of choice regarding selection of case sites

Having developed the family resemblance factors and rewilding typology to, *inter alia*, inform the selection of case sites, I was able to apply them to this purpose. England was chosen as the locus of my research, not because England can offer 'typical' (Seawright and Gerring, 2008) cases of rewilding but rather because it is unusual, even atypical. This is first because England, and the UK more widely, is exceptional in its long history of human habitation and extensive human modification of its landscape (Smout, 2000; Carver, 2007; Linnell *et al.*, 2015; Sandom and Macdonald, 2015). Secondly, due to Britain's island nature, where human activity has led to the loss of species, these species often lack the ability to (auto)recolonise (Sandom *et al.*, 2018). Their re-establishment would therefore require human intervention, engendering considerably more debate than would eventuate if species re-established autonomously. Considerable debate is also centred on British agricultural policy in light of the UK's departure from the European Union, and hence European policy, including the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) which has been identified as driving agricultural intensification, which in turn has been detrimental to birds and other wildlife (Thirtle, Palladino, and Piesse, 1997; Donald, Green and Heath, 2001; Donald *et al.*, 2002; Brown, McMorran and Price, 2011). This concatenation of circumstances renders debate surrounding rewilding in the UK particularly complex and rapidly evolving, thereby making case sites from within the UK especially interesting.

Even within the UK however there is considerable variation with respect to attitudes towards and discourse surrounding both rewilding and landscape. Given that I approach rewilding through the lens of landscape I needed to be conscious of both these factors. With respect to country specific attitudes to rewilding for example, in Scotland, rewilding can raise sensitivities given socio-political injustices of the past<sup>66</sup> (Lorimer *et al.*, 2015; Deary and Warren, 2018; Shucksmith, 2018; Wynne-Jones, Strouts and Holmes, 2018) while in Wales rewilding is often viewed as being foisted upon the country by the English, and

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<sup>66</sup> Authors reference the 'Highland Clearances' of the 1700 and 1800s which saw mass rural depopulation in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland thus producing a landscape denuded of people. Attempts by rewilding to valorise such a landscape are therefore resented (Deary and Warren, 2018).

therefore resented as something akin to a 'colonial' imposition (Wynne-Jones, Strouts and Holmes, 2018). In relation to landscape, the landscapes of England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales *are*, and are *viewed*, very differently (Carruthers and Rawes, 2003). The focus of this research was therefore narrowed to concentrate on English rewilding sites and thus the specifically English notion of landscape outlined in Chapter 2 – that of the pastoral idyll.

Purposive, theory guided selection (based on findings from the literature review and expert interviews, and application of the family resemblance factors and rewilding typology) was therefore applied to English 'rewilding' sites. Given that the rewilding typology identifies four types of rewilding, it initially seemed logical to compare four sites, each one representing a different rewilding type. The difficulty with this however was that cultural dominance (passive nature) may not strictly be rewilding since, as the typology identifies, it permits natural, ecological processes to resume / continue only within the bounds of culturally dominated land use. Meanwhile, as far as I was able to ascertain, natural dominance (passive culture), which represents the most 'classic' interpretation of rewilding i.e. allowing natural, ecological processes to resume / continue without human intervention, does not occur at any site in England and I suggest that England's status as a small, densely populated country precludes this form of rewilding from taking place. Since I focussed specifically on rewilding in the English context it was therefore not possible to include an example of this type. This resulted in two types being available for case study, culture led (active nature) and nature led (active culture), making a pairwise comparative case study an ideal approach. The Avalon Marshes and Wild Ennerdale were selected as representative of these two types respectively, to provide a 'diverse' set of cases i.e. providing a range of relevant attributes in relation to the phenomena of interest (Seawright and Gerring, 2008).

The determinants of where a rewilding site falls on the typology are the level of human intervention, since this influences (even dictates) the landscape type (natural versus cultural), and the location of agency (human versus other-than-human). Overall, intervention in the Avalon Marshes is considered to be 'moderate', according to the developed typology, given that there is ongoing human intervention and that this intervention is planned to continue (Avalon Marshes, 2020a). The clearest example of this can be seen at the Ham Wall



reserve which is 'managed to keep the wetland habitats in the best possible condition for the wildlife that lives there' (RSPB, 2021). As this quote reveals, the ecological restoration of what is now the Ham Wall reserve has resulted in habitat which the RSPB considers desirable, and significant management effort contributes to maintaining it in this state (e.g. reed cutting and removal, water level management, and conservation grazing). Arguably, this focus on specific habitats and species aligns the work of the Avalon Marshes more closely with conventional conservation than rewilding; this is reinforced by the fact that the Avalon Marshes set out with the stated aim of creating habitat for wetland species, including and especially the bittern, and that this habitat is what they now seek to maintain (RSPB, 2021). Despite the maintenance of stable ecosystem states being somewhat antithetical to rewilding, external commentators do describe the Avalon Marshes as rewilding (e.g. Moss, 2016; Taylor, 2017; Macdonald, 2019) and this can be justified given the other-than-human agency at play there. For example, certain species have effected 'auto-rewilding' (Tsing, 2017; Ward, 2020), reintroducing themselves to the area and recolonising the Marshes. This not only illustrates an increase in natural autonomy (one of the tenets of rewilding) but also demonstrates the futility of human efforts to maintain stable ecosystems in the face of such wild autonomy.

Wild Ennerdale provides an excellent contrast to this in that it has no set goals or targets, as made clear by its most recent stewardship plan: '[t]he Stewardship Plan is not a typical management plan with prescriptive targets and deadlines. There is no end point. As emphasis is on moving away from 'management' in the traditional, controlling sense' (Wild Ennerdale, 2018, p. 4). Indeed, as this quote suggests, management interventions in Wild Ennerdale are limited, hence classifying it as 'low' according to the developed typology. The stewardship plan makes clear that management interventions are determined by the extent to which they will affect the 'wild' character of the valley (Wild Ennerdale, 2006) although exceptions to this are made meaning that some management remains hence classifying Wild Ennerdale as low, rather than no, intervention. For example vegetation is cleared from archaeological sites, non-native spruce seedlings are removed, and interventions are made if either they are in-line with Wild Ennerdale's vision or to take action if the vision is threatened (Wild Ennerdale, 2018). Overall however, Wild Ennerdale's guiding principles

include 'giv[ing] freedom for natural processes to enable more robust, resilient and better functioning ecosystems to develop' (Wild Ennerdale, 2018, p. 7). This aim of allowing other-than-human autonomy to increase aligns wild Ennerdale very closely with the ethos of rewilding and makes the comparison of it with the Avalon Marshes extremely interesting providing, as they do, contrasting approaches to, and relationships with, the term rewilding. In addition, their different levels of and approaches to human intervention (moderate for the Avalon Marshes and low for Wild Ennerdale) make them very suitable cases for comparison, particularly as representing the two rewilding types available in England.

With regard to the factors connoting rewilding, Wild Ennerdale demonstrates all six factors while the Avalon Marshes demonstrates all factors except that of self-identification as rewilding. While this research does not consider self-identification as rewilding to be sufficient, or even necessary, to classify a project as rewilding, given that it places considerable emphasis on rewilding as a term it was deemed necessary that at least one case site *did* self-identify as rewilding. Deployment of the term rewilding is interesting here. At the time of case selection (2018) it was not possible to identify *any* site in England which used the term rewilding in its title or description. As a result, two organisations were used to identify rewilding projects: Rewilding Britain and Rewilding Europe<sup>67</sup>. Rewilding Britain's website listed three projects as examples of rewilding in England: Knepp Wildland, the River Wandle and Wild Ennerdale. Meanwhile Rewilding Europe listed two projects on its website as examples of rewilding in England and as members of the European Rewilding Network: Knepp Wildland and Wild Ennerdale<sup>68</sup>. Given that they appeared on both lists, Knepp Wildland and Wild Ennerdale required serious consideration for inclusion. The River Wandle was however discounted since it is an example of urban rewilding, which falls outside the scope of this study.

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<sup>67</sup> Rewilding Britain (<https://www.rewildingbritain.org.uk/>) is a charity based in Britain, while Rewilding Europe (<https://rewildingeurope.com/>) is a not for profit organisation based in the Netherlands. The organisations have the goal of promoting rewilding in Britain and Europe respectively with Rewilding Europe having established the European Rewilding Network.

<sup>68</sup> Since field sites were selected for this research three more English sites have been added to the Rewilding Europe website: Wallasea Island Wild Coast Project, Wicken Fen Vision and Wild Ken Hill.

While it would have been possible to compare Knepp Wildland and Wild Ennerdale, thereby selecting both English sites in the European Rewilding Network and both *rural* English sites on the Rewilding Britain website, or to compare Knepp Wildland with another rewilding site, Knepp Wildland was rejected for two significant reasons. First, the emphasis at Knepp Wildland is very much on farming, although ecological restoration is a significant part of this, meaning that its landscape(s), and its *approach* to landscape(s) is much more limited. Given that my research looked at rewilding from the perspective of landscape, using Knepp Wildland would have reduced its scope considerably. At Wild Ennerdale, by contrast, the emphasis is primarily on ecological restoration, with any farming being ancillary to this. Second, while self-identification as rewilding was deemed significant, it became increasingly apparent during the process of case selection that the use or avoidance of the term rewilding was interesting in and of itself and thus it was seen as important to compare a site which did (as far as possible) self-identify as rewilding with one which did not, though which still displayed the other attributes of rewilding. It was therefore decided not to select two sites which both self-identified as rewilding.

The Avalon Marshes therefore presented a suitable case for comparison, displaying, as it does, all the factors considered by this research to connote rewilding *except* self-identification as rewilding. As highlighted above however, it has been described as rewilding by some authors (for example Moss, 2016; Taylor, 2017; Macdonald, 2019), and, significantly, was mentioned several times during the preliminary round of expert interviews as an instance of rewilding and as an excellent subject for case study. Participants also emphasised the benefits of having an upland and a lowland site for the sake of comparison, thus making the juxtaposition of the Avalon Marshes and Wild Ennerdale highly appropriate. Indeed, as well as highlighting the *Avalon Marshes* as a suitable field site, the expert interviews also reinforced the selection of *Wild Ennerdale* as a case, both for its own sake and as an example of upland rewilding, with several participants recommending it as a field site.

Aside from revealing the contrast of upland and lowland rewilding to be an important consideration when selecting field sites, the expert interviews revealed two other important factors to consider – a site’s geographical location and the presence of water at the site. Water is a significant actor in shaping landscape, and the way in which humans interact with water is significant in terms of their dwelling within a landscape and of the landscapes created. Participants noted the highly interventionist approach taken to water in the Avalon Marshes and, by contrast, the non-interventionist approach taken to water in Wild Ennerdale, making the exploration of human interaction with water an important part of this research. With respect to the geographical location, the ‘North-South divide’<sup>69</sup> is a well-recognised phenomenon in England (see Baker and Billinge, 2004) and position relative to this of the chosen field sites was thus considered important. Again, the Avalon Marshes, being in Somerset in England’s South-West, and Wild Ennerdale being in Cumbria in the North-West, offered suitable contrasts (the wider contexts of the sites will be outlined in more detail in the following section).

Despite adopting the pairwise comparative case study, I had initially intended that three case sites would be used in order to achieve triangulation of data, and had identified a third site. Unfortunately, during the process of engaging with the site it became apparent that the project was in an earlier stage than had been anticipated (having had its commencement delayed) and was extremely reluctant to be associated with the term rewilding in any way. While either of these challenges alone could have been overcome, together they presented a considerable barrier to the successful inclusion of the site, especially given that the research included a focus on the term rewilding itself. As a result the site was excluded and the case study was redesigned as a pairwise comparison. This decision was also rationalised once it became clear that, of the four types of rewilding identified in the typology, only two are present in England. The two case sites ultimately selected are outlined in the following sections.

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<sup>69</sup> The North-South divide refers to the cultural, economic and social differences between southern and northern England (Baker and Billinge, 2004). The East of England, London, the South-East, and the South-West are considered south of the divide while the North-East, the North-West, and Yorkshire and the Humber are considered north of it. The status of the East and West Midlands is less clear but they are broadly considered to be southern (Baker and Billinge, 2004).

## **4.3 Data collection**

A key strength of the case study as a research method is the way it allows the researcher to assemble a detailed, in-depth perspective of cases by collecting data from a range of sources (Yin, 2008; Creswell, 2013). I used a combination of expert and stakeholder interviews, visitor questionnaires, and field notes and photographs to gather information which together provided the detailed and in-depth perspectives on the Avalon Marshes and Wild Ennerdale I sought. Using multiple methods of data collection enables 'triangulation' of data (Yin, 2008) and also offers benefits in that shortcomings in one method are compensated for by the strengths of another. The way each method was applied is outlined below.

### **4.3.1 Interviews**

Yin (2008) cites the interview as one of the most important methods of data collection in case study research. Further to this, he suggests that in the context of the case study, interviews can be 'guided conversations' (i.e. semi-structured or unstructured) as opposed to the more formal, structured interview employed in other research approaches allowing the interview to proceed in a 'fluid' manner (Yin, 2008). I therefore employed semi-structured interviews as my main method of data collection. Of particular interest to this research is that interviews are a key method in uncovering 'multiple realities' (Stake, 1995). Revealing multiple realities is essential when examining concepts such as rewilding and landscape given the highly varied ways that these terms are understood and interpreted. Creswell (2003) has identified this way in which information obtained via interview is 'filtered' by the views of the interviewees as a limitation of the method but, with regard to landscape and rewilding, this filtering of information according to the views of interviewees assisted in the uncovering of these multiple realities.

Other limitations of the interview identified by Creswell (2003) include the fact that not all participants will be equally literate, either in their perceptions or the communication of these perceptions, and that, typically, interviews occur, and therefore gather their information, in a 'designated place' as opposed to the 'natural field setting'. The first of these limitations can be overcome, at least to some degree, by ensuring that the number of interview participants is sufficiently large. Ideally this should occur to the extent that opinions are duplicated between

participants, i.e. 'saturation' occurs (Edwards and Holland, 2013), so that any difficulties one participant may have in articulating their views will be compensated for by another participant. Achieving saturation also satisfies the researcher that sufficient sampling has been conducted (Edwards and Holland, 2013). To this end I interviewed twelve experts, nineteen stakeholders at the Avalon Marshes and eighteen stakeholders at Wild Ennerdale with saturation occurring between experts and stakeholders of the same type.g. between conservationists or between landowners / managers.

The second limitation is interesting and, while ostensibly more problematic, can be almost entirely overcome by the use of 'walking interviews' (Jones et al., 2008; Evans and Jones, 2011) in place of the more conventional interview format. Walking interviews derive from Anderson's (2004) notion of 'talking whilst walking', which itself stems from 'conversations in place' – a corrective to Creswell's (2003) criticism of interviews occurring *out* of place, or out of their natural setting. A walking interview can restore conversation to its natural setting, rather than the disconnected location of a designated place, and, as its title makes explicit, participants engage in dialogue while perambulating through or around a setting relevant to the interview. Walking interviews thus offer two considerable advantages over sedentary interviews. First, the act of walking promotes reminiscence, with 'the rhythm of walking generat[ing] a rhythm of thinking' (Solnit, 2001, p. 5). In this manner, walking becomes a 'midwife of thought' (de Botton, 2002), enabling interviewers to gain richer data than that gathered during sedentary interviews (Anderson, 2004). Second, the walking interview affords greater opportunity than the static interview to access attitudes to, and knowledge of, the environment within which the interview is conducted (Evans and Jones, 2011). Evans and Jones (2011) describe walking as an 'intimate' way of engaging with landscape that can offer 'privileged insights' to a place; it is perhaps for this reason that data collected during walking interviews has been shown to be 'profoundly informed' by the landscape in which the interview takes place. Walking interviews therefore, with their unique ability to provide insight into people's relationship to landscape, and elicit responses in relation to that landscape, afford an excellent means of exploring rewilding and its landscapes (Wheeler, 2014, 2017a, 2017b). This makes the adoption of the walking interview highly appropriate for this research, seeking as it does to gain

a holistic understanding of landscapes, their meanings, and the impacts they have on rewilding. Walking interviews also fit elegantly with Yin's (2008) notion of interviews as a guided conversation. In the case of walking interviews the word 'guided' takes on a dual meaning – while the researcher can guide the direction of the conversation, the participant can guide the direction of the walk. Holton and Riley (2014) suggest that this 'mutual guiding' democratises knowledge production to some extent, with the participant having a role in determining the direction of research enquiry. Participants were therefore encouraged to select the route for the walking interview, thus determining its spatial direction and temporal duration.

While walking interviews were attempted for all interviews conducted at the field sites, in some cases participants were unwilling or unable to undertake a walking interview. In these cases participants were encouraged to choose an interview location which had some relevance to the landscape and/or rewilding project in question. If such a location could not be identified, participants were encouraged to choose a location which was familiar to them and in which they felt comfortable, thereby increasing the likelihood of a productive interview. Given the impracticality of note taking during walking interviews, interviews were, where possible<sup>70</sup>, recorded for post hoc close listening and transcription, an additional advantage of recording being that it provided an accurate record of the interview (Creswell, 2013). Two audio recordings were taken of each interview, one using an iPhone 5 with a Rode smartLav+ (i.e. a lavalier condenser microphone) with a dead cat to muffle wind noise, and the second with an Olympus WS 853 voice recorder with Olympus ME-12 noise cancelling microphone (again in an attempt to counter wind noise). Using two recording devices mitigated the risk of any equipment failure and meant that one could be given to the participant while one was retained by me. This optimised recording quality since participants and I often had to walk single file during the course of interviews. The microphones in both set ups could be clipped to the lapel which again maximised sound quality. In addition to audio recording, the walking interviews routes were recorded using a Garmin Forerunner 225 sports watch which used the GPS to log the location of the interview. On completion of an interview, data was uploaded to Strava, a web-

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<sup>70</sup> Three participants agreed to be interviewed on the condition that they were not recorded. Recording and subsequent transcription was therefore not possible for these interviews.

based service which uses GPS technology to track activities. Uploading data to Strava generated a map of each interview, illustrating its route. Given the technical equipment required for walking interviews, all these protocols, as well as the interview questions themselves, were piloted before being implemented more widely. This was done by conducting a walking interview on Dartmoor, the findings of which do not form part of this research but practical lessons from which were integrated into the research methods before further interviews were conducted.

Once interviews were completed, and audio recordings transcribed, transcriptions were uploaded to NVIVO 12, a qualitative data analysis software package, which was used to code the interviews thematically (Braun and Clarke, 2006, 2019; Gibbs, 2012; Guest, MacQueen and Namey, 2014; Nowell *et al.*, 2017). Applying codes consistently and systematically ensured internal validity of the study, giving the codes, and the research, explanatory depth. Within case analysis was conducted with respect to each field site, followed by a cross case analysis of the two sites. Drawing comparisons between two sites lent the research an empirical breadth, meaning that its findings can be applied to other cases of rewilding.

#### **4.3.1.1 Expert interviews**

Phase one of this research involved a preliminary round of interviews with twelve rewilding experts in order to inform the research and to gain insight into the current context of rewilding debates in the UK. According to Martin *et al.*, an expert is 'someone who holds information about a given topic and who should be deferred to in its interpretation' (2012, p. 30). They describe expert knowledge as 'substantive information on a particular topic that is not widely known by others ... This knowledge may be the result of training, research, and skills, but could also be the result of personal experience' (Martin *et al.*, 2012, p. 30). Experts for involvement in this research were identified via purposive sampling through: authorship on rewilding, participation in one or more of three rewilding



conferences held in the UK in 2018 and 2019<sup>71</sup>, and/or 'chain referral' (Robson and McCartan, 2015). Experts included authors, ecologists, farmers / landowners / land managers, and policy advisors. Given that these experts were not necessarily involved with any specific rewilding project(s), these interviews took the more conventional, static format rather than being walking interviews. This decision was also made for pragmatic reasons as many of the interviews occurred at the conferences themselves, i.e. in towns / cities, thereby rendering the walking interview less appropriate given that one of the primary reasons for its employment was to interview participants within the landscapes that they were discussing. Participants were questioned as to i. their involvement in rewilding, ii. their definition of rewilding, iii. the landscapes that rewilding operates within, iv. the boundaries that rewilding encounters, and v. points of contention or controversy surrounding rewilding. They were also asked to suggest suitable case study sites and other potential interviewees (see Appendix 3 for a copy of the consent form and interview schedule for these interviews). Information gathered during these interviews was used both in the research results and to guide the research, guiding the selection of field sites and informing the second phase of data collection. Interviews continued until saturation occurred at which point the research progressed to the second phase (Edwards and Holland, 2013).

#### **4.3.1.2 Stakeholder interviews**

Phase two of the research involved interviews with stakeholders at each of the field sites in order to gather subjective meanings of rewilding. Stakeholders included: business owners / managers (including accommodation providers and commercial angling operators), farmers / landowners / land managers, farmer / land owner representative groups, peat / compost producers, individuals from conservation / environmental groups, individuals from heritage groups, individuals from walking groups, individuals from local government, individuals from public bodies, and rewilding practitioners. In order to recruit these stakeholders, I initially contacted practitioners directly involved in the rewilding

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<sup>71</sup> Conferences were: 'Recovering Nature: Approaches to species reintroduction and rewilding', October 2018, held by the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management in Cardiff, 'Rewilding: Perspectives and applications', November 2018, held by the Royal Agricultural University and Cirencester College in Cirencester, and 'Rewilding and its effects on nature and people', January 2019, held by the Cambridge Conservation Forum in Cambridge.

projects and then recruited further participants via chain referral and purposive sampling of relevant stakeholder groups. Nineteen stakeholders were interviewed from the Avalon Marshes and eighteen were interviewed from Wild Ennerdale, giving a total of 37 stakeholder interviews.

Approaching the organisations involved in the rewilding of the Avalon Marshes provided an excellent means of recruiting rewilding practitioners to participate in this research. These participants were then able to recommend other potential participants who were stakeholders in the Avalon Marshes. In turn chain referral from these stakeholders became an excellent way of recruiting further stakeholders. In addition to this, an aspect of the Avalon Marshes which facilitated field work immensely is that they are relatively small in size and are adjoined by communities whose inhabitants are, in general, very approachable and deeply invested in the landscape, and are thus willing to share their experiences. I was therefore able to identify and approach stakeholders directly and they were usually extremely willing to participate in the research.

Particular attention was paid to peat / compost producing businesses near the Avalon Marshes for several reasons: i. the peat industry has a long history in the area and is deeply entangled with the Avalon Marshes, ii. there is significant variation between producers (ranging from very small, family businesses, essentially consisting of a man and a tractor, to very large enterprises operating with state-of-the-art technology) requiring participants to be recruited to represent producers from across this spectrum, iii. there is also considerable variation in producers' approach to the use of peat (with some divesting from it entirely, producing peat-free compost, while others are heavily reliant on it), again this necessitated the selection of participants to represent the diversity of approaches, and iv. neither the literature nor the expert interviews offered much insight regarding the peat industry's relationship with rewilding. On account of this last point I determined that there was considerable scope to contribute to knowledge in this area since peat production represents a significant rural land use with which rewilding interfaces and yet there is a paucity of literature on the subject with the majority of the literature focusing on the interface with agriculture.

Approaching the organisations involved in the rewilding of Wild Ennerdale also proved an excellent means of recruiting rewilding practitioners from that field site. Again, these participants then recommended stakeholders in Wild Ennerdale as potential participants. Once again chain referral from one stakeholder to another was important both in terms of establishing contacts and also because stakeholders appeared more willing to participate when informed that someone they knew had recommended them. Wild Ennerdale did however present more of a challenge when conducting field work than the Avalon Marshes – it covers a much larger area (4300 hectares as opposed to 1500 hectares) and the area generally is much more sparsely populated, meaning that its stakeholders were considerably harder to locate and approach. As a result there was a much greater reliance on chain referral in Wild Ennerdale than was necessary at the Avalon Marshes, where it had been possible to identify participants independently. Nevertheless, once participants were identified, their level of investment in the landscape meant that, as in the Avalon Marshes, stakeholders were very willing to share their experiences.

Questions for stakeholder interviews were similar to those for expert interviews but were informed by the responses from those expert interviews and were tailored to the participant and rewilding site in question. Participants were asked about i. their involvement with the project and how long they had been involved, ii. how they defined rewilding, iii. whether they thought rewilding was a useful term, iv. how rewilding was practised at the site and if / how that had changed over time, v. what boundaries rewilding encountered at the site and how they were negotiated, vi. if there had been any public consultation / negotiation regarding rewilding and, if so, how that had changed over time, vii. whether there had been any controversy relating to rewilding at the case site, and viii. what advice they would give to other rewilding projects based on their experience. In addition, there were questions specifically relating to the landscapes of the rewilding site which were intended to complement the nature of the walking interview. Participants were asked about i. the walking route selected and why they had chosen it, ii. the landscapes that were encountered while walking and also about the landscapes in the site more generally, iii. whether / how those landscapes had changed over time, and iv. how the participant viewed and valued those landscapes. Participants were also encouraged to point out anything of

interest that they saw during the interview and to mention anything that they were inspired or prompted to think of by things encountered during the walk (see Appendix 4 for a copy of the consent form and interview schedule for these interviews).

To ensure confidentiality, all interview participants are identified by a number referring to the stage of the research at which the interview occurred and a code designating whether they belong to the expert group or, if they are a stakeholder, which field site they are associated with and which stakeholder group they fall into. The majority of interviews were conducted with a single participant but in some cases pair or group interviews took place. In these cases, participants share the same number and code but are differentiated by the addition of an alphabetic suffix e.g. P14a CAM, P14b CAM, and P14c CAM denote three participants (a, b and c) in a group interview (number 14 of the research) of conservationists (C) at the Avalon Marshes (AM). Specific numbering and coding are outlined in each of the relevant chapters (Chapter 5 pertains to expert interviews, Chapter 6 pertains to the Avalon Marshes and Chapter 7 pertains to Wild Ennerdale). Interviews continued at each case site until saturation occurred or until the network of relevant stakeholders was exhausted.

### **4.3.2 Questionnaires**

Opinions and attitudes of visitors to the rewilding sites were assessed via self-administered questionnaires delivered on paper at the rewilding sites or online once visitors had left the site (see Appendix 5 for a copy of the consent form and questionnaire). The questionnaires provided a quantitative assessment of visitor attitudes and opinions towards rewilding, landscape and their co-dependent impacts to complement the qualitative evidence gained by other data collection methods (Creswell, 2003). Although the geographically diverse locations of the field sites necessitated the collection of data on a number of occasions with sampling at each field site taking place on different dates, the results were analysed to provide cross-sectional perspectives of each sample site (Creswell, 2003). A major advantage of self-administered questionnaires is their ability to collect data from a large number of individuals, therefore offering a broad overview of public attitudes to, and opinions of, rewilding (Robson and McCartan, 2015). A major disadvantage is that, while broad in scope, self-administered

questionnaires cannot offer in-depth detail regarding the issues surveyed (Robson and McCartan, 2015). This is largely due to the necessity of self-administered questionnaires being relatively short with relatively simple questions in order to maximise the likelihood of reasonable completion and response rates (Robson and McCartan, 2015).

A questionnaire was designed specifically for this research and consisted of a standardised design with closed questions utilising fixed choice answers and continuous scales (numerical scales and semantic differential scales) although respondents were given the choice of 'other' to enter a free text response if none of the options were appropriate (Robson and McCartan, 2015). A paper version of the questionnaire was piloted (n = 20) at both field sites via convenience sampling with the questionnaire being self-administered to assess its suitability for this method since this was the intended means of administration for the final version when delivered to a larger audience. I was however on-hand during the pilot for any questions that respondents wished to ask. Following piloting the questionnaire was reviewed in light of i. the way respondents had approached and answered questions and ii. questions directed to me during the pilot phase. The review highlighted several areas that required adjustment:

1. In the pilot version of the questionnaire the first question asked respondents to specify which site they were visiting. Several later questions then referred simply to 'here' rather than to the Avalon Marshes or Wild Ennerdale directly. When encountering the term 'here' however several respondents asked whether it referred to the field site directly (i.e. the Avalon Marshes or Wild Ennerdale) or to the Somerset Levels and Moors or the Lake District more generally. As a result, specific versions of the questionnaire were developed for the Avalon Marshes and Wild Ennerdale. This eliminated the need to ask respondents which site they were visiting as they were completing a questionnaire specific to that site and meant that the term 'here' could be replaced with either 'the Avalon Marshes' or 'Wild Ennerdale' as appropriate.

2. Some questions addressed engagement with rewilding, asking respondents if they had, or would, participate in consultation regarding 'rewilding' at the field sites. Many of the respondents however were not local to the field sites and felt unable to respond to these questions as they assumed i. that consultation would

be face-to-face and ii. that because they were not local to the field site it would, *ipso facto*, be inappropriate for them to participate in consultation. These questions were therefore modified to incorporate the phrase 'including on-line discussions' in an attempt to make explicit i. the potential for / possibility of online consultation and engagement and ii. that the field sites might invite input from all interested parties irrespective of their proximity to the field site itself.

3. In the pilot questionnaire the final question asked whether respondents were 'a member of any conservation organisations e.g. National Trust, RSPB, Wildlife Trusts.' A weakness in this question was exposed when some respondents answered simply 'yes' or 'no'. The question was therefore adjusted in order for it to function as intended and obtain the desired information. In the final version therefore, the question read 'Please list any conservation organisations that you're a member of e.g. National Trust, RSPB, Wildlife Trusts'.

Once the adjustments had been made the questionnaire was delivered on a larger scale using a random sampling strategy. Robson and McCartan (2015) cite appropriate sample sizes as being those which include 100 observations for 'major subgroupings' and 20-50 observations for 'minor sub-groupings' in a survey. The target number of questionnaire responses for this research was therefore 100 for each of the field sites. There is an important point to note here regarding administration of questionnaires at each site. At the Avalon Marshes there is a large carpark at one of the reserves which provides access to the Avalon Marshes and also to the Avalon Marshes Visitor Centre and a café. This café has outdoor picnic tables and is a popular destination for visitors to the Avalon Marshes. It was thus very easy, with permission from the café, to approach visitors there and ask them to complete a questionnaire, and visitors were often willing to participate while they were waiting for food or drinks. As a result, the target of 100 questionnaires were collected at the Avalon Marshes, with randomness being achieved by approaching the next person seen unless they had already participated or were a child under 16 (no one under 16 was approached to participate). This approach rendered a relatively even spread of male (n = 43) and female (n = 51) respondents (six respondents did not disclose this information) but did not afford an even spread of participants across age ranges. The majority of respondents who disclosed their age were over 65 (n = 36) with those in the 55-64 (n = 27) and 45-54 (n = 17) ages ranges the next most

numerous respectively. Very few respondents fell into the 35-44 (n = 10) or 25-34 (n = 2) age ranges, with no respondents in the 16-24 age range. One explanation for this discrepancy is that questionnaires were conducted during business hours on weekdays, making it understandable that more retired than working age people were encountered.

The situation was very different, and much more difficult, at Wild Ennerdale. While there are two large car parks which serve Wild Ennerdale neither of them have any facilities at all. Initial attempts were made to approach visitors in one or other of these car parks at the end of their visit to Wild Ennerdale but this was extremely time consuming, with long gaps between encountering visitors, and had a very low success rate, with visitors reluctant to spend time completing a questionnaire. Subsequently an online version of the questionnaire was developed, using the Online Survey, an online survey tool, and notes with a link to the questionnaire were left on the windscreens of cars in the car park. Unfortunately, although perhaps unsurprisingly, this also had a very low success rate. As a result, a further strategy was developed which relied on assistance from The Gather, a nearby café. The Gather is in Ennerdale Bridge (the nearest village to Wild Ennerdale, approximately a mile from the head of the valley) and is closely associated with Wild Ennerdale (displaying interpretation boards regarding the valley) and is frequented by many of its visitors. While not co-located with Wild Ennerdale the café is sufficiently related to the project for it to provide a suitable site to collect visitor questionnaires. Given that not everyone who visits The Gather has also visited Wild Ennerdale however, it was not possible simply to approach visitors as they arrived. Instead the Gather kindly permitted placement of posters within the café requesting people to complete the online version of the questionnaire and also shared details of the questionnaire on their social media. Randomisation was therefore achieved since participation was dependent on visitors responding to the poster or social media messaging. While effective, this method was not as effective as that employed at the Avalon Marshes, hence only 74 responses were received, and also meant that there was a higher degree of self-selection in respondents. Nevertheless, an even spread of male (n = 37) and female (n = 35) respondents was obtained (two respondents did not disclose this information). Interestingly, this approach afforded a more even distribution of respondents across age ranges than had been achieved at

the Avalon Marshes although the younger demographic was still under represented. Of respondents who disclosed their age, n = 16 were over 65, n = 23 were in the 55-64 category, n = 19 were in the 45-54 category, n = 4 were in the 35-44 category, n = 11 were in the 25-34 category and n = 1 was in the 16-24 category.

On reviewing the completed questionnaires it became apparent that there was an issue which had not been picked up during the pilot phase. One question asked 'What do you think should happen in relation to 'rewilding' at [field site]?'. This was designed as a multiple-choice question with the possible answers being a. the landscape should go back to how it was before, b. the landscape should stay as it is now, c. the landscape should get a little bit wilder, d. the landscape should get a lot wilder. It was intended that option 'a' be interpreted as land going back to how it was before the rewilding project started but, given that this questionnaire was being conducted in the context of rewilding, judging from other answers it was apparent that some respondents interpreted this question as taking a 'baseline' approach and construed the land 'going back to how it was before' as being a reference to some kind of pre-human or pre-modern baseline. Since it was not possible to ascertain which interpretation respondents had taken, the results from this question were considered unreliable.

#### **4.4 Research ethics**

Ethical approval for human involvement in this research (as interview participants and questionnaire respondents) was sought, and granted, in two stages. Since it was necessary for the expert interviews to be conducted relatively early in the research process (so as to be able to inform the selection of field sites and the research at those field sites), ethical approval was sought for this preliminary phase of interviews in July 2018 and granted in August 2018. The interviews then took place between October 2018 and January 2019 (see Appendix 6 for Certificate of Ethical Approval). Further ethical approval for the full project (involving stakeholder interviews and visitor questionnaires) was sought in December 2018 and granted in February 2019, allowing this second phase of research to proceed from March 2019 to November 2019 (see Appendix 7 for Certificate of Ethical Approval).



The research ethics application paid particular attention to researcher safety, and informed consent and anonymity for participants. Researcher safety was particularly important given the use of the walking interview as a method, meaning that the participants and I were walking in isolated, rural locations during interviews. To avoid compromising my safety, I 'checked-out' with a trusted individual at the start of walking interviews and 'checked-in' on completion. Check-out was performed via telephone, in the presence of the participant, and involved informing the trusted individual of the interview location, intended route, intended time of return, and the identity of the interviewee. Check-in involved an 'all's well' message, indicating that the interview had been completed safely. If the trusted individual did not receive the all's well message within a reasonable time they were to attempt to contact me (I kept a telephone with me at all times) and raise the alarm if I could not be reached.

Informed consent and anonymity were important for participants given the relatively small community of rewilding experts and practitioners and stakeholders at each of the field sites and the somewhat contentious nature of rewilding as a conservation approach – a breach of anonymity could therefore compromise the professional reputation of expert and stakeholder participants requiring anonymity to be rigorously preserved in order to protect these reputations. Informed consent was gained by approaching potential participants (for interviews or questionnaires) and asking them of their willingness to take part. If they declined, no further communication was had. If they agreed, I offered them a written consent form to read which, in the case of interviews and paper questionnaires, I also summarised verbally. If they still agreed to participate I asked them to sign the consent form which I then retained and stored separately from their responses. In the case of online questionnaires, the consent form was presented online and proceeding with the questionnaire was taken as tacit consent. In the case of interviews and questionnaires, participants were at liberty to withdraw from the research at any stage should they wish to rescind their consent and end their participation.

## 4.5 Researcher positionality

Coming from a professional career in veterinary nursing and animal science, and an academic background in communication (particularly science communication and the communication of conservation / wildlife issues) I initially approached this research from a conservation perspective: my starting point being a normative one – that biodiversity and ecosystems ‘should’ be restored. Rewilding seemed to offer a means of doing this and so, broadly speaking, my initial position was ‘pro’ rewilding, although I was not in any way involved with any rewilding initiatives. Since my research examined the ‘boundaries’ of rewilding, it quickly became apparent that many of these boundaries related to human factors and that the human / rewilding interface was a complex one. My earlier naivety, which had meant that I found it difficult to envisage any serious negative consequences to rewilding, gave way to the realisation that the situation was far more subtle and nuanced and that rewilding entailed, and *required*, compromises on many sides to, as far as possible, reconcile competing interests. This understanding which I gained from early fieldwork (particularly the expert interviews) was complemented by theoretical training in sociology and science and technology studies which I undertook as part of my research studies and which equipped me to be more reflexive as a researcher. While remaining in favour of the potential benefits that rewilding can offer I became convinced that these benefits should not come regardless of their (human) cost, since there could, potentially, be significant adverse impacts on humans as a result of rewilding: compromises on rewilding’s part (as well as changes in human attitudes and behaviour) seem to offer a way forward here.

During all my interviews I attempted to build rapport with participants and to remain impartial on the subject of rewilding, however the fact that I had chosen to research rewilding made participants assume that I was in favour of it. Additional effort to build rapport was therefore needed when interviewing those opposed to rewilding lest they assumed that our positions would be conflicting. Despite not necessarily entirely agreeing with those who were not in favour of rewilding I was genuinely interested in their views, and their views formed an extremely valuable contribution to my research. On several occasions I found myself listening to views which differed considerably from my own (e.g. regarding climate change) and realised that the best response from me was to listen to

such views in silence without disagreeing with them (which could potentially have damaged rapport with the participant) but also without agreeing with them which would have been disingenuous. This technique is described by Luker (2008) who notes that rapport can emerge, even when interviewing people with whom one disagrees, if one listens with 'respect and deep attention'.

## **4.6 Summary**

This chapter has outlined the methods employed in this research and demonstrated how the case study was a highly appropriate method with which to interrogate the landscapes, boundaries and negotiations of rewilding, with the opportunity to use several methods of data collection and therefore affording the possibility of gathering different perspectives. In addition to this, it has justified the selection of the Avalon Marshes and Wild Ennerdale as field sites and outlined the techniques used to gather data at these sites: stakeholder interviews, visitor questionnaires, and field notes and photographs. The adoption of a pairwise comparison of the Avalon Marshes and Wild Ennerdale as diverse cases afforded the opportunity to collect information on a broader range of the boundaries of rewilding than could be achieved if the study were restricted to a single case or to comparing similar cases. Looking at rewilding in different contexts offered a more thorough way of capturing the spectrum of its boundaries, particularly since a project's context presents specific boundaries. The appropriateness of the case study approach for this research was therefore reinforced since Yin (2008) has suggested that the approach is useful when a phenomenon's wider context is highly pertinent to its situation. The next four chapters discuss the findings derived from applying these methods. Chapter 5 presents results from the expert interviews, Chapters 6 and 7 offer within case analyses of the Avalon Marshes and Wild Ennerdale respectively, and Chapter 8 then provides a cross case analysis of the two sites.

## Chapter 5: A bewilderment of experts

### 5.1 Outline

This chapter is the first of four empirical chapters and presents findings and discussion relating to the preliminary round of interviews conducted with experts in the field of rewilding. These interviews were designed to i. identify the ways in which rewilding is interpreted and perceived, ii. the landscapes and boundaries that it encounters, and iii. the negotiation of those boundaries. As well as contributing to the findings of this research, the themes identified in these interviews informed the stakeholder interviews and visitor questionnaires which were subsequently conducted at each field site. This chapter sets out these themes, being those of cultural, political and economic, temporal, and spatial landscapes and their associated boundaries. These boundaries have the potential to enable or constrain rewilding and I summarise findings from the interviews about how rewilding negotiates this potential.

### 5.2 Interpreting rewilding

Expert knowledge and interpretations of rewilding were gathered through twelve expert interviews, with experts identified via their authorship on rewilding (both academic and popular), their involvement in rewilding conferences<sup>72</sup>, and chain referral. All except one of the expert participants could be described as rewilding advocates i.e. they were broadly in favour of rewilding as a conservation tactic. While a obtaining a balance of views was not the goal of this research, achieving such balance would have been difficult given that the majority of those involved in the discourse on rewilding are advocates of the approach<sup>73</sup>. Expert participants were asked for their interpretation of rewilding and their responses reflected the confusion around the term seen in the literature (e.g. Nogués-Bravo *et al.*, 2016; Prior and Brady, 2017; Sandom *et al.*, 2018, see also discussion in Chapter 2, Section 2.2.2 and see Table 5.1 for a summary of the interpretations

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<sup>72</sup> I attended these conferences and was therefore able to meet participants either to conduct an interview or to arrange to do so at a later date.

<sup>73</sup> This should not be interpreted as meaning that the possession of expert knowledge on rewilding makes one a proponent of the approach, simply that it tends to be those who are proponents of rewilding who become expert in it.

Table 5.1: Summary of expert participant interpretations of rewilding

Participant	Role	Code <sup>74</sup>	Interpretation of rewilding (all emphasis added)
1	Ecologist (E)	EE	Trying to restore <i>natural processes</i> so land could manage itself with <i>minimal intervention, maximizing biodiversity</i> .
2	Ecologist (E)	EE	It's about <i>restoring ecological processes</i> that are either missing or not quite firing on all cylinders ... it's about <i>processes</i> .
3	Ecologist (E)	EE	It is basically <i>letting go. It's just stepping back and it's just not being in control ... It's just letting it go and seeing what happens ... stepping back from the environment, let natural processes take over ... letting nature take its course</i> .
4	Author / journalist (AJ)	AJE	There are two kinds of approaches, one of which is to try and <i>recreate a point in the past ... [and the other] is about letting nature be wild ... it's stepping back and just seeing what happens</i>
5	Ecologist (E)	EE	The <i>large-scale restoration of ecosystems</i> to the point where <i>nature is allowed to take care of itself</i> .
6	Landowner / manager (L)	LE	Participant 6 did not offer an interpretation of rewilding.
7	Author / journalist (AJ)	AJE	Taking the modern landscape which by definition is usually relatively impoverished for wildlife and <i>using certain processes both natural ... and highly unnatural ... to create a habitat that will be better for wildlife ... basically intervening in a landscape to create something</i> .
8	Ecologist (E)	EE	The <i>restoration of ecological processes</i> .
9	Ecologist (E)	EE	It is about <i>ecological restoration</i> and it's about using natural processes and it's <i>being more reliant on natural processes than ... imposing on the land</i>
10	Policy advisor (P)	PE	There are two broad definitions an American definition, cores corridors and carnivores, and a European definition that's much more based on Frans Vera and free roaming herbivores in wood pasture.
11	Landowner / manager (L)	LE	What defines rewilding as opposed to conventional conservation is the <i>removal of humans</i>
12	Author / journalist (AJ)	AJE	The mass <i>restoration of ecosystems</i> .

<sup>74</sup> Used when citing participants. The initial letter(s) refer to the participant's role and the suffix 'E' refers to expert.

of rewilding offered by expert participants). Despite the lack of a single, coherent definition however, recurring themes did emerge: i. an *emphasis on scale*, ii. an *intention / desire to increase biodiversity*, iii. a *reduction of human intervention / management, or even presence*, iv. an *increase in 'wildness' / non-human agency*, v. an *aim to restore ecosystems / ecological or natural processes*, and vi. a *focus on rewilding being a process / ongoing activity*. As was discussed in the previous chapter, these themes (together with a review of the literature) were used to inform the development of the list of factors which I suggest confer family resemblance to rewilding<sup>75</sup>.

Notwithstanding these common themes, there were also contradictions between the definitions offered (as is also seen in the literature on rewilding). In relation to size for example Participant 5 (EE) stressed that to be considered rewilding something must be 'large scale' or 'landscape scale', and that anything at a smaller scale is 'not pure rewilding ... you're still just doing it really at a nature reserve scale', he even suggested a minimum size requirement of 10,000 hectares. In a similar vein, Participant 6 (LE) said that 'scale really matters' in rewilding projects and identified scale as being instrumental to the 'long-term success' of a project. Meanwhile, Participant 8 (EE) emphasised the *difficulty* of imposing limits in terms of scale and her reluctance to do so, not wanting to 'restrict rewilding to just being large scale' and acknowledging that the restoration of natural processes can occur within 'a couple of hectares'. This can be compared to existing literature on rewilding where similar disagreement is evident between those who think rewilding should (and can only) operate at landscape scale (Soule and Noss, 1998) and those who think that wildness can occur at any scale (Prior and Brady, 2017).

Equally, while most participants focused on decreased human intervention, for example Participant 3 (EE) and Participant 4 (AJE) both spoke of 'stepping back', Participant 7 (AJE) saw rewilding as 'basically intervening in a landscape to create something'. Again this difference of opinion as to whether rewilding depends on human intervention or requires its absence mirrors current literature which places emphasis on reducing human intervention (Lorimer *et al.*,

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<sup>75</sup> These factors are: i. large scale, ii. increase in biodiversity, iii. reduction of human intervention, iv. increase in natural autonomy, v. restoration of ecological functioning, and vi. self-identification as rewilding.

2015; Carver, 2016a; Gammon, 2018; Sandom *et al.*, 2018), but which also mentions a role for 'active [human] intervention' as part of the ecological restoration process (Carver, 2016a).

Also consistent with current literature (e.g. Nogués-Bravo *et al.*, 2016; Prior and Brady, 2017; Sandom *et al.*, 2018), was that discussion surrounding the term rewilding itself was something which was considered significant, with participants acknowledging the debate and the confusion over the word. Participant 2 (EE) stressed his 'fatigue' in relation to this ongoing discussion and his concern that it was becoming counterproductive and actually hampering rewilding progress saying, 'after a while, after a few years, you think oh my God are we still talking about what it means, just do it, whatever it is, just do it'. Other participants drew attention to the way this debate stems from the fundamental fact of rewilding being problematic, both because it lacks a cohesive definition, and because of its ramifications. Participant 4 (AJE) highlighted that since rewilding is a 'human construct ... it's what people want it to be' it is therefore often defined very differently by different groups and, consequently, 'hugely misunderstood' (P7, AJE), leading to 'rewilding as a movement' being seen as 'creating a bit of an uncontrollable beast' (P11, LE). The fatigue which Participant 2 (EE) mentions here is indicative of the long running nature of the 'boundary work' which is being performed in relation to rewilding (Star and Griesemer, 1989). Moreover the comments from participants concerning understandings and *misunderstandings* of the term highlight that this is still very much a live debate, and also the status of the term rewilding as a boundary object; rewilding cannot be made to fit neatly into one category or another – it is an 'uncontrollable beast' which entrepreneurs are trying to tame to fit their own agenda (Star and Griesemer, 1989). Similarly, it is a buzzword with 'interpretive flexibility' which can be adapted to specific 'niches' in order to suit the different needs of these entrepreneurs and so that they can take advantage of its buzz (Bensaude-Vincent, 2014).

### 5.3 Perceptions of rewilding

Having noted the ways in which understandings of rewilding are contested and problematic, several participants suggested that cognisance of the word's implications leads some projects, which could be described as rewilding, to avoid using the term (P1, EE, P2, EE, P5, EE, P6, LE, and P7, AJE) due to 'sensitivities to the word': 'you're going to struggle to find a site which openly calls itself that [rewilding] because of the sensitivities around the word' (P5, EE). This sensitivity was seen as related to financial or practical concerns. For example, Participant 6 (LE) suggested that projects which are publicly funded have to be 'very careful of what they're saying and how they couch it' in regard to their conservation approach so as not to provoke controversy. The less contentious phrase 'nature recovery' is preferred by Natural England and the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs for example (DEFRA, 2018; Natural England, 2020). Meanwhile, Participant 1 (EE) highlighted the way in which use of the term rewilding could be 'unhelpful':

we've found that we're increasingly operating against a background which is dominated by rewilding and the opinions that rewilding generates. We're quite often associated with rewilding and we had to go to some lengths to describe that that's not what we were doing ... We decided not to use the word rewilding ... being associated with rewilding ... would not be particularly helpful ... I think people would be quite suspicious of that.

In spite of this caution, Participant 9 (EE) emphasised that it can still be difficult to escape the term rewilding, even when deliberately trying to avoid it. Speaking in relation to the Summit to Sea / O'r Mynydd i'r Môr project<sup>76</sup> he stated that 'even though rewilding isn't the term that's used and they've [the project organisers] been trying to avoid using it, it doesn't really matter it's already there' (P9, EE). While this participant was making reference to a particular project, the same could be said of other conservation initiatives (including the Avalon Marshes) where, even when it is not used by practitioners, the word rewilding creeps in like an invasive weed (*sensu* Tsing, 2017).

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<sup>76</sup> A 'rewilding' project in Ceredigion (see Chapter 1, Section 1.2 and Chapter 2, Section 2.2.1 and also the project website: <http://www.summit2sea.wales/>).



Another example can be seen in the case of Coetir Anian / Cambrian Wildwood, a species and habitat restoration project located, like Summit to Sea / O'r Mynydd i'r Môr, in Ceredigion. At the project's inception it promoted itself as rewilding. Since then however, it has elected to 'no longer promot[e] the project as such [rewilding]' because of the way it leads to 'misapprehensions' about what the project is doing and because of the term's connotations e.g. being 'synonymous with land abandonment' (CoetirAnian / CambrianWildwood, 2020, see also Wynne-Jones, Strouts and Holmes, 2018). This avoidance of the term rewilding illustrates the way in which those working in conservation recognise that it can be perceived negatively. This was explicitly stated by several participants who saw the term as 'contentious [and] controversial' particularly to 'people who work in the countryside' (P9, EE), as one which 'puts up a lot of backs, particularly in the traditional land management community', and even as one to which there is an 'aversion' (P2, EE). The common theme here is that rewilding is, or is at least *perceived to be*, particularly unpopular amongst those who work in the countryside / the traditional land management community. This reinforces existing literature which describes the way in which rewilding as a term is 'its own worst enemy' (Carver, 2016a) and has become 'toxic' (Sandom *et al.*, 2018). While this perception has been somewhat countered by a study of stakeholder perceptions of rewilding which found broad, general support for the concept, as the study's authors themselves pointed out, their survey sample size was small (n = 47) and of those respondents only four identified themselves as farmers or landowners (other respondents were 'conservation practitioners' (55%), 'academics' (15%), 'students' (9%), or 'other' (28%)) (Loth and Newton, 2018). Indeed, the authors themselves expected that 'support for rewilding would be weaker among a group comprised mainly of farmers or landowners' (Loth and Newton, 2018, p. 118).

Part of this could be attributable to the perception that rewilding involves the 'removal of humans' (P11, LE), and therefore presents a threat to communities whose lives and livelihoods are intrinsically linked to the land (Höchtl, Lehringer and Konold, 2005; Navarro and Pereira, 2012; Gammon, 2018). This resonates particularly strongly in places that have a history of 'land clearance' (i.e. the exclusion and removal of people from land) e.g. the USA and Scotland (Cronon, 1995; Brown, McMorran and Price, 2011; Adams, Hodge and

Sandbrook, 2014; Harrison, 2016; Deary and Warren, 2018) but is not restricted to rural communities. Participant 7 (AJE) identified that the term rewilding 'suggests that these places [rewilding projects] exclude people', including visitors, and although he went on to argue that this was not the case he highlighted that this is nonetheless the *perception* of rewilding by some publics. This finding, that it is the (real or perceived) separation of humans from the land which makes rewilding unpopular, is in line with the findings of Loth and Newton (2018). Of the eight rewilding scenarios used in their stakeholder survey, 'passive management' (i.e. the reduction or removal of human interaction with the land) was the least popular but one and 'did not receive majority support' despite respondents to the survey being otherwise broadly sympathetic to rewilding (Loth and Newton, 2018).

In contrast to these negative associations, interview participants (including some who had discussed the term in a negative light) also focussed on the *positive* connotations of rewilding, and the way in which it inspires, excites and enthuses people (P2, EE, P6, LE, P9, EE and P12, AJE). This was often linked to the term's novelty and the way it generates new interest in the, rather more staid, concept of 'ecological restoration', particularly apropos its potential to address biodiversity loss in contrast to the failure of traditional conservation to do so (P2, EE, P7, AJE and P8, EE). This is comparable with comments in the literature, for example that rewilding 'has caught the popular imagination in a way in which the more scientific 'ecological restoration' never has' (Deary and Warren, 2018). These positive connotations of rewilding lead to the opposite phenomenon of that identified above (whereby projects deliberately avoid being associated with the term) to one in which 'a lot of people doing what was previously just called conservation activity, frame it as rewilding' (P4, AJE). Once again this parallels findings in the literature where rewilding is described as being 'a popular rebranding of ... long-established work in ecosystem rehabilitation' (Murray, 2017, p. 207) and links to rewilding's status as a buzzword giving it utility as a marketing device (Bensaude-Vincent, 2014).

This creates yet another difficulty for the term, and for its advocates, since it leads to a blurring of the distinction between rewilding and 'traditional' conservation. Perhaps unsurprisingly there are different motivations for wanting to preserve this distinction. Those in favour of rewilding emphasise the

importance of maintaining clear definitional boundaries in order to avoid ‘blunting its radical potential’ (Jepson, 2016); for example Participant 8 (EE) said ‘I think we need to keep the definition away from traditional conservation methods ... I think we need a different term for people to be able to see that it is actually something that’s very different to what we’ve been doing’. Here Participant 8 (EE) is engaging in ‘boundary work’ (Gieryn, 1983), positioning herself as a ‘gatekeeper’ (Star and Griesemer, 1989) and lowering the portcullis between what is ‘traditional conservation’ and what is rewilding. The ‘re-interpretation’ (Star and Griesemer, 1989) involved in such boundary work aims to align rewilding with the notion of being ‘radical’ and ‘different’ from traditional conservation.

Meanwhile, those opposed to rewilding also felt that it was important to distinguish between rewilding and traditional conservation (particularly ecological restoration) to highlight that, whilst they were in no way opposed to the positive effects that ecological restoration could have, they were opposed to achieving those ends via means which, in their view, excluded humans:

I think you need to draw quite a clear line between ecological restoration and rewilding ... The wild bit is the issue because that's where the *value judgment's* placed, whereas ecological restoration ... no one's going to argue with that at all ... there are elements of what would be called rewilding, that aren't controversial in any way at all, and would work perfectly well. While it comes with the baggage of the wider [rewilding] movement, unfortunately, even those things [ecological restoration measures] then become unpalatable (P11, LE, emphasis added).

A very important point raised here is the valence attached to the word ‘wild’, something which Participant 11 (LE) describes as ‘an assumed virtue in ‘wildness’ and ‘nature’ (cf Saunders (2016) who comments on the way conservation discourse can ‘demean the human’). This comment highlights an important aspect of the way in which the construction of rewilding hinges on understandings and meanings of ‘wild’. The use of the word wild was seen as problematic, not only because of the value judgments that it raises, but over the question as to whether ‘wild places’ still exist. Participant 7 (AJE) insisted that ‘there are no wild

places' echoing the ideas of Cassidy (2012), Cronon (1995) and McKibben (1990) that wild places (including 'wilderness') no longer exist given the far-reaching effects of human activity on the planet. This is particularly evident in the case of England which, as discussed in relation to nature and culture (Chapter 2, Section 2.3.3), is a 'small, old country ... nothing is wilderness' (Smout, 2000, p. 172) i.e. England, with its long history of human habitation and high population density has been affected by human intervention to the extent that its landscapes are entirely cultural (Carver, 2007; Linnell *et al.*, 2015; Sandom and Macdonald, 2015). As a result, advocates of rewilding have to be highly conscious of the connotations of 'wild' in the English context – 'wildness' is contrary to English ideas, and *ideals*, of the landscape as a managed one and can therefore be viewed negatively as a rejection of the interaction of people with the land.

Participants also spoke of the difficulties created by the prefix 're' and the way its use can be viewed as being 'reactionary', suggestive of 'going back in time', and of 'trying to recreate some distant Eden' (P7, AJE). Participant 7 (AJE) emphasised the impossibility of recreating this 'distant Eden' 'because everything's changed, we live in a post-industrial, industrial society'. Participant 11 (LE) meanwhile identified that 'the 're' bit is something that even rewilders have a bit of an issue with, because we're not returning to anything at all'. He went so far as to suggest that this makes the term rewilding entirely inappropriate: 'it's ... unfortunate that someone's coined a term that isn't actually reflective of what's happening' (P11, LE). Participant 8 (EE) noted that, as a result of such comments, 'wilding'<sup>77</sup> is now being used in preference to 'rewilding' in some instances, and went on to suggest that if 'rewilding' is used the 're' should be interpreted as 'restoring' rather than turning the clocks back<sup>78</sup>. This sentiment reiterates discussion in the literature around the use of 're' as being problematic and similar attempts to emphasise that it should not be interpreted as regressive (e.g. Carver, 2016a; Tanasescu, 2017; Deary and Warren, 2018; Jepson, 2018). Again, this is evidence of boundary work being performed in relation to rewilding,

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<sup>77</sup> 'Wilding' is also the term favoured by Carver (2016a) and Tree (2018a).

<sup>78</sup> Participant 8 (EE) is at risk of getting into semantic difficulty here but it is reasonable to infer that her comment was intended to convey the meaning of restoration in the sense of *repair* rather than *rewinding*.

with gatekeepers attempting to dictate the way in which the prefix 're' should be understood.

Despite the proposal of alternative terms such as 'wilding', participants spoke of the need to rehabilitate the word rewilding, 'get[ting] rid of the bad press around it' (P8, EE) and educating people 'to the fact that it's not about wolves and bears' (P6, LE); this is further evidence of boundary work in operation, with Participant 6 (LE) wanting to 'educate' people as to rewilding's meaning. The desire to rehabilitate the term often stemmed from dissatisfaction with the alternatives and a reluctant acceptance of rewilding as a term, for example: 'I can't think of a better word ... it's probably the best word we have for this sort of project ... rewilding's about as good as we can get' (P7, AJE). Participant 2 (EE) highlighted that rewilding is at least a 'snappy' term and therefore has advantages over other terms which are not: 'landscape scale ecological restoration ... I guess is the other way of saying rewilding, it's not very snappy'. This again is something mentioned in the literature – that the term 'rewilding', while contentious, has a 'pizzazz' (Carver, 2016a) which recommends it over its alternatives. These comments further illustrate rewilding's status as a buzzword, with its snappiness and pizzazz giving it a euphony and 'buzz' which other terms, such as landscape scale ecological restoration, lack.

The efforts being made to rehabilitate rewilding also provide further evidence of the boundary work being done in relation to rewilding as a term and a concept. For example, Participant 5 (EE) insisted that 'we will stick with that word [rewilding] ... and we will bring people to understand ... what we mean by rewilding, not what the purists mean ... what we mean'. This sentiment is echoed by Participant 6 (LE): 'we completely are now behind using that word [rewilding] and just want to fill it with what we think it is and what it means and keep on bashing at it'. The comments from these participants are redolent of the observations from Star and Griesemer (1989) regarding boundary work where they identified the way in which 'entrepreneurs' reinterpret objects or ideas to 'fit their own programmatic goals'. In this case Participants 5 and 6 are reinterpreting rewilding to fit their own agendas.

Also of importance in relation to rewilding's deployment is the way it has been subject to 'concept travelling' and 'concept stretching' (Collier and Mahon, 1993). This is explored extensively by Jørgensen (2014), who sees the concept of rewilding as 'travelling' from the USA to Europe, and 'islands', and 'stretching' to take on quite different meanings in those new locations. This phenomenon was recognised, but regretted, by participants, with Participant 10 (PE) seeing the way that rewilding has been stretched as a concept since travelling from the USA to Europe as an unfortunate 'watering down' of the term from its 'original' meaning<sup>79</sup>. In his view, as far as the public are concerned, the term rewilding still carries the connotations of wolves (and to a lesser extent bears) that it has in the North American sense. He suggests however that 'very few people in England, or the UK at all, are talking about reintroducing wolves' and that, therefore, the use of the term rewilding in England, and the UK more broadly, 'creates fear where there's no need for it' (P10, PE). These comments are extremely useful in highlighting the differences between rewilding in the North American sense and the English sense, and also in drawing attention to the different contexts within which rewilding operates in the USA and England. I now turn to expert interpretations of those English contexts, or landscapes, of rewilding.

## **5.4 The landscapes and boundaries of rewilding**

### **5.4.1 Cultural landscapes**

Although rewilding can (and does) include projects in urban areas (Lorimer *et al.*, 2015; Jepson and Schepers, 2016; Prior and Brady, 2017; du Toit and Pettoirelli, 2019), this research focuses purely on rural rewilding. Thus, when considering the physical landscapes encountered by rewilding in this research, the landscapes are, by definition, *rural* landscapes and, given England's status as a land with a long history of human habitation (Smout, 2000; Carver, 2007; Linnell *et al.*, 2015; Sandom and Macdonald, 2015), these rural landscapes are *farmed* and *cultural* landscapes. It should be noted that this immediately draws attention to the way in which humans and nature are inextricably entangled in

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<sup>79</sup> In his interpretation of rewilding this participant drew attention to what he referred to as the 'two broad definitions [of rewilding], an American definition, cores corridors and carnivores, and a European definition that's much more based on Frans Vera and free roaming herbivores in wood pasture' (P10, PE).

landscape and, as discussed in Chapter 2, how landscape can be considered the product of a negotiation between ‘natural conditions’ and ‘cultural practices’ (Wylie, 2007). This overlapping of the cultural and the natural became immediately apparent in the responses of expert participants, as did the tensions which this creates. Participant 8 (EE) spoke explicitly about England’s ‘cultural landscape’ which she described as having emerged as a result of the ‘dig for victory campaign<sup>80</sup>’ in World War II and which we have ‘adopted ... and accepted ... as our historical cultural landscape’. She also drew attention to the Lake District (the National Park within which Wild Ennerdale is located) as being ‘a very good example of ... where lots of people get very passionate about their cultural landscape’ and suggested that ‘lots of people don’t like rewilding because it changes ... [this] cultural landscape’ (P8, EE). This was echoed by Participant 7 (AJE) in his description of an incident (again related to the Lake District) where, ‘when the National Trust tried to plant trees on a sheep farm it was owning in Cumbria, it caused massive controversy because you’re ruining the traditional way of life’. This is illustrative not only of the way in which farming and England’s cultural landscape are deeply entwined, but also of the inherent tension which rewilding, with its focus on increasing ‘natural’ autonomy, and corresponding reduction of human intervention, therefore creates (Lorimer *et al.*, 2015; Carver, 2016a; Gammon, 2018; Sandom *et al.*, 2018).

This was exemplified further by Participant 11’s (LE) interpretation of rewilding and its attendant consequences: ‘what defines rewilding as opposed to conventional conservation is the removal of humans, and in human landscapes that conflict in vision is always going to be a conflict’. The ‘vision’ this participant speaks of is related to the debate, discussed in Chapter 3, over whether or not humans are part of nature and therefore whether or not they can exist as part of a ‘natural’ landscape (see McKibben, 1990; Cronon, 1995; White, 1995; Helmreich, 2005; Carver, 2007; Brown, McMorran and Price, 2011; Cassidy, 2012; DeMello, 2012; Seddon *et al.*, 2014; Head, 2015). Participant 11’s fear is that, according to rewilding, humans are *not* part of nature and therefore *cannot* exist in ‘natural’ landscapes (c.f. Lorimer *et al.*, 2015; Carver, 2016a; Gammon,

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<sup>80</sup> The dig for victory campaign was introduced by the Ministry of Agriculture in response to severe wartime rationing and saw large tracts of previously uncultivated land recruited for the growing of food (British Library, 2020).

2018; Sandom *et al.*, 2018). Because landscapes in the UK currently exist as ‘human landscapes’, Participant 11 (LE) therefore envisaged that attempts at rewilding would result in the ‘removal of humans’, something which according to *his* vision is problematic, believing as he does that humans can, and should, be part of a functioning ecosystem – a notion which reconceptualises traditional nature / culture separations. Participant 11 (LE) illustrated this clearly by saying ‘you can increase biodiversity with human processes, you can increase it through agriculture, you can increase levels of species richness by introducing grazing regimes that still are part of a productive system’ i.e. in his view it is possible to get comparable results from a farming system using ‘human processes’ as from a rewilding approach using ‘natural processes’. In the former scenario however, both humans and ecosystems can flourish, while in the latter there is no room for human flourishing.

Participants also recognised the generations of labour that have gone into creating (and by implication ‘taming’ and ‘improving’<sup>81</sup>) England’s landscape and the way that rewilding at best devalues and at worst undoes this, with rewilded land being seen as ‘degraded’ or ‘going to wrack and ruin’. This was evident in the way that rewilding is associated with ‘land abandonment’ and that abandonment is interpreted in its most negative sense<sup>82</sup>. Participant 8 (EE) explained that rewilding is ‘associated with just buying people’s land and just leaving it to *degrade* and lots of farmers have spent generations farming land and they don’t want to see it just *abandoned* and left to *degrade* in their eyes’ (emphasis added), while Participant 9 (EE) said that farmers were ‘threatened by the fear that people from outside are buying up the land and just let it go to *wrack and ruin*’ (emphasis added). These comments reflect the literature which notes

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<sup>81</sup> Improving has a specific agricultural sense in that land is ‘improved’ in terms of its production value (OED, 2020f) but participants were also using it in the sense that taming or cultivating land improves it from its raw, ‘barbaric’ state, demonstrating man’s ‘dominion’ over nature (Genesis, 1:26-28).

<sup>82</sup> c.f. the way in which the ‘managed retreat’ of coast is now often termed ‘managed realignment’ due to ‘retreat’ being perceived as negative (Dannenbergh *et al.*, 2019). In this case, and the case of rewilding, rather than being interpreted in the sense of ‘to relinquish control’ (or even in the now somewhat archaic sense of ‘to release’ ‘set free’ or ‘liberate’), ‘to abandon’ is seen as ‘giving up’, ‘surrendering’, ‘renouncing’, or even to ‘desert’ or ‘forsake’ (OED, 2020g).



that abandoned farmland is 'perceived negatively' and is associated with being 'unkept' and of decreased 'economic usability' (Navarro and Pereira, 2012).

The expression 'people from outside' illustrates how rewilding is seen not only as a threat to farming but as a threat to rural communities 'which are very much underpinned by ... farming' (P1, EE). Any threat to farming was therefore also seen as a threat to the community and its values, with Participant 11 (LE) saying that by 'decreas[ing] the human element in the landscape ... you risk hollowing out what the community feels is important to it'. This participant went on to say that rewilding is predicated on a value system 'that's not reflective of the value system of the population locally to where those projects are happening' (P11, LE). Such comments reflect the view that rewilding is an external imposition on rural communities by urban elites and is not only linked to similar sentiments towards conservation initiatives more broadly (see Lorimer *et al.*, 2015; Wynne-Jones, Strouts and Holmes, 2018), but tallies with findings showing that drivers of rural change are frequently exogenous (Shucksmith, 2018). Shucksmith identifies that in such cases 'the agency of people in rural areas went unacknowledged, and instead they were viewed as acted upon' (2018, p. 164). The negotiation between communities local to rewilding projects and the organisations driving them, particularly in relation to the *agency* of both parties, thus becomes a very important aspect of rewilding's boundary negotiations. Other critical aspects, as highlighted by the foregoing discussion, are the aesthetic qualities of cultural landscape and the active engagement of farmers with those landscapes in an ongoing creation and co-constitution of landscape and farming. Thus, the negotiation of the boundary between rewilding and farming by rewilding organisations (which are often distant from the rewilding site) and rural farming communities (who are usually local to the rewilding site) is extremely complex and often contentious.

With regard to these negotiations, Participant 1 (EE) highlighted the physical separation between the two parties, and the sense of injustice that this can provoke, saying 'why should people in London and Birmingham and Brighton and Bristol, why should they decide that our rural countryside ... should be used as a big game park, for their interests? ... And why should people inflict predators on us, dangerous animals?'. Participant 11 (LE) also saw the physical distance between those advocating rewilding and the areas affected by it as problematic,

not only from the point of view of injustice but because it risks 'decontextualizing the dialogue' and 'allow[ing] proposals to be abstracted to a point that they have very little credence when re-inserted into real and geographically unique landscapes'<sup>83</sup>. By contrast, while recognising the same phenomenon, Participant 12 (AJE), seemed to want to exploit and perpetuate the distance rather than address it, in order to maintain the sense of abstraction between the rewilding debate and the areas under discussion saying 'when you're talking globally it's not as scary as when you're talking about specific national instances'. These contrasting views highlight the very different ways that actors approach the negotiation of rewilding's boundaries; while some prefer to discuss rewilding at an abstract level, in an attempt to avoid creating concern in relation to specific locations, others prefer to discuss rewilding in relation to those specific locations to ensure that negotiations are relevant to local contexts and landscapes.

I have dubbed the phenomenon of rewilding being discussed in, and sometimes imposed from, locations distant from the rewilding site itself 'armchair rewilding'. Armchair rewilding is adapted from the concept of 'armchair travel' whereby, usually through the medium of travel writing, people get a sense of a place that is remote from their location without leaving home (Waters, 2019). It is also influenced by the terms 'armchair countryside' (Bunce, 1994) and 'armchair urban residents' (Shucksmith, 2018), used in the discussion of rural idylls, and the work of Wynne-Jones, Strouts and Holmes (2018) who describe rewilding as being imposed by a 'metropolitan elite'. Thus, armchair rewilding involves people advocating and promoting the rewilding of places which are remote from their own location, without leaving home, and potentially, without ever going, or intending to go, to the site where they are suggesting rewilding should occur. Perceptions that armchair rewilding is occurring is something which rewilding will need to work very hard to negotiate since it can create the sense that rural

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<sup>83</sup> This participant's concern regarding the way in which the discourse surrounding rewilding occurs away from rewilding sites, and the way that this allows the dialogue to become decontextualized, offers further justification for the walking interview as a method for this research.

communities are not understood or valued (Wynne-Jones, Strouts and Holmes, 2018) and sustains conflicting viewpoints (Arts, Fischer and van der Wal, 2016)<sup>84</sup>.

Another focus of the negotiation of rewilding's boundary with farming is the way that rewilding is so polarising as a concept. Participant attitudes to the term ranged from Participant 10's (EE) optimistic 'I don't see any real conflict with sheep farming and lots of the objectives of people who want to rewild', to Participant 11's (LE) insistence that 'I don't think rewilding as a term, and as a methodology ... has any place at all' which he attributed to the way in which rewilding emphasises the removal of humans and, salient to the point at hand, *farmers* from the landscape. Rewilding's aim to reduce or remove human involvement in landscape is certainly evident in the literature (e.g. Lorimer *et al.*, 2015; Carver, 2016a; Gammon, 2018; Sandom *et al.*, 2018) and this creates a tension in negotiations regarding the, seemingly irreconcilable, goals of rewilding and farming as land uses.

Related to this, Participant 11 (LE) saw the term rewilding as being 'unhelpful' when trying to have 'nuanced' conversations about land use because it creates 'entrenched positions' which can be difficult to 'move forward' from. Participant 12 (AJE) made a very similar point saying that, during negotiations, people get 'locked in' to their arguments and 'find it very hard to see that there could be any other way' of land management than conventional farming. This form of 'conservation-conflict' or 'human-wildlife conflict (where conservation is threatened by other interests, in this case agriculture, and where the effects of wildlife can have an adverse impact on humans and vice versa (Redpath *et al.*, 2013)) is well documented in the literature with Navarro and Pereira (2012) describing it as 'age old'. In the case of rewilding, Wynne-Jones, Strouts and Holmes (2018) identify such conflict as arising between 'rewilding advocates' and 'local people' over the 'use value' of landscape – rewilding advocates see the use value of land as providing opportunities for the flourishing of biodiversity,

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<sup>84</sup> According to Arts, Fischer and van der Wal 'tourists, ecologists, and members of the general public with no particular interest in the topic' are usually more in favour of wolf reintroductions than 'local residents whose interests may be directly affected by the presence of wolves in their area, such as hunters, farmers, and landowners', with positive attitudes to wolves being linked to urban residency and negative attitudes being linked to rural residency (2016, p. 29 see also Bauer, Wallner and Hunziker, 2009).

ecological functioning and wildness and natural autonomy, which often requires the reduction or removal of agriculture, while farmers see the use value of land as maintaining a productive food system. Such polarisation situates rewilding at the heart of wider debates in the UK regarding rural and environmental issues (see Lowe *et al.*, 1986 for a history of such conflicts in the UK).

Despite, or perhaps because of, this acknowledgement of the opposing standpoints of parties in the negotiation between rewilding and farming, participants emphasised the essential role of communication in negotiating this boundary. Perhaps unsurprisingly however, given how divergent the perspectives are, this communication does not appear to be working well, with those advocating for rewilding seeing the process very differently from those who are advocating a more conventional approach to rural land management that is more aligned with existing farming and conservation strategies. On one hand, participants spoke of the need for rewilding advocates to make the case for rewilding and 'persuade' others that it is a good approach. Participant 5 (EE) took a very practical approach to this, hoping to convince major landowners to embark on rewilding projects by persuading them to embrace the concept. On a wider level, Participant 12 (AJE) saw the 'capacity for persuasion' as a major boundary, if not *the* major boundary, to rewilding saying:

always the *limitation* is your capacity for *persuasion*. Which is why I'm in this business. I'm in the *persuasion business* and that, 90% of the time with rewilding, is where you need to be ... it's *persuading people* that it's not that scary, that it could be of great benefit, that it could actually enhance lives rather than detracting from their lives. That is 90% of the business that we're in (emphasis added).

Participant 11 (LE) meanwhile saw such a communication strategy as *coercive* rather than persuasive, criticising what he saw as rewilding advocates simply repeating their point of view until they get the answer they wanted, 'we'll just keep telling you until you tell us we're right', and viewing the communication process as lacking a consultative aspect: 'there's a difference between asking someone what you should do and telling them what you're doing - it's definitely fallen into the telling them what you're doing camp'. The communication which Participant 11 (LE) identifies is widely discussed in the literature on conservation and

rewilding both as commonly employed *and* as often ineffective (e.g. Hintz, 2007; Arts, Fischer and van der Wal, 2012; Redpath *et al.*, 2013; Serfass *et al.*, 2014). Nevertheless, I found that such approaches are still being perpetuated.

### 5.4.2 Political and economic landscapes

As is evident from the foregoing discussion, England's long history of human habitation has resulted in profoundly cultural, in many cases, *farmed* landscapes. These landscapes have supported rural livelihoods for millennia, thus the cultural landscape is overlain by an economic one. Further to this, extensive policies of agricultural support payments, not least stemming from the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), have added a political dimension to the economic landscape, and the two are now tightly interwoven. Consequently, disentangling the political and economic landscapes is extremely difficult and they will therefore be considered together. Indeed, as Participant 5 (PE) pointed out, rewilding operates within a landscape where farming, has 'a very strong underpinning of financial reward', either by generating income or by attracting agricultural support payments. In fact, agricultural support payments can comprise a substantial proportion of farm income and their receipt is contingent on farms meeting criteria set out in agriculture and environment legislation. Until very recently the most relevant of these support payments was the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) to be eligible for which farmers were required to keep their land in 'good agricultural condition' (POST, 2016). As Participant 10 (PE) highlighted, this meant that farmers did not get paid for 'PIFs, permanently ineligible features, that includes things like trees and scrublands'<sup>85</sup>. Such legislation and economic incentives valued land for its agricultural productivity and therefore presented a boundary to rewilding since many elements of rewilding (for example the trees and scrublands mentioned by Participant 10 (PE)) could not generate income either via agricultural production or support

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<sup>85</sup> 'Permanent non-agricultural areas and features that are 0.01 hectares or bigger' are considered ineligible to be included in the BPS which calculates payments based on farm hectareage (Rural Payments Agency, 2019). A second category of 'temporary' non-agricultural areas and features are also considered temporarily ineligible to be included in the scheme (Rural Payments Agency, 2019).

payments, creating a significant *disincentive* for farmers and landowners to participate in rewilding<sup>86</sup>.

Beyond purely financial motives however, participants also alluded to the moral imperatives associated with agricultural production, as illustrated in a comment from Participant 10 (PE): ‘there are concerns about the *ethics* of using rural land for anything other than food production’ (emphasis added). In the face of this view, rewilding, with its move away from extractive land use, can be seen as *unproductive* and either wasteful (P8, EE, P 9, EE, P10, PE) or a luxury (P7, EE). This tension reflects the literature which discusses the way in which ‘wild land is frowned upon as the product of the idle’ (Jeeves, 2006, p. 16; also Ayres and Wynne Jones, 2014) and enrolls notions of food security to argue against rewilding: ‘[t]he population of England and Wales is now 56 million ... it is unlikely that we could afford to let vast tracts of what is currently sheep pasture revert to wilderness’ (Fairlie, 2013, p. 24). Rewilding then threatens to undermine established financial and moral systems of valuing rural land and therefore faces significant inertia in negotiating this boundary. This was made clear by Participant 9 (EE) who explained that ‘when you’ve got areas which in previous times and current times are productive ... that process of change is very difficult’. Further to this, as Participant 8 (EE) highlighted, this value system has historically been underpinned by a policy landscape which promoted agricultural productivity while not offering significant incentives for increasing biodiversity, one of the main goals of rewilding:

there isn’t really any policy remit for rewilding at the moment. There aren’t really any strong drivers for improving biodiversity. We’re very much an economy, productivity kind of country and until we start bringing in that opportunity within policy, to rewilding these large areas, and have a national strategy of where our rewilding areas are going to be, I think it’s going to be a real struggle to bring in what’s essentially seen as unproductive land.

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<sup>86</sup> All interviews for this research were conducted before the introduction of the ELMS to replace the BPS. All participants are therefore speaking from within that policy context and discussion necessarily relates to that context despite the policy landscape having now changed.

Again, these perspectives echo the literature which discusses the lack of specific rewilding policy (e.g. Gooden, 2016), emphasises the way that current policies ‘maintain the status quo of a productive landscape rather than facilitating process-driven rewilding’ (Sandom *et al.*, 2018, p. 5) and even suggests that there ‘are deep-rooted and powerful vested interests in maintaining the status quo ... [which are] almost wholly focused on the production of food and fibre’ (Carver, 2016b, p. 33).

Clearly this combination of political and economic, and even moral drivers presents a significant boundary to rewilding, leaving rewilding to negotiate new economic and political landscapes in which it can operate more comfortably. While occurring independently of rewilding’s efforts, the major renegotiation of British, and English, agricultural and environmental legislation as a result of Brexit is, nonetheless, affording rewilding advocates the opportunity to lobby for legislative changes within the ‘policy window’ (Kingdon, 2013) which Brexit has created (as discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.2.3.1). Pertinently, given how participants identified existing legislation as precluding rewilding, Participant 10 (PE) highlighted that in order to admit the possibility of rewilding, any UK legislation introduced post Brexit would need to ‘recognise the process [of rewilding] rather than a fixed [species or habitat] state’ because, as identified by Sandom *et al.* (2018), current legislation often ‘maintains the status quo ... rather than facilitating process-driven rewilding’. This is partly because a *process* is inherently extremely difficult to measure, as opposed to the more quantifiable targets and goals of conventional conservation, making rewilding less attractive to policy makers (Pettorelli *et al.*, 2018). It is also because rewilding often needs longer time periods than conventional conservation for its benefits to manifest and these long time periods are incompatible with legislation and parliamentary terms (Sandom *et al.*, 2018).

Other participants noted the opportunities which Brexit had presented, specifically in relation to the UK’s ‘25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment’ (25YEP) (2018). The 25YEP introduced the idea of ‘public money for public goods’, something which was highlighted by Participant 7 (AJE), and which he saw as promoting a ‘different attitude’ towards land management. He (and other participants) also predicted that agricultural support payments would ‘disappear’ (P7, AJE, and also P6, LE, P10, PE, P12, AJE), taking with them the restrictions

that would once have classed trees and scrublands as 'permanent ineligible features' which were 'limiting factors' to rewilding (P6, LE). With this predicted disappearance of agricultural support payments, and their attendant conditions, would go the 'disincentive to abandon management' (P10, PE), thereby potentially removing a significant political and economic boundary to rewilding. What participants also identified is that this could mean that 'there won't be as much money for farming' (P7, AJE), with Participant 12 (AJE) going so far as to say that 'it's actually very hard to see how, in Britain, the upland livestock industry will be viable because it depends entirely on subsidies', something which could, potentially, create space for rewilding.

These predictions proved strikingly accurate given the recent introduction of the ELMS which does indeed foster a different attitude towards land management and, with the change in the basis on which agricultural support payments will be made, also (re)moves some of the legislative, and financial, boundaries to rewilding. In light of the new policy landscape, and the new payment system associated with it, landowners are looking for new ways to generate income from their land. Participant 10 (PE) suggested that this could be beneficial to rewilding since without 'that [BPS] financial underpinning to their businesses' farmers and landowners will be 'obliged to think about how they can both save on input costs and maximize the use of their land', going so far as to suggest that 'in many cases that's going to be through rewilding.' He cautioned however that 'the economics of land management are really the crux of it: people will only enter into rewilding type projects if they feel that it'll wash its face' (P10, PE). The idea of some rewilding advocates therefore, as expressed by participants, is to create 'nature-based economies', either through monetising the natural capital that rewilding sites possess, and the ecosystem services which they therefore provide (something which the ELMS facilitates), or through 'nature-based tourism' (P5, EE). Participant 5 (EE) saw nature-based tourism as a 'really important' way of deriving benefits to 'rewilding engagers' i.e. those conducting, or allowing the conduction of, rewilding on their land and he was optimistic about its ability to do so, saying:



you only need to look at the numbers of people that go to nature reserves on the north Norfolk coast ... to see there's a market in this, these people are flocking to a particular location to take a photograph of a spoonbill or an avocet or something. They would definitely be the same sort of people that would flock to see a white-tailed eagle, flying over the edge of the Isle of Wight for example.

This comment introduces two important tensions. First, as Participant 5 (EE) implied here, and subsequently made explicit, nature-based tourism is highly dependent on 'charismatic species', necessitating their (re)introduction if they are absent from the landscape: 'nature-based tourism would involve reintroductions in order for it to be truly successful, you've got to have charismatic animals in the landscape, birds and animals in order to draw more people into these remote areas'. There can however be significant resistance to (re)introductions, which often provoke strong, fear based reactions (Navarro and Pereira, 2012; Stohr, 2012; Cloyd, 2016; Prior and Brady, 2017; von Essen, 2017). Secondly, nature-based tourism schemes need to be carefully negotiated with regard to how they actually generate money and whether this involves charging people for access to the countryside. While Participant 5 (EE) spoke of people spending money in 'pubs and B&Bs', Participant 7 (AJE) noted what he saw as the worrying potential for rewilding sites to charge admittance fees. He highlighted the importance of maintaining *free* access to the countryside, including rewilding sites, and used the Avalon Marshes as an example:

unlike a nature reserve like Minsmere or the London Wetland Centre where you have to pay to go in or have an RSBP membership card, these [the Avalon Marshes] are accessible to anyone. You have to pay for parking but you can get in free. And that's very important ... because that means people go<sup>87</sup> (P7, AJE).

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<sup>87</sup> It should be noted here that there are several parking areas for visitors to the Avalon Marshes and, at time of writing, although there were parking charges at the RSPB carpark at the Ham Wall reserve, all other parking sites were free. Likewise, the two car parks at Wild Ennerdale were also both free at time of writing. Access, including car parking, at each of the field sites will be discussed in greater detail in Chapters 6 and 7.

This comment highlights the tension between needing to keep rewilding sites open and accessible and yet finding a way in which they can ‘wash their faces’ and be, if not profitable, at least financially sustainable.

It has also been suggested that rewilding may be able to generate income as part of extensive farming systems. In such cases domestic cattle are introduced to the landscape to serve as analogues for the large herbivores which are otherwise absent (e.g. aurochs and European bison). These cattle then act both as ‘disturbance factors’ within the ecosystem and as part of a food producing system (Tree, 2018a). Participant 11 (LE) noted however that in order for this to be financially sustainable on a wide scale, rewilding would need to renegotiate legislation which is *not* currently being reviewed as part of the broader review precipitated by Brexit. The legislation in question relates to regulations surrounding the slaughter of cattle above 30 months old and regulations restricting contact between neighbouring cattle herds<sup>88</sup>. This legislation creates a political, and related economic, boundary to the suggested model of blending rewilding with extensive farming, to the point that Participant 11 (LE) stated that ‘if what you’re trying to do is really bring back a lot of cows to the uplands, to have those ecological benefits ... you need to do something about those two regs’. Under current legislation regarding the control of bovine tuberculosis (bTB), cattle ‘can’t touch on open mountains’, meaning that, if cattle *were* to be introduced in any numbers, fencing of large areas of land would be required which would be ‘prohibitively expensive’ (P11, LE). Meanwhile, current legislation regarding bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) dictates that cattle either have to be slaughtered before they reach 30 months of age *or* to have their brain and spinal cord removed at time of slaughter. Since beef cattle in an upland farming system are not ‘finished’ until they are 38 months old they, inevitably, exceed the 30 month age limit for standard slaughter and therefore incur the higher slaughter costs associated with the removal of their central nervous system. An additional point is that cattle in an upland system need to be ‘hardy’ breeds, which are

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<sup>88</sup> Regulations designed to control bovine tuberculosis (bTB) prohibit contact between separate cattle herds (HMG, 2020) while regulations relating to bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) impose special conditions, and therefore additional cost, on the slaughter of cattle over 30 month old (Adkin *et al.*, 2010). Ultimately, both these measures are designed to protect the human food chain from zoonotic disease.

typically smaller than other breeds, all of which Participant 11 (LE) pointed to as creating a perfect storm of high outgoings and low incomings:

you've got a very high fixed cost and you've got an animal which compared to most beef herds, is actually quite small. So you're getting the same per kilo as you would do for any other bit of beef [but] you've got less kilos because you've got a smaller animal and you've got a high fixed cost.

These factors highlight the difficulties in 'scaling up' the presence of cattle in upland systems as part of combined extensive agriculture / rewilding projects since while there are few cattle the need for fencing can be avoided and the beef from these animals can be sold at premium prices. If the system is scaled up however, expensive fencing become unavoidable *and* supply of 'premium' beef increases, reducing the ability to charge premium prices, while the costs either remain high (in relation to slaughter charges) or even increase (in relation to fencing). Related to this is the way that rewilding projects tend to be 'front loaded' (P3, EE) in terms of cost (e.g. fencing) and have a long lead in time before they begin to be profitable. Participant 7 (AJE) suggested that because of this 'you lose money for the first few years when you rewild farmland and then you make it ... but in the interim I think you lose money', which would suggest the need for rewilding to adopt different strategies for the short, medium and long term economic landscapes when negotiating its financial boundaries.

### **5.4.3 Temporal landscapes**

One of the many contradictions within the rewilding discourse, as discussed in Chapter 2, is the way in which some advocates propound its departure from target setting while others see it as being driven by 'baseline' goals (Hodder *et al.*, 2009; Gillson, Ladle and Araújo, 2011). Participant 4 (AJE) set this baseline approach within 'a strong tradition of wanting to recreate pristine ecosystems and a sense of ecosystems as naturally permanent entities'. He went on to describe this as potentially 'dangerous for conservation [because] it can shut off conservation opportunities' (P4, AJE). One of the 'opportunities' which

Participant 4 (AJE) identified are so called ‘alien invasive species’<sup>89</sup>, the role of which he argued may be ‘essential, particularly when you have damaged ecosystems’. This introduces another, related contradiction from the literature wherein proponents of rewilding hold contrary standpoints regarding the role which these species can play in rewilding. Opinion is divided as to whether invasive, non-native species should be eradicated in order to recreate pristine, baseline ecosystems (von Essen and Allen, 2016) or whether, in line with the rejection of goals and targets, rewilding should adopt a *laissez faire* attitude to non-native species (including invasive species) and allow them to operate within an ecosystem according to their own agency (Bakker and Svenning, 2018).

Several participants discussed this attitude towards non-native species, suggesting that ‘nativism’ versus ‘non-nativism’ is something which affects what is valued in the landscape. Participant 4 (AJE), with his tolerance and even appreciation for so called non-native species (although he would hesitate to refer to a species as non-native), was in the minority. He found it ‘alarming’ and a ‘perversion’ of biodiversity discourse that, in measures of biodiversity, non-native species ‘literally don’t count’ and thought that non-native species were ‘just as much part of the ecosystem’ as native species. Part of his rationale is that he considers the time frames within which species are judged as either native or non-native to be ‘arbitrary’ because ‘native species were only native at one time’ (P4, AJE). With respect to Britain, he considers that ‘most of what we now regard as native species are ... either returnees or new arrivals’ since the last ice age (P4, AJE)<sup>90</sup>. As a result he claimed that ‘nativism has no sense of permanence

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<sup>89</sup> According to the IUCN (2000) an alien species (also known as non-native, non-indigenous, foreign, exotic) is one which is ‘occurring outside of its natural range’ and an alien *invasive* species is one which ‘threatens native biological diversity’. By contrast, a native species (also known as indigenous) refers to a species which is ‘occurring within its natural range’ (IUCN, 2000).

<sup>90</sup> The JNCC (1996) base their definition of whether something constitutes an introduction or a reintroduction (i.e. whether a species is *non-native* and being *introduced* or *native* and being *reintroduced*) on whether a species has existed within an area ‘since the last glaciation’ (1996, p. 9). In relation to mainland Britain, ‘species present by the time of the formation of the English Channel c. 9,500–7,000 BP are now classed as native’ (Brown, McMorran and Price, 2011). This idea of species being native to a time links back to Bakhtin’s (1981) notion of chronotopes and the intersection of time and place.

here' and that it is important for conservationists to recognise this in order to avoid doing what he calls 'gardening' to 'manipulate the landscape to get back to a perfect state, pristine state that you imagine is where you should get to, rather than trying to ensure a dynamic ecosystem' (P4, AJE). Carver (2007) uses the term 'wildlife gardening' to describe such an approach, although he would argue that this is the remit of species focussed conservation rather than rewilding.

By contrast Participants 9 (EE), 10 (PE) and 11 (LE) all clearly valued native species over non-native species. Participants 9 (EE) and 10 (PE) made specific reference to Coetir Anian / Cambrian Wildwood, (the 'rewilding' site discussed earlier) where species, including equids, are being (re)introduced. Coetir Anian / Cambrian Wildwood have chosen Konik<sup>91</sup> horses, a Polish breed, as analogues for the, now extinct, tarpan<sup>92</sup>, a move which Participants 9 (EE) and 10 (PE) both saw as regrettable given the availability of a 'native' alternative in Carneddau<sup>93</sup> ponies. At times this preference for native species manifested as a derogatory attitude towards non-native species with Participant 9 (EE) describing Konik horses as 'not wild horses ... just some retro, weak, constructed wild horses' and Participant 11 (LE) describing Heck cattle, not inaccurately, as 'made by the Heck brothers in Berlin zoo in the 1930s'. Rewilding projects have, naturally enough, sought to distance themselves from the eugenic associations of Heck cattle (Lorimer and Driessen, 2016), but the wider conservation discourse still often utilises xenophobia and racist language (Subramaniam, 2001; Helmreich, 2005). Participant 10 (PE) meanwhile saw the approach of selecting non-native breeds in favour of native breeds as causing 'increasing frustration amongst mainstream small livestock farmers'. He gave further examples of what he too saw as the availability of suitable native breeds (which in his view negated the need to introduce animals which are either not geographically native, or are no longer time native, to England and the UK) e.g. English Longhorns as a substitute for aurochs rather than European bison, and Tamworth pigs rather than

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<sup>91</sup> Konik horses are a feral horse breed the origins of which are unclear. Different schools of thought exist as to whether they are descended from the now extinct tarpan, the Eurasian wild horse, or are more closely related to domestic horse breeds (Pasicka, 2013; van Vuure, 2014).

<sup>92</sup> The now extinct tarpan, *Equus ferus*, was a Eurasian wild horse (Hodder *et al.*, 2005).

<sup>93</sup> Carneddau ponies are an ancient pony breed native to Wales (Winton *et al.*, 2013, 2020; Mackinnon, 2020).

wild boar<sup>94</sup>. While he admitted that this approach ‘takes you closer to the wood pasture type model’ he saw its advantage in being ‘more acceptable to mainstream rural dwellers’ (P10, PE). This increase in acceptability may play an important role in the negotiation of rewilding’s boundaries e.g. facilitating the negotiation of a compromise between rewilding models and extensive farming systems.

It is interesting to note that the dominant sentiment identified in these interviews was strongly opposed to non-native species, with a distinct preference for enrolling traditional, native breeds as analogues for their extinct or extirpated counterparts. This is indicative of the boundary work surrounding the companion species of rewilding, as different actors attempt to dictate which species can, or cannot, become companions in rewilding projects. Further to this, it is suggestive of the nationalism which has been identified as linked to Brexit. Garrard specifically highlights *English* nationalism ‘as a key factor in Leavers’ [i.e. those who voted for the UK to leave the EU] cultural identity’ (2020, p. 110) and links this to depictions of the English countryside and the pastoral ideal. Nationalism is perhaps identifiable in all these comments from Participants 9 (EE), 10 (PE) and 11 (LE) although it is the latter’s which relate to England and are therefore particularly relevant to my conclusions about understandings of rewilding in England, and which appear to display the sentiment which Garrard (2020) relates to Brexit, especially in the preference for the ‘wood pasture type model’ which could be seen as a pastoral ideal.

## 5.5 Summary

The findings discussed in this chapter have reinforced existing literature on the subject of rewilding by providing further illustration of the extent to which rewilding as a term lacks a clear definition. The findings have also shown how rewilding *feels* this lack of a clear definition, becoming subject to misunderstandings and differences of opinion within the discourse. Novel findings relate to the unique landscapes within which rewilding operates in England and

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<sup>94</sup> Wild boar were once native to England but are now considered non-native having first been extirpated circa 1400 (Goulding, 2003). This is notwithstanding the fact that there are colonies of free-living wild boar in England (particularly in the Forest of Dean and Sussex), though these animals are considered ‘feral’ rather than wild (Goulding, 2003).

the way in which these landscapes are valued, with key landscapes identified as being cultural, political and economic, and temporal. Because of the value attributed to them, these landscape present significant boundaries to rewilding and experts offered insights regarding how rewilding negotiates these boundaries. All of these findings informed the field work conducted at the Avalon Marshes and Wild Ennerdale and therefore also inform the subsequent chapters in which the results from that field work is discussed. At the field sites, particular attention was paid to the extent to which the landscapes and boundaries identified by expert participants were, or were not, relevant. This is discussed with respect to the Avalon Marshes in the next chapter and I build on this in Chapter 7 which addresses Wild Ennerdale and Chapter 8 which offers a cross case comparison.

## Chapter 6: The Avalon Marshes

Then Sir Bedivere cried: Ah my lord Arthur, what shall become of me, now you go away from me and leave me here among mine enemies? Comfort thyself said the king, and do as well as though mayst, for in me is no trust for to trust in; for I will into the vale of Avilion to heal me of my grievous wound: and if thou hear never more of me, pray for my soul (Mallory, 1969, p. 517).

King Alfred, while the Danes sought him far and near, was left alone one day, by the cowherd's wife, to watch some cakes which she put to bake upon the hearth. But, being at work upon his bow and arrows, with which he hoped to punish the false Danes when a brighter time should come, and thinking deeply of his poor unhappy subjects whom the Danes chased through the land, his noble mind forgot the cakes, and they were burnt (Dickens, 2007, p. 17).

### 6.1 Outline

This chapter presents findings and discussion relating to the first of the case studies for this research – the Avalon Marshes. It introduces the Avalon Marshes as a place and sets out the themes which emerged from analysis of nineteen interviews with practitioners and stakeholders of rewilding. Participants were selected via purposive sampling and chain referral, first approaching the organisations involved in the 'rewilding' of the Avalon Marshes and subsequently using chain referral and further purposive sampling to identify other practitioners and key stakeholders. The preferred method of data collection was the walking interview though, where this was not possible, interviews were sedentary. The interview data were supplemented with data from one hundred visitor questionnaires conducted outside a cafe situated at the carpark entrance to Shapwick Heath nature reserve, one of five nature reserves which make up the Avalon Marshes. Participants discussed how they interpreted and conducted rewilding, (or in the case of visitors how they perceived rewilding), how they valued the landscapes of the Avalon Marshes, how the landscapes of the Avalon Marshes presented boundaries to rewilding, and how those boundaries were negotiated. The discussion in this chapter leads on from the themes identified in the expert interviews, discussed in the previous chapter, and will be built upon in Chapter 8 in a cross-case analysis of the results from both the field sites examined during this research.



## 6.2 The landscapes and stakeholders of the Avalon Marshes

### 6.2.1 Encountering the landscapes of the Avalon Marshes



Figure 6.1: View over the Somerset Levels and Moors from Glastonbury Tor (photograph by the author).

Rising above the marshes, Glastonbury Tor<sup>95</sup>, the mythical Isle of Avalon, is visible on the horizon long before one reaches it. Nor does it appear to get any closer, lost as the traveller is in the marshes, which so well concealed King Alfred and his men from the ‘false Danes’, and in a maze of droves<sup>96</sup> which resemble nothing so much as an Escher drawing. The droves lead the traveller ever on but somehow never closer to the Tor, always perpendicular to it, so that one has to travel miles out of one’s way before reaching a T-junction or cross roads, each one indistinguishable from the last. The droves, though arrow straight in their compass trajectories are in no way flat despite, or rather because of, their crossing of the flatlands of the marshes. They buck and hummock skywards as the peat beneath them shifts and sinks, their edges seeping gradually from tar to

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<sup>95</sup> While Glastonbury Tor is outwith the boundaries of the Avalon Marshes it can be seen from many points within them and so very much forms part of their visual landscape.

<sup>96</sup> Droves are old roads, originally used for driving livestock.



grass and water. At the same time the grass makes incursions in the other direction, encroaching on the tarmac, its incursion part of the slow dance of osmosis which is seeing wildlife reclaiming what was once human territory (see Figure 6.2). For the Avalon Marshes are undergoing 'rewilding' – sites which were once peat works are now nature reserves, and the use of this landscape is being renegotiated.



Figure 6.2: Road sign near the Avalon Marshes warning that the road is 'liable to subsidence'. The sign itself has subsided and is now almost completely engulfed by an elder tree (photograph by the author).

The Avalon Marshes are low-lying wetlands near Glastonbury, Somerset in the south west of England, and form part of the larger Somerset Levels and Moors. These clay levels and peat moors comprise coastal plains and inland fens stretching from the Bristol Channel in the west to the Mendip and Blackdown hills in the north and south respectively (Bunning, 2006). The area, including the Avalon Marshes, is at or close to sea level, sometimes above and sometimes below, both in terms of its current topography and in terms of its history. Paleoecology has helped to reveal the transient nature of this landscape. Since the start of the Holocene the land which is now the Avalon Marshes has been fresh water marshland, salt water marsh and mud flats, fresh water reed bed, wet fen woodland, raised peat bog, salt water marsh and mud flats, raised peat bog, and then farmland and peat works (Bunning, 2006).

Until the development of agriculture led to major drainage of land for farming, these changes were primarily due to ecological succession rather than the effect of any human intervention. Drainage of the area has been conducted on a reasonably substantial scale since the Middle Ages but the agricultural revolution<sup>97</sup> saw a rapid increase in land modification and essentially completed the drainage of the fens, with much of the farmed landscape which exists today tracing its genesis to that period (Bunning, 2006). Perhaps the most significant change however was the industrialisation of peat extraction and, subsequently, the substantial peat digging which occurred in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This resulted in an intensely anthropogenic landscape which was effectively abandoned following the end of much of the large-scale peat extraction in the 1990s. In a sense this was 'productive land abandonment' (Jørgensen, 2014), with a major peat extraction company ceasing resource exploitation and relinquishing ownership of much of the land. That land was handed to English Nature (now Natural England) which in turn transferred land to the Somerset Wildlife Trust (SWT) and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB).

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<sup>97</sup> The agricultural revolution in Britain was an extended period (1600s to 1800s) of increased agricultural productivity due to improvements in land and labour (Overton, 1996).

The Avalon Marshes as they currently are, evolved out of the complementary efforts of these, and other, conservation organisations working to restore the post-industrial landscape left by peat extraction and to conserve the region's natural and cultural heritage (Avalon Marshes, 2019). The project's exact genesis is unclear but a defining point in its history was the successful application for a Heritage Lottery Fund grant in 2011 which provided funding for the Avalon Marshes Landscape Partnership Scheme from 2012 to 2016 (Avalon Marshes, 2019). This Partnership, a collaboration between the core partners of English Nature, the SWT and the RSPB, and five other organisations (Environment Agency, Hawk and Owl Trust (H&OT), Historic England, Somerset County Council (SCC) and South West Heritage Trust (SWHT)), formed to restore the degraded landscape and create a functioning wetland ecosystem (Avalon Marshes, 2019). Although the Partnership concluded in 2016 its work is continuing through the cooperation and collaboration of its key members: the nature reserve owners (H&OT, Natural England, RSPB, and SWT), the SWHT, and the Environment Agency. The consortium claim that, as they are today, the Avalon Marshes provide an important, permanent habitat for native and non-native<sup>98</sup> flora and fauna and are also of significance to many migratory birds (Avalon Marshes, 2019). It is this richly complex area which constitutes the first field site for this research.

### **6.2.2 The peat landscape of the Avalon Marshes**

As well as considering the surficial landscapes of the Avalon Marshes, it is necessary to delve beneath the surface. The peat soil of the Avalon Marshes has created a subterranean landscape with a complex past and present. Peat has been dug in the area for centuries, originally as fuel for burning but, by the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this had been almost entirely replaced by the extraction of peat for horticulture. Not only was the peat being used for a different purpose, its extraction was very different, being dug mechanically rather than by hand as it had been traditionally. This wholesale extraction of peat had two significant environmental impacts, one local and one global. Locally, it created 'peat voids', large areas of land from which significant amounts of peat had been removed in

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<sup>98</sup> This point regarding the Avalon Marshes providing habitat for native *and* non-native flora and fauna is an interesting one given the debate over the role that non-native species can or should play in rewilding projects (see Chapter 5, Section 5.4.3).



a process resembling open cast mining, the result being crater-like holes in the landscape. The other impact, which had effects globally, was the release of carbon dioxide (a potent greenhouse gas) when the peat was drained and dried. Knowledge of this latter effect contributed to a decision by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) which saw planning permission for peat extraction halted for new sites and not extended for existing sites (MHCLG, 2012, 2019), a policy which is the culmination of a strategy to 'reduce peat use to zero by 2030' (DEFRA, 2011). It should be noted that the embargo on the granting of planning permission for peat extraction applies only to new sites or extensions to existing sites; sites which already have planning permission are currently permitted to continue extracting peat in accordance with their existing permissions, with many peat producers in Somerset falling into this category. It should also be noted that the embargo is a national decision and not one which is local to the Avalon Marshes or related specifically to rewilding in the area.

The response of Somerset County Council (SCC) with regard to local planning and regulations has, naturally, been in line with national government 'Restoration and Aftercare of Minerals Sites' guidelines (SCC, 2013). These guidelines state that the restoration of land where mineral extraction has taken place 'should use every opportunity to enhance the environmental value of sites to contribute to the biodiversity of the County' (SCC, 2013). Accordingly, SCC have developed the 'Somerset Minerals Plan' which, *inter alia*, 'seeks to ensure any scheme for restoration of a former peat workings will focus on promoting nature conservation and biodiversity' (SCC, 2015). This approach, coupled with the embargo on new extraction of peat has contributed to the complexity of the boundary between rewilding and peat extraction. While the rewilding at the Avalon Marshes is not responsible for the embargo it is benefiting from the phasing out of the industry. This led to some stakeholders conflating the rewilding of the area with the ending of new peat extraction licenses, as perhaps did the fact that the Avalon Marshes are a very visible representation of conservation locally. This interface between rewilding and peat extraction contributed to making the Avalon Marshes such an interesting, and appropriate, site to study.

### 6.2.3 The conflict landscape of the Avalon Marshes

Aside from the reasons already given for selecting the Avalon Marshes as a field site (i.e. its quasi distance from the term rewilding, its representation of a case of 'culture led, active nature' rewilding, its geographical location in the south of England, its topography as a lowland site, the omnipresence of water, and its interface with peat production) it makes a very interesting case for study for another reason. The Somerset Levels and Moors have a history of 'conservation conflict' (Redpath *et al.*, 2015) which may predispose the area to conservation conflicts in the future. The most notable instance of conservation conflict, in this case between conservation and agriculture, occurred in 1983 following farmer protests over the designation of West Sedgemoor in Somerset as a site of special scientific interest (SSSI) (Lowe *et al.*, 1986). Conflict in this particular case became so heightened that farmers hanged and then burnt effigies of representatives from the RSPB and the, now defunct, Nature Conservancy Council (Lowe *et al.*, 1986).

Even before that however the area had a history of strong local opposition to any changes to the landscape; in the 1700s protests against agricultural improvement resulted in another instance of effigy burning (Lowe *et al.*, 1986). This tradition of strong opposition to changes in landscape management persists in the area illustrated recently by the major protests over changes to waterway dredging policy which were perceived to be the cause of significant flooding in Somerset in 2014 (McEwen, Jones and Robertson, 2014; Thorne, 2014; Smith, Porter and Upham, 2017). Evidence of both the recalcitrance of the local population and the predisposition of the area to conservation conflict was present in the interview data. Participant 46 (CAM) illustrated the recalcitrance when he said 'we've got a very strongly embedded culture within the area, it's always been known to be a bit difficult to work down on the Levels'. Meanwhile Participant 40 (CAM) spoke of how the history of conflict over drainage in the area could serve as a 'heat point' to 'reignite' conflict relating to water management. Both of these factors make the Avalon Marshes an extremely interesting case for investigating rewilding's potential for conflict and co-existence with other land uses as it negotiates its boundaries.

## 6.2.4 Walking in the landscapes of the Avalon Marshes

Walking interviews at the Avalon Marshes proved to offer a very rich interview experience, both in terms of the data yielded and also in terms of *how* it was yielded. Because participants were asked to choose the route of the walking interview they were able to select a place which had meaning for them and they were then able to communicate that meaning to me in a much more complete way than had the interview occurred 'out of place' (*sensu* Creswell, 2003). This provided 'privileged insight' into how stakeholders interacted with and valued the landscape which would not have been afforded by a conventional interview (Evans and Jones, 2011).

Walking interviews also enabled an element of other-than-human participation in the research. One of the interviews was accompanied by dogs, which not only introduced other participants to the research but added insight into how stakeholders interacted with the landscapes of the Avalon Marshes with their canine companions. Birds made their presence known in all interviews, sometimes more than others. Bird calls were audible on several of the interview recordings and in one instance the participant identified the hunting call of a sparrow hawk. At other times participants and I discussed the birds we encountered, either identifying them or, once, negotiating a bank of swans across our path. Cattle were also important, with the Highland cattle which occupy the Avalon Marshes being encountered and discussed during one interview. Lastly, water was a major feature, shaping the direction of walks as routes followed the ditches, rhyes and drains<sup>99</sup> which criss-cross the marshes. Walking with and by

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<sup>99</sup> While ditch is a commonly understood term for a channel which surrounds a field, ditches have greater significance on the Somerset Levels and Moors than is often the case. Given the high water table, their role in draining water from fields in order to accommodate agriculture is essential. They also, on occasion, serve the additional function of acting as 'wet hedges' and field boundaries (Avalon Marshes, 2020f). Rhyne on the other hand is a lesser known term and is local to Somerset (the features are also found in Gloucestershire where they are called rhines, or sometimes rhyes, and Gwent where they are called reens, though the pronunciation is the same across all spellings), being channels which carry water away from ditches and towards drains (Avalon Marshes, 2020f). The functionally named drains are canals which collect water from rhyes and channel it to rivers (Avalon Marshes, 2020f). Water is then pumped from these drains into 'rivers' and carried away, although rivers in the Avalon Marshes are not necessarily natural

these waterways allowed me to see, *inter alia*, the evidence of dredging or its absence, with dredging being a recurring theme in interviews. In some cases, if the interview was a sedentary one, participants encouraged me to go for a walk along the rhynes afterwards, in order to see evidence of what had been discussed.

Talking whilst walking allowed the conversation to flow in a much more natural fashion than in sedentary interviews where researcher and participant tend to be uncomfortable with silence and feel obliged to fill it. By contrast, the walking interviews were often punctuated with long, comfortable, silences, often due to the nature or terrain of the route, which allowed both the participant and me time for reflection. This contributed to a relaxed atmosphere which was highly propitious to gathering rich data, particularly when discussing the more controversial aspects of rewilding. Conducting walking interviews 'in place' also meant that the landscape could act as an *aide-memoire*, prompting participants to discuss things that they saw while walking and also prompting me to ask questions about things encountered *en route* (Solnit, 2001; de Botton, 2002; Anderson, 2004; Evans and Jones, 2011). Finally, these walking interviews introduced an visual element to the interviews, allowing the landscape to play a visual role, with participants able to point to examples of what they were discussing or to describe a view they were looking at (Evans and Jones, 2011).

Unfortunately it was not possible to conduct all interviews in a peripatetic fashion and many of the interviews were sedentary. When this was necessary, participants chose a location for the interview that was either germane to the landscape or pertinent to them. In many cases these locations were the participants' homes or places of work and were often in or near the rewilding site. While these interviews did not afford the opportunity of walking *in* the landscape, it could still be experienced as a scene – linking back to the dual meaning of landscape as something to be *viewed* as well as something to be *in* (Wylie, 2007). These interviews were therefore able to offer the advantage of being 'in place' (Anderson, 2004), both familiar to the participant and relevant to the interview, thereby affording rich and productive interviews. A summary of the interviews

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with river being a misnomer for the Huntspill and Brue 'rivers' since they are in fact canals (Avalon Marshes, 2020f).



conducted in relation to the Avalon Marshes is given in Table 6.1 which describes the role of the participant, the code used when referring to them in the discussion, and the type of interview conducted.

Table 6.1: Practitioner and stakeholder interview participants at the Avalon Marshes

Participant	Role	Code <sup>100</sup>	Interview type
14a,b,c	Conservationists (C)	CAM	Sedentary, on Avalon Marshes reserve
15	Conservationist (C)	CAM	Sedentary, on Avalon Marshes reserve
23	Land owner / manager (L)	LAM	Sedentary, at participant's home
24	Recreational fishery operator / angling association (F)	FAM	Sedentary, at fishing lake
25	Peat / compost producer (P)	PAM	Sedentary, at peat / compost factory
26	Peat / compost producer (P)	PAM	Walking (see Figure 6.11)
27	Peat / compost producer (P)	PAM	Sedentary, at peat / compost business office
28	Peat / compost producer (P)	PAM	Sedentary, at peat / compost factory
29	Peat / compost producer (P)	PAM	Sedentary, at peat / compost factory
30	Land owner / manager (L)	LAM	Sedentary, at participant's home
31	Conservationist (C)	CAM	Walking (see Figure 6.5)
32	Conservationist (C)	CAM	Walking (see Figure 6.7)
40	Conservationist (C)	CAM	Sedentary
44	Peat / compost producer (P)	PAM	Sedentary
45a,b	Parish council representatives (PC)	PCAM	Walking (see Figure 6.9)
46	Conservationist (C)	CAM	Sedentary, at office
47	Peat / compost producer (P)	PAM	Sedentary, at peat / compost business office
48	Archaeologist (A)	AAM	Sedentary, at office
49	Recreational fishery operator / angling association (F)	FAM	Walking (see Figure 6.13)

<sup>100</sup> Used when citing participants. The initial letter(s) refer to the participant's role and the suffix 'AM' refers to the Avalon Marshes.

## 6.3 Landscapes, boundaries and negotiations with rewilding

### 6.3.1 Real and imagined landscapes and boundaries of the Avalon Marshes

The Avalon Marshes, as they are understood for the purposes of this research, comprise an area of approximately 1500 hectares made up of five nature reserves; the Catcott Complex (owned by SWT) Ham Wall (owned by RSPB), Shapwick Heath (owned by Natural England), Shapwick Moor (owned by H&OT) and Westhay Moor (owned by SWT) (Avalon Marshes, 2019)<sup>101</sup>. These reserves are not all geographically contiguous, with Westhay Moor being approximately a mile to the north of the others and with a small section of the Catcott Complex (Little Fen) lying slightly apart from the rest of the complex (see Figure 6.3). As well as showing the geographical locations of the reserves, Figure 6.3 illustrates their geographical boundaries, however, while the reserves of the Avalon Marshes exist on the ground and their boundaries can be depicted on maps, these boundaries are not always seen to be as distinct as might be expected. For example, four interview participants all had their own, slightly different, interpretation of what constituted the Avalon Marshes, and notably, stressed the *indistinctness* of the boundaries, and even, in the case of Participant 40 (CAM), the way in which those boundaries are not fixed but ‘shift’ over time or are even disregarded. Participant 46 (CAM) went so far as to discount the Avalon Marshes’ existence on a map altogether, saying that there was ‘no map that says this is the Avalon Marshes’ and that the Marshes could therefore be ‘as big as you like’ with no geographical boundaries or spatial limits. (See Table 6.2 for a summary of participant interpretations of the physical boundaries of the Avalon Marshes).

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<sup>101</sup> The individual nature reserves that make up the Avalon Marshes are of different ages. Shapwick Heath and the Catcott Complex are the oldest, established in 1967 and 1968 respectively, with Westhay Moor following in 1971. Ham Wall was founded in 1995, and therefore celebrated its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary during the course of this research, while Shapwick Moor is the newest, having been purchased in 2007.

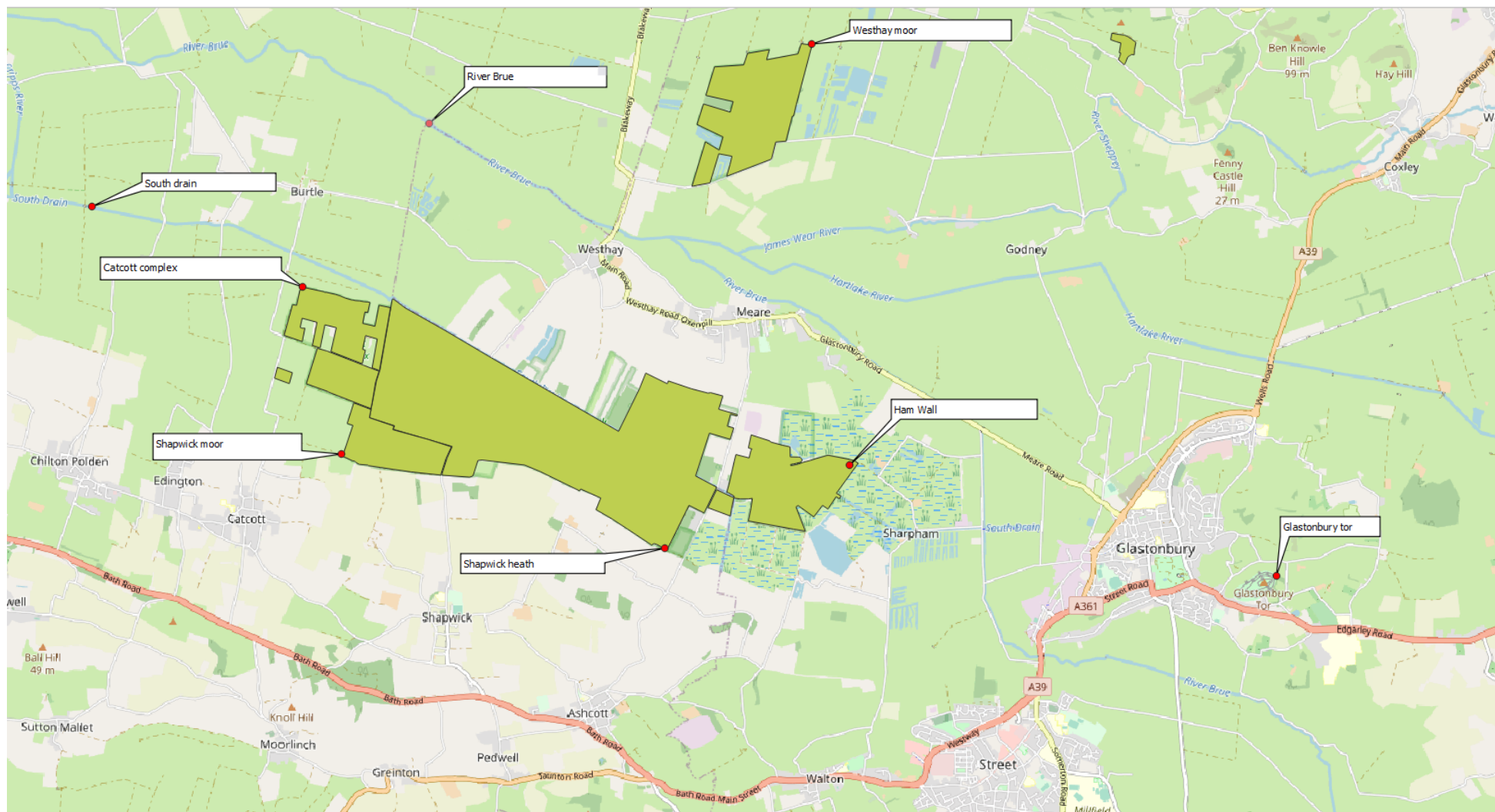


Figure 6.3: The Avalon Marshes as constituted by its five reserves; Catcott Complex, Ham Wall, Shapwick Heath, Shapwick Moor, Westhay Moor (source OpenStreetMap <https://www.openstreetmap.org/> and Avalon Marshes and Google Maps [https://www.google.com/maps/d/viewer?mid=1yP\\_ZW28yF-2S6dJfChYyyngyTSY&ll=51.18996171127566%2C-2.8151473832642693&z=14](https://www.google.com/maps/d/viewer?mid=1yP_ZW28yF-2S6dJfChYyyngyTSY&ll=51.18996171127566%2C-2.8151473832642693&z=14)).

Table 6.2: Participant interpretations of the physical boundaries of the Avalon Marshes

Participant	Interpretation of the physical boundaries of the Avalon Marshes (all emphasis added)
P32 (CAM)	The Avalon Marshes as we talk about it now is a network of reserves really. For the Heritage Lottery project a few years ago there was a <i>nominal boundary</i> which was set at the 5m above sea level line, so anything that was below 5m above sea level in this landscape was classed as the Avalon Marshes landscape boundary. So, it stretches all the way up to Glastonbury and it stretches quite a long way out towards Burnham-on-Sea and to the coast.
P40 (CAM)	A project area was defined for the Avalon Marshes which broadly speaking is from Glastonbury down to Shapwick and Westhay Moor so it makes a sort of wedge coming out from Glastonbury and that project area was defined to basically have some resonance with local communities and visitors and stakeholders in the area but it was also defined because the Heritage Lottery fund ... want a clear project area where you can focus effort and make a difference rather than a very large project area that's so diffuse that it has no meaning to people. So, the Avalon Marshes project area was defined under the Heritage Lottery fund. <i>It's shifting slightly</i> as our ambitions shift around and with thinking on a bolder scale really about NNRs [National Nature Reserves]. So, it's about being bolder and braver with NNRs and <i>not restricting yourself to just being in the boundary</i> .
P46 (CAM)	The thinking has got a bit bigger and has become more of a landscape definition. It's <i>not a very well-defined boundary term</i> . There's no map that says this is the Avalon Marshes. It can be as big as you like, really.
P48 (AAM)	Basically, it's the central Brue Valley, so the area of floodplain just west of Glastonbury. <i>It hasn't really got a sharp boundary on the ground</i> , so it encompasses all the nature reserves that have been created in worked-out peat cutting areas. And I suppose it goes roughly from Burtle in the west to almost all the way up to Glastonbury in the east. So, it's a large part of the central Brue Valley, really, but <i>there isn't really a strict line on the border</i> , it's that general area.

Aside from the potential debate as to how or where the Avalon Marshes exist in the physical and cartographical landscapes, they exist very vividly in the landscapes of our individual and collective imaginations. This special place that the Marshes occupy in our minds is the result of their long, rich, social and cultural history. They are the site of one of the earliest known permanent human settlements in England, with evidence of settlement in the Avalon Marshes dating back to the Neolithic period, circa 4300-6000 years before present (Avalon Marshes, 2019). Artefacts from this period, and the later Bronze and Iron Ages, have been preserved in the peat, perhaps the most notable example of which is the 'Sweet Track'<sup>102</sup>, named after the local peat digger who discovered it (P44, PAM). Other periods in history and myth also have significance for the Avalon Marshes, with legends and stories entwined with the landscape. The legend of King Arthur is intimately connected to Somerset, and the Glastonbury region in particular, with Glastonbury Tor often claimed to be the mythical 'Isle of Avalon' which, in legend, is the island to which the wounded King Arthur was taken after his final battle (Mallory, 1969). King Alfred the Great, remembered (among other things) for his inattention to baking is also associated with Somerset, retreating there from the Vikings and hiding with his men in the marshes (Dickens, 2007). The significance of this history and heritage was illustrated by data from the visitor questionnaire with 44% of respondents associating the Avalon Marshes with ancient monuments and heritage (see Figure 6.4 for visitor responses regarding the landscapes they associate with the Avalon Marshes). Visitors were also asked what they *valued* about the Avalon Marshes landscapes, and how important these landscapes were to them. 29% identified the landscapes as highly valuable to them as 'part of their heritage', with 20% identifying them as highly valuable as 'part of their national identity'. Linked to this, and to ideas of the Marshes existing in our minds and imaginations, 54% of respondents rated the Avalon Marshes as highly valuable as 'somewhere they like to know is there, even if they can't always visit' – this hints at how the Marshes exist in our minds without our necessarily having to be there.

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<sup>102</sup> The Sweet Track is a 'trackway' - a raised path made from timber, created by Neolithic settlers allowing them to traverse the marshy ground.

The 'wild' or 'natural' elements of the Avalon Marshes were also something which visitors viewed as highly valuable, with 65% of respondents rating the opportunity to come and connect with nature as highly valuable and 50% rating the chance to experience 'wildness' as highly valuable. Part of this could have been linked to the landscape's instrumental value as being 'somewhere to come and get away from it all', which 57% valued highly, and somewhere to 'to come and do outdoor activities', with 38% valuing the Marshes highly for this purpose. The availability of the Marshes for recreation and/or connection with wildness / nature in an inclusive way (i.e. not exclusionary of people generally and as somewhere that is accessible to *all* people) appeared to be important to respondents with 54% identifying the Avalon Marshes providing 'a chance for people and nature to be together' as highly valuable and 48% seeing 'everyone having the freedom to visit if they wanted to' as highly valuable. This inclusivity of humans is something which rewilding aspires, and claims, to offer, certainly as opposed to the concept of wilderness which is exclusive of humans (Prior and Brady, 2017). The next sections turn to examine how this operates with respect to other stakeholders in the Avalon Marshes, particularly those who live and work in the area, either farming or producing peat.

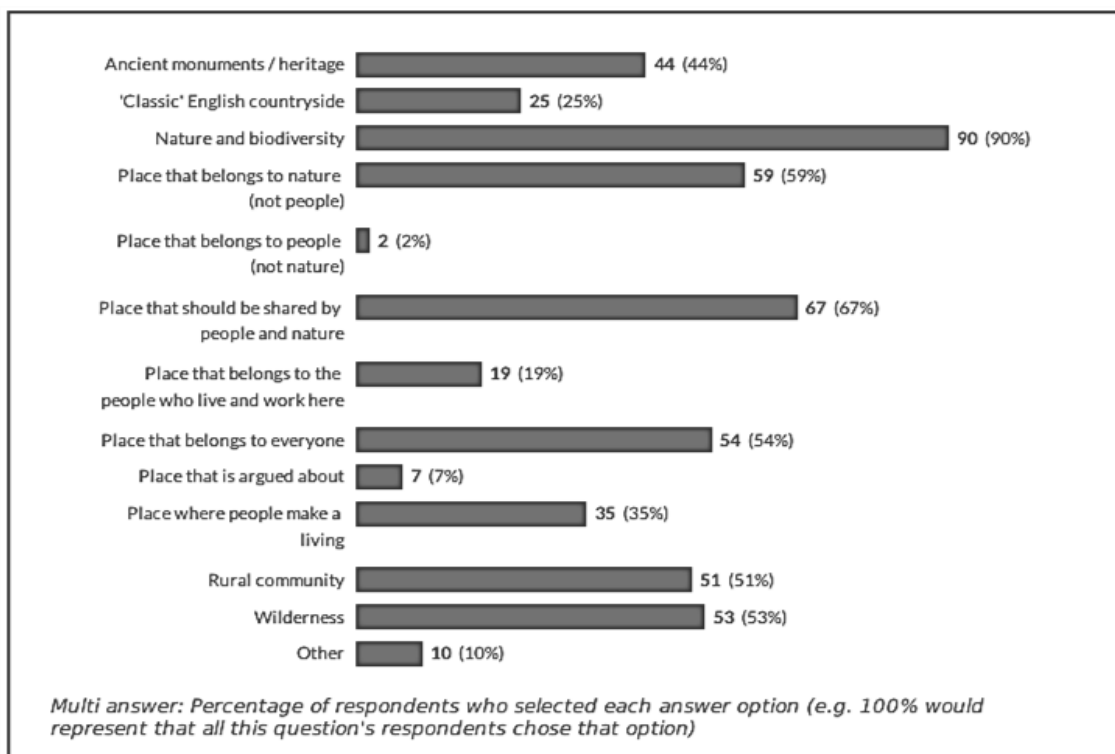


Figure 6.4: Visitor questionnaire responses to the question 'what landscapes do you associate with the Avalon Marshes?'

### 6.3.2 Rewilding's interface with farming

During the preliminary round of interviews for this research, farming was identified as the primary rural land use with which rewilding interfaces and it is certainly a significant land use in and around the Avalon Marshes. Rewilding in the Avalon Marshes must negotiate with farming on three levels: i. with farming which coincides with it in terms of time and space (i.e. where extensive farming and rewilding operate alongside each other), ii. with farming which coincides with it in terms of space but not time (i.e. where farming previously operated on land which rewilding now occupies), and/or iii. with farming which coincides with it in terms of time but not space (i.e. where farming is currently operating on land which is connected in some way with rewilding areas – in the Avalon Marshes this connection may be via water rather than directly, via land).

With respect to the first of these, extensive farming is an important aspect of the Avalon Marshes rewilding strategy with several sections of the reserves being grazed, in conservation grazing regimens, by cattle, ponies and/or goats, some of the 'companion species' of rewilding at the Avalon Marshes (Haraway, 2003). Here rewilding and farming coexist, with livestock grazing performing a 'management' task which might otherwise be done with machinery (P30, LAM). This is an instance of companion species occupying an interesting, and potentially problematic, role within rewilding. In one respect, by avoiding the use of machinery, companion species are ensuring that land is governed by 'natural processes' rather than 'human intervention'. On the other hand, because these companion species are domestic and, ultimately, play a role in food production as well as performing their role in rewilding as large, grazing herbivores, they are not truly a 'natural' process but an artificial or cultural one. In this sense, according to Lorimer and Driessen (2013), the cattle, ponies and goats of the Avalon Marshes 'unsettle the modern division between the wild and the domestic'. This renders them 'boundary objects', since they cross the boundary between being 'wild' and 'not wild', requiring humans to renegotiate their relationship with them (Star and Griesemer, 1989; Cassidy, 2012; Lorimer and Driessen, 2013; Linnell *et al.*, 2015; DeSilvey and Bartolini, 2018).

Humans are also required to renegotiate their relationship with these companion species due to the multiple roles which these species perform. These roles include acting as proxies for humans in human attempts at ecological restoration (von Essen and Allen, 2016), as analogues for the extinct or extirpated large herbivores which would once have occupied niches within the ecosystem (Gillson, Ladle and Araújo, 2011; Jørgensen, 2014; Lorimer *et al.*, 2015; Jepson, Schepers and Helmer, 2018), and as disturbance factors, performing a role with respect to ecological succession (Hodder *et al.*, 2009; Gillson, Ladle and Araújo, 2011; Navarro and Pereira, 2015). By occupying more than one role, these companion species unsettle the biopolitical modes which would, ordinarily, be used to regulate them. For example, companion species acting as proxies for humans would, theoretically, be subject to a different mode of biopolitics than those acting as analogues for other species, or those acting as disturbance factors. In occupying all these roles simultaneously, these companion species again become boundary objects, crossing the boundaries between roles and then crossing the boundaries between biopolitical modes, potentially disrupting the way in which they can, or even *should*, be regulated.

The way these multiple roles are inseparably imbricated within the activities of the companion species was illustrated by the interviews. Participant 31 (CAM) talked about the way Exmoor ponies were deployed to ‘tackle the scrubland’ and ‘keep that a suitable habitat for ground nesting birds’. Here the ponies are embodying the role of human proxy (in tackling the scrubland), disturbance factor (in countering ecological succession and maintaining a suitable habitat for ground nesting birds), and of analogues for extinct or extirpated species (having been chosen specifically for their morphological similarity, and possible genetic lineage to wild horses (Hovens and Rijkers, 2013; van Vuure, 2014)), all while performing the same activity. The walking interview with Participant 31 (CAM) was conducted on Westhay Moor (see Figure 6.5 for a map of the interview) and encountered a variety of habitats including the scrubland on which the Exmoor ponies graze (see Figure 6.6).



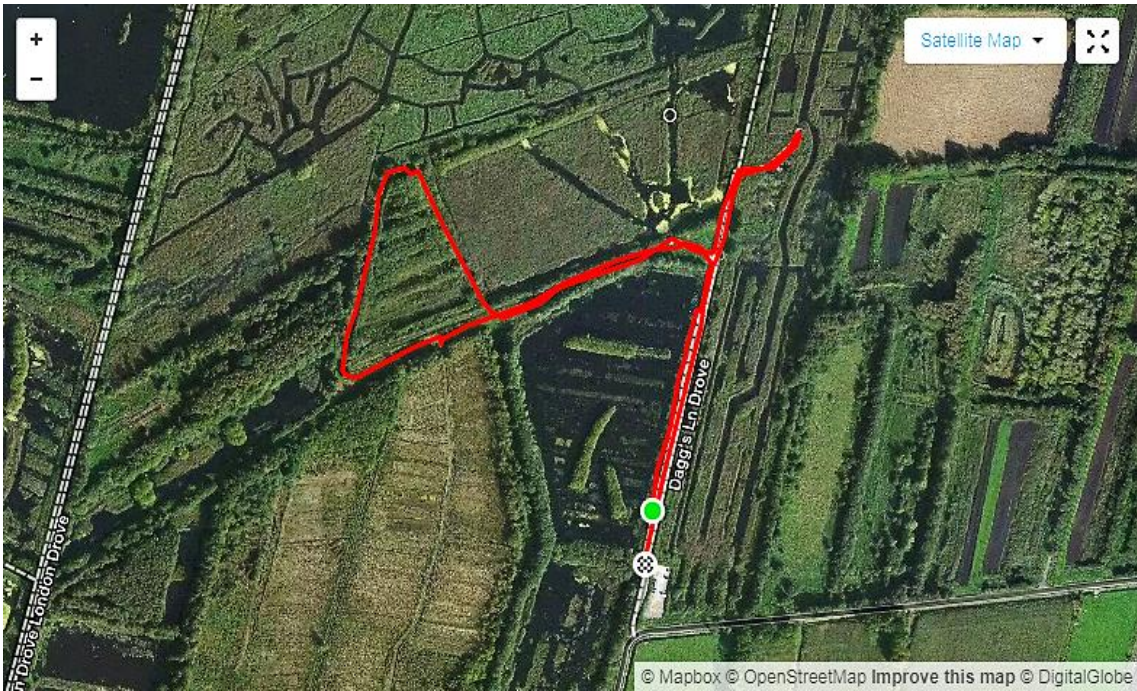


Figure 6.5: Walking interview with P31 (CAM) at Westhay Moor, Avalon Marshes (source Mapbox, <https://www.mapbox.com/>, Maxar, <https://www.maxar.com/>, OpenStreetMap, <https://www.openstreetmap.org/>, open source).



Figure 6.6: Exmoor ponies grazing at Westhay Moor, Avalon Marshes (source Adrian Colston, <https://adriancolston.wordpress.com/>, reproduced by kind permission of Adrian Colston)

Comments from other participants hinted at how tensions might emerge in relation to the different biopolitical modes that relate to each role. Participant 32 (CAM) spoke about how cattle and goats were used for 'grazing' or 'scrub control' in the 'more difficult parts of the site' or 'the more scrubby units on the reserve' and highlighted that this was an onerous task because of the wet and difficult conditions which would be too harsh for less hardy animals. Participant 40 (CAM) expressed this even more clearly, saying that the cattle 'do a good job for us' (illustrating very clearly cattle in the role of proxies for humans) and then going on to describe the risks that the cattle were exposed to when carrying out this role e.g. explaining that it was necessary for them to possess immunity to Redwater Fever<sup>103</sup> which they are exposed to in the Marshes. This demonstrates how the companion species are knowingly exposed to harsh conditions and disease risk by humans when they are utilised in the Avalon Marshes rewilding project in a way that they might not be in other, more established modes of biopolitics (e.g. conventional farming), suggesting that new modes of biopolitics are being created for the governance of the life, and possible death, of companion species in rewilding projects (this will be explored in more detail in Chapter 8). The Highland cattle of the Avalon Marshes which Participants 32 (CAM) and 40 (CAM) referred to were encountered during the walking interview with Participant 32 (CAM) (see Figure 6.7 for a map of the interview). This walk started on Shapwick Heath, which was being grazed by the Highland cattle (see Figure 6.8) and crossed onto Shapwick Moor, returning via the same route.

With respect to the second level on which rewilding negotiates with farming, parts of the Avalon Marshes occupy land which was once farmed (i.e. they coincide with farming in terms of space but not time) and must therefore negotiate with farming's legacy. This is particularly evident where rewilding seeks to convert land from 'intensive farm[land]' to 'wildflower-rich meadows' (P14a, CAM) which requires the removal of nutrients added to the land as part of its agricultural improvement. This is because agricultural fertilizers introduce artificially high levels of nutrients to the soil, with farmers tailoring fertilizer use to suit the requirements of their particular crops. These high nutrient levels are

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<sup>103</sup> 'Redwater fever' or babesiosis is a tick-borne disease which affects cattle and causes, *inter alia*, haemoglobinuria, hence the name 'red water' (NADIS, 2020a).





Figure 6.7: Walking interview with P32 (CAM) at Shapwick Heath and Shapwick Moor, Avalon Marshes (source Mapbox, <https://www.mapbox.com/>, Maxar, <https://www.maxar.com/>, OpenStreetMap, <https://www.openstreetmap.org/>, open source).



Figure 6.8: Highland cattle grazing at Shapwick Heath, Avalon Marshes (photograph by the author).

incompatible with wild flowers which are adapted to much lower nutrient levels and therefore cannot flourish in nutrient enriched soil. The process of *unimproving* soil involves a long and sometimes 'violent' (*sensu van Dooren, 2014*) negotiation with the land. One of the best, or only, ways of reducing the nutrient content of the soil is to cut summer grass growth and remove the resultant hay from the land since leaving it lying on the ground allows nutrients to return to the soil. Similarly, livestock grazing allows for too much recycling of nutrients (in the animals' dung) to be effective at lowering nutrient levels. Both of these points were made by Participant 23 (LAM) who commented on the activities of the conservationists in managing the reserves: 'you don't have cattle on it [grassland] if you're going to take fertility out, they [the conservationists] should be mowing it and selling hay and selling hay and selling hay. But once you put animals in, it's going round in a circle'. Conservationists have to balance the, in this case undesirable, ability of grazing animals to recycle nutrients against the other roles they perform in the ecosystem, as they negotiate the many boundaries of rewilding.

The process of negotiating the nutrient content of the land also leaves conservationists open to criticism from farmers who often can't understand why conservationists want to 'knock the goodness' (P23, LAM) out of the soil which they, the farmers, spend time and money putting in, with this participant's language also denoting the violence involved in the negotiation. During the course of his interview this participant repeatedly emphasised his view that the conservationists 'don't ... know what they're doing' (P23 LAM), a view which Participant 48 (AAM) felt was shared by other farmers:

some farmers don't have a very good opinion of the farming ability of the nature conservation organisations ... I think they still look at some of the land and think it's managed inefficiently, but then it's meeting nature conservation priorities isn't it? It's not out there to be maximum efficiency in terms of grazing.

This comment also hints at a potentially irreconcilable difference between conservationists and farmers – assuming that they have different priorities regarding how land should be managed. It is however an *assumption* on the part of Participant 48 (AAM), that (all) farmers want to achieve 'maximum efficiency' and that this is incompatible with conservation; errors in this assumption may

point to a way forward in the negotiation between farming and rewilding. For example, agroecological systems which have mutual benefits for agriculture and conservation (as compared to more intensive agriculture systems of the present and recent past) are gaining increased attention illustrating that the goals of farming and conservation are not necessarily incompatible (Jackson, Maginnis and Sengupta, 2007; Neely and Hatfield, 2007; Thompson *et al.*, 2007). Adoption of such systems could offer a means for rewilding and agriculture to negotiate from compatible, as opposed to conflicting, perspectives.

With regard to rewilding which operates alongside agriculture, rewilding must negotiate boundaries which are not always respected by other-than-human agents. First, there are the physically constructed boundaries (e.g. ditches, fences, hedges) which often demarcate the virtual boundary of landownership. Companion species of rewilding will however often transgress these boundaries either by going under, over or through them or simply by breaking them. For example, Participant 23 (LAM) spoke about how the 'damn cattle got out' of one of the reserves of the Avalon Marshes and on to his land after breaking through fencing. Similarly, Participant 30 (LAM) discussed the hypothetical (re)introduction of large predators to England for whom the usual farm boundaries would be insignificant. Fencing sufficient to exclude large carnivores, e.g. wolves and lynx, would however be prohibitively expensive for farmers. The participant highlighted the consequences of not being able to exclude these predators from farmland, saying that if:

you've got someone living next door [to a rewilding project], farming that land, trying to make a living ... when he's lambing or calving in the spring, to that wild animal that's just like us going to a McDonald's, it's easy. ... they just go behind a sheep and pick a lamb up (P30, LAM.)

This highlights the need not only for rewilding to negotiate with farming but for humans to negotiate with other-than-human animals, including species for which we have, historically, had very little tolerance. For human tolerance of other species to improve, scholars suggest that we would need to hold a more 'enlightened' position than we have in the past, and change our approach to

dwelling with other species (Wilson and Bruskotter, 2009; Arts, Fischer and van der Wal, 2012, 2016; Stohr, 2012).

Abiotic factors can be even harder to contain with physical boundaries. Water, for example, which is an integral part of the Avalon Marshes, is able to permeate most boundaries. This presents a major challenge for land users within the Marshes, who often have different preferences regarding what water levels should be. Water is so significant in this research that it will be discussed separately in Chapter 8 but it warrants specific mention here in relation to farming. As a very broad generalisation farmers prefer water levels to be lower than is desirable for conservation and vice versa (Bradbury and Kirby, 2006). This situation was acknowledged by conservationists who recognised that if 'land is too wet and you're farming that land it makes it really, really difficult for you to graze your animals, to plant your crops, to do your hay cut or your silage cut' (P32, CAM). Participant 32 (CAM) went on to point out that the only way to overcome this difficulty is by 'managing' the land and 'tak[ing] water out of the system', which is where he sees potential 'conflict' arising. He depicted this conflict as being between those draining water from the land and the land and water themselves, attributing agency to the landscape: 'this landscape wants to be a wetland, it wants to be wet' (P32, CAM). This is an important illustration of the negotiation between humans and nature but, as will be discussed in Chapter 8, there are also significant negotiations regarding water in the Avalon Marshes between humans and other humans, and equal potential for conflicts of interest.

Leaving aside conflict over water levels, stakeholders often spoke of other tensions between rewilding and farming, particularly regarding food security, an issue which was also raised during the expert interviews. Stakeholders spoke either of concerns about food security e.g. 'I wouldn't have thought that we can afford to rewild 25% of our farmland, because the nation needs to be fed' (P27, PAM) echoing the concerns of Fairlie (2013), or of their assumption that, what they perceived as England's currently high levels of food security, had made things easier for conservation initiatives e.g. 'conservation is obviously the key word at the moment, no one is hungry, no one is thirsty, there's plenty of food

around<sup>104</sup>, so I think that plays a bit to their [conservationists'] advantage' (P30, LAM). As these participants rightly identify, food security is significant issue in the UK and has increased in priority since the Brexit vote (POST, 2017). Food *security* is however distinct from food *self-sufficiency*: the UK produces only 52% (by value) of its food, with the rest being imported, predominantly from the EU, hence concerns over the impact of leaving the EU on food security (DEFRA, 2016). Given Britain's level of food self-sufficiency however, its food security is as dependant on its trading relationships as it is on producing food domestically.

Nonetheless, Brexit is certainly changing Britain's land use priorities – something which rewilding needs to negotiate. This is especially true since the perception exemplified by Participant 30 (LAM), that Britain's comparative food security is enabling conservation to gain a stronger foothold than would be possible in a food *insecure* environment, implies that, if the situation were to change, rewilding and other conservation approaches may slip down the policy agenda. Given the challenges to the UK's food security posed by Brexit, and threats to food security globally from population increase, climate change and pandemics, this is something which rewilding will increasingly have to negotiate in the future, both with agriculture and with policy makers (Brussaard *et al.*, 2010; Tschardtke *et al.*, 2012; Cramer *et al.*, 2017; Carver, 2019). These negotiations are highly sensitive however since rewilding faces accusations of 'neo-colonialism' (Fairlie, 2013) if it results (or is *perceived* to result) in the out-sourcing of food production and, consequently, of environmental degradation.

Lastly in relation to agriculture, the landscape of the Avalon Marshes itself is considered 'marginal', on the boundary between land and water and on the boundary of productivity. Participants 30 (LAM), 32 (CAM) and 40 (CAM) all spoke of the land being 'not easy' or 'difficult' to farm 'even with modern technology' (P40, CAM). Participant 40 (CAM) even spoke of 'Levels farmers' as a distinct group, with land often being exchanged privately between them,

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<sup>104</sup> Data from the UK government and the Trussel Trust (an NGO which works to end food poverty) would contradict this, with recent data showing more use of food banks than ever before (although of course this may also be linked to a wider distribution of food banks than previously) (Sosenko *et al.*, 2019; Tyler, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated this although the interview with Participant 30 (LAM) was conducted prior to the pandemic (Tyler, 2020).

implying that it would be an unattractive prospect for anyone from outside the area. Land which is engaged in this sort of agriculture, i.e. marginal in terms of profitability and often reliant on government payments as a source of income, is frequently identified by rewilding advocates as providing the ideal opportunity for a different approach to land management (read 'rewilding'), one that is more sustainable both in terms of financial reward and its environmental impact (Merckx and Pereira, 2015; Navarro and Pereira, 2015). This perspective was evident in participant responses, with two alternative sources of income from rewilding land being proposed.

First was the 'public money for public goods' approach, as set out in the '25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment', wherein land owners are paid for providing ecosystem services (DEFRA, 2018, and discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.2.3.1). Second was the ecotourism ideal whereby land owners diversify into providing goods or services to those who visit the area for nature-based tourism<sup>105</sup>. This is typified in a response from Participant 32 (CAM) who sees both of these approaches as being possibilities in the Avalon Marshes:

we need to look at working with farmers and land holders and trying to change the way this landscape's managed so it's actually farmed for benefits to people, so it's about carbon, it's about water storage and also the quality of water, natural filter systems for water and all that kind of thing, that's what we should be looking at and trying to work with farmers on, and ecotourism actually as well.

Other participants were however far less optimistic on the subject of ecotourism with Participant 40 (CAM) saying, 'the money from that [ecotourism] doesn't tend to come back into that [local] landscape, it tends to go to whoever's driving people down from Bristol<sup>106</sup> to see the murmurations<sup>107</sup>'. Participant 45a (PCAM) made a similar point, saying that ecotourism does not contribute much to the economy

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<sup>105</sup> This ideal was also expounded by rewilding experts during the preliminary round of interviews and is discussed in Chapter 5.

<sup>106</sup> Bristol is the most populous city in the south west of England and lies approximately 30 miles to the north east of the Avalon Marshes.

<sup>107</sup> A murmuration is the name given to a flock of starlings and, more commonly, their flocking behaviour in flight in which large numbers of birds fly in unison creating emergent patterns.



in the area because ‘there’s nothing for them [tourists] to spend it [money] on’. Participant 30 (LAM) went even further, claiming that those who engage in nature based tourism may enjoy seeing ‘wilder’ landscapes but are not prepared to pay for the privilege: ‘even if they want to see it [rewilding], they won’t pay to go and look at it’. This participant went on to note that rewilding has the potential to ‘impact’ people’s livings without necessarily offering a replacement source of income, it being, in his view, very hard to monetise rewilding via ecotourism (P30, LAM). He therefore questioned the validity of rewilding and referred to it as a ‘whim’ saying ‘how can you have an impact on a man’s living because of a whim of someone wanting to rewild. Can’t work. I don’t think it should even be considered’ (P30, LAM). The use of the word ‘whim’ hints at the sense of rewilding being an imposition by urban elites based on the vagaries of their approaches to conservation which was stated even more strongly by Participant 23 (LAM) when he said ‘we’re being ruled by the townies who don’t want hedges pushed out and don’t want this and don’t want that.’ Both comments are redolent of the ‘armchair rewilding’ identified in Chapter 5 and illustrate the tensions in the negotiation between rewilding and farming when rewilding is seen as being externally imposed (Lorimer *et al.*, 2015; Wynne-Jones, Strouts and Holmes, 2018) Redpath *et al.*, 2013).

Before moving on to discuss rewilding’s interface with peat production, it is pertinent to discuss the walking interview with Participants 45a and b (PCAM) quoted above. This interview took place on Westhay Moor and followed the network of droves to trace a rectilinear path through and around the reserve from London Drove to North Chine Drove to Dagg’s Lane Drove (see Figure 6.9). Dagg’s Lane Drove is shown in Figure 6.10 and typifies the linear nature of these droves which, together with the waterways, give the landscape its rectilinear pattern. Capturing this pattern was an unexpected outcome of the mapping of walking interviews, with the maps decoding the uploaded data to reveal the way in which the landscape, as well as the participants, had shaped the direction of the interviews at the Avalon Marshes.

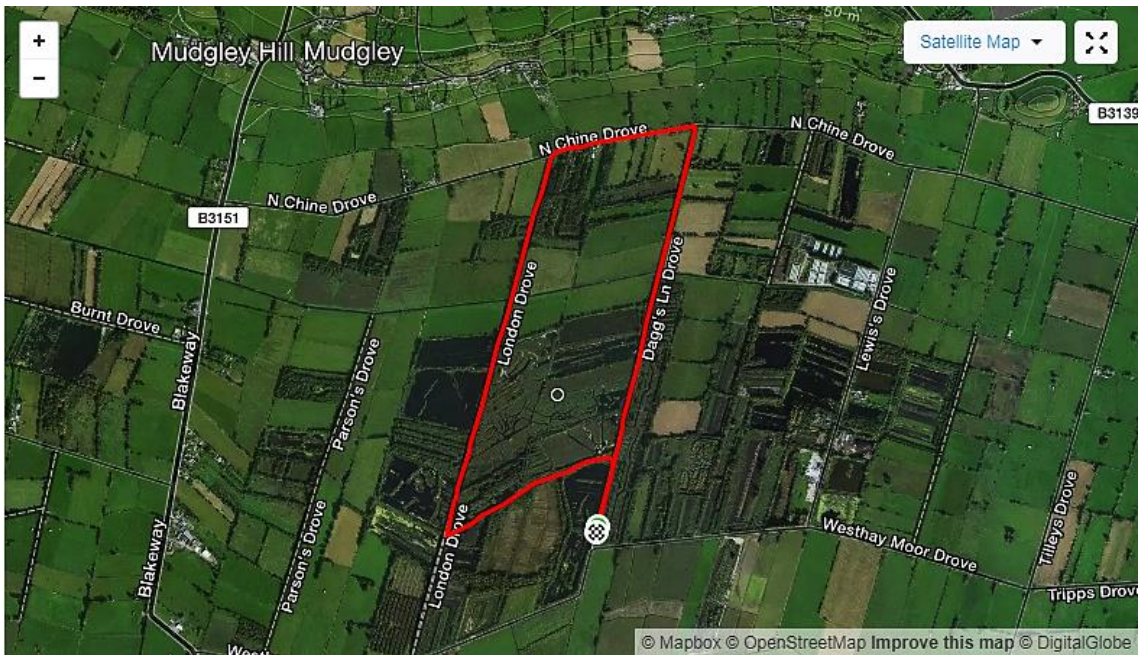


Figure 6.9: Walking interview with P45 a,b (PCAM) at Westhay Moor, Avalon Marshes (source Mapbox, <https://www.mapbox.com/>, Maxar, <https://www.maxar.com/>, OpenStreetMap, <https://www.openstreetmap.org/>, open source).



Figure 6.10: Dagg's Lane Drove at Westhay Moor, Avalon Marshes (photograph by the author).



### 6.3.3 Rewilding's interface with peat extraction

While farming is recognised as the rural land use with which rewilding most commonly interfaces, land use for peat extraction is of at least equal significance in the Avalon Marshes. The presence, and importance, of the peat industry in Somerset means not only that rewilding must negotiate its boundaries with another competing, and potentially conflicting, land use (in addition to farming) but it must do so in ways which are specific to the boundaries which peat extraction presents. One of the major boundaries for rewilding to negotiate in relation to peat is the economic boundary, whereby peat production provides a significant source of income to the area which rewilding currently appears unable to replace. Several participants spoke of the financial benefits of peat production and the livelihoods, and indeed way of life, that it supported. Participant 14c (CAM) described how some would have seen the time of peak peat production as 'halcyon days': 'it was a place where lots of money was made once ... some will harken back to those halcyon days'. This view was supported by other participants who described what a big employer the peat industry had been, and continued to be e.g. Participants 15 (CAM) and 30 (LAM). Indeed Participant 15 (CAM) went on to acknowledge how hard it would be to replace those jobs and livelihoods: 'all these local peat workers, they are local people, this is their livelihood, what are they going to do instead?'. Another participant was particularly articulate and vociferous on this point stating that, if peat extraction is ceased, 'nothing you can do afterwards will ever generate the same level of economic activity out there in the wider community' (P47, PAM). He went on to stress that conservation is a poor economic alternative to consumptive land use generally but particularly as compared to peat extraction:

The issue with restoration to conservation [post peat extraction] is you're taking land that had an economic value to the community as a whole, not just to the owner, to the community as a whole ... in so much as the revenue that it generates, the multipliers out there in the wider economy are much greater ... And then you're going to a conservation after use, a restoration, which has a value to society that can be monetised, but it's not a monetary value ... And what you've seen in this area is you've taken a big chunk of land out of a productive land use, ... you've taken a big chunk of land out of

something that generated revenues for the local community ... and put it into something that has very limited revenue generation (P47, PAM).

This argument is very similar to that raised in expert interviews which questioned if and how the ecotourism associated with conservation might be able to replace the employment and incomes generated by agriculture.

Not unrelated to this, and again echoing themes from the expert interviews, Participant 30 (LAM) highlighted that the decline of the peat industry and a corresponding (though unrelated) change in farming has resulted in significant changes to the rural community:

in your villages and that, your people and your families worked, if they weren't on the farms, they were in the peat works, and very often they would come out and help the farms in the evenings after they'd been doing the peat all day. So, all that's changed really, people have lost the connection with the land around and the social aspect of it I suppose has changed.

While these changes are not caused by the Avalon Marshes, Participant 40 (CAM) also recognised the threat facing rural communities and acknowledged that rewilding could contribute to it, seeing this as creating a complex boundary and therefore one which was difficult to negotiate, especially with regard to striking a balance between rewilding's objectives and the needs of people:

the confounding factor [to rewilding a larger proportion of the Somerset Levels and Moors] would be the fact that people depend on that landscape for all sorts of livelihoods and that people live in that landscape so if you were too successful in connecting up all the water connections between different bits of that landscape you might find it affected people's houses somewhat.

Participant 40 (CAM) is not suggesting that this should be done, in fact she is citing concern for rural residents as a reason for *not* proceeding with more ambitious rewilding, and her comments are reminiscent of those made by Participant 11 (LE) during the expert interviews, and also of the literature, which

warns of rewilding's potential to displace people from the landscape (Höchtel, Lehringer and Konold, 2005; Navarro and Pereira, 2012; Gammon, 2018). While rewilding in the Avalon Marshes is not *currently* responsible for the disruption of rural communities (which are being affected by changes to the agricultural and peat industries precipitated by factors other than rewilding), Participant 40 (CAM) highlights that it could *become* responsible if it was conducted on a larger scale.

The fact that the Avalon Marshes have evolved from the decline of the peat industry is an inescapable fact and one which was often highlighted by participants e.g. Participants 15 (CAM), 25 (PAM), 28 (PAM), 32 (CAM). In the case of the peat / compost producers there appeared to be a suggestion that the peat industry deserved credit for this or, perhaps, that because the Avalon Marshes now exist on what was peat extraction land, this made the Avalon Marshes beholden to the peat industry, and even that their continued existence depended on the sufferance of the peat industry:

they say, 'oh the Avalon Marshes,' but they've never once said what brought 'em about, and that's what they don't realise, if that land had been never dug for peat, they wouldn't be there, and I'm sure if we'd said, 'oh we're going to take 'em away,' they wouldn't like it (P28, PAM).

This participant placed emphasis on the peat industry being a precursor to the Avalon Marshes as if it was a necessity for their creation. He went on to assign some of the credit for the recolonization of the area by wildlife to the peat industry as a defensive strategy against those whom he says, claim peat extraction is 'ruining the area':

when people say, 'oh you're ruining the area by peat extraction,' I think they're totally wrong. They've got to make a decision: do they want wildlife here or don't they? And if they don't want wildlife well no peat extraction but if they want wildlife, which there is, that's how the wildlife come, by the peat extraction ... if we hadn't extracted the peat, the wildlife wouldn't be there. So, I think they're totally wrong when they say, 'when you dig the peat, you ruin the area' (P28, PAM).

Participant 26 (PAM) made a related, though less contentious, point when he credited the peat industry with creating a 'beautiful, beautiful area' part of which he attributed to the creation and modification of the drainage waterways:

this river wouldn't be here if it wasn't for the original peat diggers that did burning blocks, you would just have the main river that flows through Glastonbury and Street, the river Brue, and then that disappearing down to Highbridge and into the sea. But now we have this massive water way, water area, on the back of the peat diggers.

The 'river' Participant 26 (PAM) is referring to is the rather unfortunately named South Drain and is a canal rather than a river, since, as he identifies, it was created by human processes. The banks of the South Drain were the route of the walking interview with this participant (see Figure 6.11) and Figure 6.12 is a photograph of the area depicting the beauty which this participant recognises. Matless (2014) identifies a similar phenomenon with regard to the Norfolk Broads which, like the Avalon Marshes, have a history of peat digging and which are also recognised for their beauty. Matless cites an evocative article from a Norfolk newspaper from 1953 which sums up the juxtaposition of the artificiality and the beauty of these landscapes, 'so seemly are they in our landscape that it is with something like a shock that one learns how much the great majority owe to man's handiwork; the beauty is *artificial* rather than *natural*' (2014, p. 47 emphasis added). This quote raises an interesting question with regard to rewilding and the way landscapes and nature are valued and considered authentic, seeming as it does to suggest that the artificiality diminishes the beauty in some way. Rewilding, with its 'creation' of nature will therefore have to negotiate a balance between the artificial and the natural and renegotiate the way that nature is valued since, if nature is created (rather than developing via 'natural processes') it may not be considered 'authentic' and may therefore be valued differently (Katz, 1998).

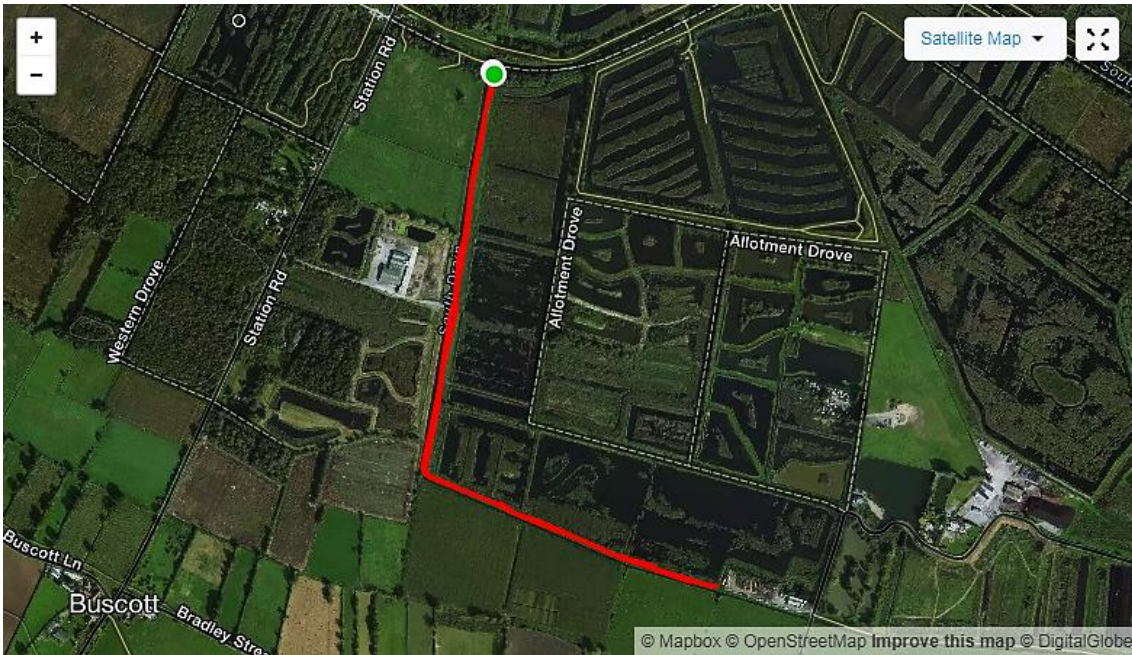


Figure 6.11: Walking interview with P26 (PAM) near Ham Wall, Avalon Marshes (source Mapbox, <https://www.mapbox.com/>, Maxar, <https://www.maxar.com/>, OpenStreetMap, <https://www.openstreetmap.org/>, open source).



Figure 6.12: Mute swans flying over the South Drain near Ham Wall, Avalon Marshes (photograph by the author).

Irrespective of its future, the peat industry is, for the time being, continuing in the Avalon Marshes area and, in some respects, rewilding and peat extraction can coexist harmoniously. One participant emphasised the way in which rewilding sites exist adjacent to peat extraction land:

where we're sat right now [Westhay Moor], not 100 yards over to the left is a peat works, where they are still digging peat, and as you cycled round and along the road there was an area that's just coming to the end of peat digging. So, straight away you've got that within the landscape that we are in. So, you have peat digging still going on, as it will do for the next twenty years or so (P15, CAM).

Another participant stressed that peat / compost production was not necessarily detrimental to, or exclusionary of, wildlife given how well the bird life integrated into his factory and even machinery:

we have barn owls in the factory, we have barn swallows in the factory, they're in the building, even in our digger – we've had starlings nesting actually in the engine compartment, and we're still using it. The mum's flying in and out to feed the young. They like us, we work well with them (P26, PAM).

This utilisation of human infrastructure by birds is an example of the companion species of rewilding negotiating their place in the landscape with humans and an illustration of the agency of the birds of the Avalon Marshes in doing so.

Participants expressed a desire for this coexistence between humans and nature to continue, and for *peat extraction* to be allowed to continue, particularly with regard to providing livelihoods which they saw as otherwise excluded by rewilding, or conservation generally:

I think that if more planning permission was granted for the excavation of peat on certain land where it wasn't high conservation value, then at the end of the day, when the peat land was dug out, it could then be turned over to Natural England and so it could then again be turned back for wildlife purposes. I don't think there'd be a problem on that, there certainly wouldn't be a problem on that, we'd



be willing to do that. We were offered twelve acres of land right next to our workings six months ago. We had no hope of getting planning permission on it. It used to be a digging zone, it's right in the middle of the digging zone. We would willingly give that land back when it was dug out to Natural England. (P25, PAM).

Allowing such continued coexistence was seen as providing a balance between the needs of people and the needs of wildlife, something which several participants considered was currently lacking. This was exemplified by comments from Participant 27 (PAM) when he said, 'the conservationists, they just take it too far, there's no balance left, I'm all for conservation and I love wildlife but also people need to make a living as well.' This balance is perhaps one of the most difficult boundaries for rewilding to negotiate when encountering, and countering, consumptive land uses, especially in negotiating attitudes to land and resources, management of land and resources, and the needs of people to make a living.

Similar to the way in which interviews with experts identified that land which was not being used for productive farming was viewed as 'wasted' (e.g. P8, EE, P9, EE, P10, Jeeves (2006) and Ayres and Wynne Jones (2014)), so peat / compost producers in the Avalon Marshes saw leaving peat in the ground as wasteful e.g. 'it's a pity it's all wasted, left, really' (P28, PAM) and 'there's been all sorts of talk about banning the use of peat, but that's silly, because we've got an acreage that's all been started, and, if we were suddenly confronted with a ban, we'd have this land that's partly used, and then we'd just have a useless, half worked out, piece of land' (P27, PAM). These views run counter to broader public attitudes, which have seen a decline in the public acceptability of peat as a growing medium and concern over the continued use of this resource (Alexander *et al.*, 2008; Alexander and Williams, 2012). This attitude to peat use mirrors those regarding the exploitation of carbon-based resources more broadly (e.g. coal and oil) which have also experienced a major shift in terms of their acceptability (Spence *et al.*, 2010; Pidgeon and Demski, 2012).

This, and the other findings discussed in relation to peat extraction, contribute significantly to understandings of rewilding's negotiation with rural land use since the majority of such literature focuses on the interface between rewilding and agriculture. My findings illustrate that while there are some

similarities to the interface with agriculture, peat extraction also presents a unique set of boundaries for rewilding to negotiate and that negotiations must therefore be specifically tailored to peat extraction: it is not possible, or sufficient, to simply apply negotiation methods developed in relation to agriculture to the negotiation of peat extraction. Some of the unique aspects of peat extraction present opportunities for, rather than constraints to, rewilding and this can form a major part of any negotiations. I now turn to interpretations and perceptions of rewilding since they play a major part in any such negotiations.

## **6.4 Rewilding of the Avalon Marshes**

### **6.4.1 Interpretation and praxis of rewilding in the Avalon Marshes**

In discussing the Avalon Marshes with respect to rewilding it should be made explicit that the Avalon Marshes do not self-identify as rewilding. They do however, to at least some degree, exhibit all the other factors<sup>108</sup> which I have identified as conferring ‘family resemblance’ to rewilding (Wittgenstein, 1968): they operate at a large scale (1500 hectares), they seek to increase biodiversity, there is a reduction in human intervention, there is a (corresponding) increase in natural autonomy, and there is restoration of ecological functioning. In addition to this, the Avalon Marshes are described as rewilding by those external to the project (e.g. Moss, 2016; Taylor, 2017; Macdonald, 2019) including one of the experts interviewed during the preliminary round of interviews who said ‘I’d be interested to see if the RSPB think Ham Wall is an example of rewilding. I would say it is but then I take rewilding in a very wide sense (P7, AJE)’. What is particularly interesting about Participant 7’s (AJE) comment is first that he (correctly) identifies that the Avalon Marshes may not self-identify as rewilding, and second that he acknowledges that his own view of rewilding interprets the term in a ‘wide sense’ – an implicit acknowledgement that the RSPB (which manages Ham Wall) and the other conservation organisations involved in the Avalon Marshes more generally may have a narrower interpretation than this.

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<sup>108</sup> These factors are i. large scale, ii. increase in biodiversity, iii, reduction of human intervention / management, iv. increase in other than human / natural autonomy / agency, v. increase in ecological functioning / resilience / natural processes, and vi. self-identification as rewilding (see Chapter 4).

Exploring the Avalon Marshes' reasons for not employing the term rewilding therefore became highly pertinent to this research. Several participants explicitly mentioned that they would not describe the Avalon Marshes as rewilding (e.g. P27, PAM, P30, LAM, P31, CAM, P40, CAM), given the high level of management occurring in the Marshes. Another participant however gave a more nuanced answer which pointed to the complexity associated with rewilding as a concept saying, 'the Avalon Marshes ... isn't a rewilding scheme but essentially that's what's happened here – wildlife is thriving isn't it ... because it's a big landscape, all joined up and connected, it's doing really well' (P32, CAM). This participant also offered an alternative reason, other than levels of human intervention, as to why the Avalon Marshes does not self-identify as rewilding, saying that the Marshes were 'around a long time before rewilding was made popular as a concept' and that 'it would have been probably insincere to try and cash in on that' (P32, CAM). In particular he emphasised the fact that rewilding is a new term for a concept that pre-dated it (landscape scale restoration), claiming that in the Avalon Marshes, 'the concepts behind it [rewilding] about restoring and creating habitat and big landscapes for wildlife, that was happening, the concept was there already so I think rewilding is a new term for something that's already been happening' (P32, CAM). These comments support findings in the literature which suggest that rewilding is something of a 'rebranding' of what might once have been called ecological restoration (Murray, 2017).

Given the conservation effort to transform the Avalon Marshes from the post-industrial landscape of peat extraction to wildlife habitat, Participant 32's (CAM) description of them as landscape scale restoration and therefore, arguably, rewilding seems apposite. This is, in some ways, echoed by Participant 40 (CAM) although testimony from this participant was particularly contradictory. The participant emphasised that the beauty of rewilding as a term is that it can be interpreted in different ways, that people can take 'ownership' of it and that it should be viewed as a continuum, even to the extent that people can say 'I've rewilded my garden' (P40, CAM). Seemingly contradictorily, she then went on to state that she would not classify the Avalon Marshes as rewilding on account of the management carried out there, even going so far as to say that they are 'a long way' from rewilding. (P40, CAM). Then, in another self-contradiction she said that:

the wilding bit of it [the Avalon Marshes] is that most of the large scale habitats in the Avalon Marshes reserves are old peat diggings that have been restored, where the initial restoration was directed towards conservation outcomes and they have been restored to a more or a less defined version of creating wildlife habitats (P40, CAM).

The difficulty that this participant has in defining rewilding and, consequently, in determining whether or not the Avalon Marshes are a case of rewilding exemplifies the debate over the term's meaning (Prior and Brady, 2017; Hayward *et al.*, 2019), the plasticity of the term (Jørgensen, 2014), and also the boundary work (Gieryn, 1983) which is done by practitioners in order demarcate what is and what is not rewilding.

This idea of active habitat creation as an early phase of a rewilding project, described by Participant 40 (CAM) is aligned to ideas of 'active rewilding' (Carver, 2016a; Sandom *et al.*, 2018) and contributes to situating the Avalon Marshes as 'culture led, active nature' in the typology of rewilding set out in Chapter 4. In some respects however the Avalon Marshes also display elements of 'passive rewilding' (Navarro and Pereira, 2012; Carver, 2016a; Corlett, 2016; Nogués-Bravo *et al.*, 2016; Sandom *et al.*, 2018), particularly with respect to the autonomous (re)introductions that have occurred based on 'the evolutionary responses of species' (Gillson, Ladle and Araújo, 2011). This was mentioned by several participants who acknowledged the agency of the birds in returning to the area when they spoke of birds returning to the area of 'their own accord', finding 'their own way here' and 'returning by themselves' e.g. Participants 14 (CAM), P15 (CAM), P28 (PAM), and P32 (CAM). This 'auto-rewilding' (Tsing, 2017; Ward, 2020) illustrates the way in which rewilding is constituted as much by its companion species as it is by humans.

In terms of how rewilding is conducted in the Avalon Marshes, there was certainly a period of highly interventionist activity in the early stages of the project where land was acquired and modified. In the case of Ham Wall this involved the hand planting of large numbers of reeds in worked out peat voids to create reed beds as wildlife (particularly *birdlife*) habitat. In the case of Shapwick Moor the intervention is the (attempted and ongoing) reduction in soil nutrients and

rewetting of peat to aid the conversion of land which has been intensively farmed. While in many places this first phase of intensive activity has ceased, or at least decreased, every reserve of the Avalon Marshes continues to be managed to some degree, in a slow, ongoing and complex negotiation with land and water as illustrated in a comment by Participant 14a (CAM):

to bring this back to a wet site is quite complicated, but we're slowly doing it now, we're damming ditches, cutting land drains, digging scrapes, but it's a very expensive and slow process ... it's still going to take many years.

What became increasingly apparent from comments such as this is that the landscapes, perhaps most especially the reed beds, of the Marshes, are a 'relational achievement' (Whatmore, 1999) in the creation of place, between the creative agencies of the peat soil, water, reeds, birds, humans and technology<sup>109</sup>. The reeds have what Cloke and Jones (2001) would call a 'unique creative ability' to form marshes in negotiation with water, which humans and birds exploit in turn – the humans exploiting the ability of the reeds and the birds exploiting the resultant marshland.

Cloke and Jones (2001) also speak of the relational achievements which occur *between* agents as a consequence of the way in which the 'innate characteristics' of one agent result in a co-dependent shaping of and by other agents. In the case of the Avalon Marshes, the peat soil provides an excellent example of this. The affordances of peat as fuel and compost has shaped the lives of the people in the area – providing work 'digging' the peat, shaping digging practises and (increasingly mechanised) digging technology. Digging has, in turn, shaped the peat – drying it, causing it to contract and sink, and leaving peat shaped voids in the landscape where the peat used to be. In turn the embargo on the issuing of further planning permission to extract peat has left a void in the landscape where the peat *industry* used to be, so that there is only a remnant

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<sup>109</sup> I am borrowing here from Cloke and Jones (2001) who adopted Whatmore's (1999) interpretation of landscape as being the co-creation of place between multiple agencies to describe orchards which, (co)incidentally, were in Somerset and therefore geographically very close to the Avalon Marshes.

peat industry and, in many places, peat industry shaped holes in the landscape (*sensu* Roy, 1997)<sup>110</sup>. This void (or vacuum) has, in turn, been filled by wildlife, as water, reeds, birds and people have worked together to co-create and shape the marshes, each exerting their own agency. This agency was seen as particularly profound in the case of water, with Participant 40 (CAM) saying that in the case of wetland restoration ‘water does a lot of the work for you’. In this way humans are making water a proxy, similar to the way in which they make companion species proxies for them in rewilding / conservation projects. Participant 7 (AJE) made a related point saying that ‘wetlands are ... very quick to do, just add water ... and within five years you have a nature reserve’. This comment highlights the agency of water as a catalyst and also its alchemy – its ability to transform degraded landscape into wetland habitat. The next section examines how this transformation is viewed by stakeholders.

#### **6.4.2 Perception and reception of rewilding in the Avalon Marshes**

As well as understanding how rewilding is interpreted and conducted by practitioners, it is paramount to this research to understand how stakeholders perceive and receive the rewilding of the Avalon Marshes. It was difficult however for participants, and hence for this research, to disentangle rewilding as a discrete issue from a plethora of other environmental concerns in the area including: i. the embargo on new permissions to extract peat, ii. the original establishment of the nature reserves which now constitute the Avalon Marshes, iii. the designation of land as sites of special scientific interest, iv. water management (particularly changes to dredging protocols), and v. government payments to farmers in relation to environmentally sensitive farming. Nonetheless, participants did identify a general, overall change in attitudes towards these concerns and a subsequent shift in the way in which they are negotiated.

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<sup>110</sup> Roy's (1997) novel *The God of Small Things* contained the conceit that there is no such thing as black cats, ‘only black cat shaped holes in the universe’.

For example, practitioners compared current negotiations over conservation concerns to the controversies which have occurred in relation to these issues in the past<sup>111</sup>, saying that there is ‘a lot less controversy nowadays ... [because] there's more realisation that things are going to change, and sustainability is a much more important issue for everyone. So ... I think there's generally more co-operation’ (P48, AAM). Stakeholders however spoke of what is perhaps best summarised as a lack of balance – their perception was that land management, and regulations around land management, had moved too far in favour of conservation (including rewilding) at the expense of other, productive, land uses. ‘Balance’ is a recurring theme in conservation debates, especially when human and other-than-human interests are opposed. Cassidy (2019) identifies it in the debate concerning badgers and bovine tuberculosis for example where farmers see their role as stewards in maintaining ‘natural balance’ as being hampered by ‘overly strict legislation’. In the case of the Avalon Marshes, Participant 25 (PAM) saw the lack of balance as making conservationists / conservation organisations ‘much harder to deal with’ and suggested that increased consideration, or preference, was being given to conservation over other concerns, saying ‘it's just conservation, conservation, conservation all the time. Even the land what we've got, we can't even make a fishing lake out of it for fishing, it's got to be for conservation. For recreational use, they've even stopped that<sup>112</sup>. This point was echoed by Participant 30 (LAM) who said ‘I think conservation has definitely got more importance than it used to and it's definitely a much bigger area than it always was ... so that just changes the impact a little bit’. From the practitioner perspective then, negotiations regarding conservation, and by extension rewilding, have got easier because stakeholders have become

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<sup>111</sup> The controversies referred to were those mentioned earlier in this chapter which occurred in the 17th century in relation to the drainage of the marshes and the 1980s in relation to the establishment of sites of special scientific interest.

<sup>112</sup> The point made by Participant 25 (PAM) reveals the practical manifestation of guidance from MHCLG, as adopted by SCC, regarding the restoration and aftercare of mineral extraction sites which states that restoration and aftercare ‘should use every opportunity to enhance the environmental value of sites to contribute to the biodiversity of the County or, where appropriate, to create recreational opportunities’ (SCC, 2013). SCC appears to have interpreted this as meaning that preference should be given to the restoration of biodiversity and the natural environment over recreational opportunities hence the policy of prioritising conservation afteruse over recreational afteruse which Participant 25 (PAM) was recognising and objecting to.

more accepting of the importance of protecting the environment. By contrast, from the stakeholder point of view negotiations have got harder because greater weight is given to conservation concerns.

Stakeholders perceived the increase in consideration being given to conservation identified by Participants 25 (PAM) and 30 (LAM) as leading to a shift in the balance, or an *unbalancing*, of the power between it and other rural land uses e.g. 'I don't think they've got the balance right, not at all' (P28, PAM), 'the balance is going the other way' (P30, LAM), and 'we realise the balance is tipping the wrong way' (P49, FAM). These last two comments are particularly interesting as they reveal viewpoints which would appear to privilege farming and fishing respectively over nature and conservation / rewilding and suggest that the 'balance' used to be in favour of farming and fishing. This perception is reflected in the literature with McEachern (1992) tracing it back to overproduction in European agriculture in the 1980s which she argues afforded new 'possibilities for conservation'. Prior to that, she suggests, even National Parks had to proceed 'sensitively' in negotiations with agriculture due to their 'limited powers' (McEachern, 1992). She contrasts this with the significant power and influence of farmers and their lobby groups (the National Farmers Union (NFU) and the Country Landowners' Association (CLA)) and suggests that this power had previously endured, even in the face of environmental concerns (McEachern, 1992). Appropriately, the example she gives of this is from the Somerset Levels where she says 'particularly influential farmers [we]re unwilling to relinquish power and control' (McEachern, 1992, p. 161) – perhaps further evidence of the intractable nature of Somerset residents mentioned earlier. Wilson and Hart (2001) identify a later shift in farmer attitudes towards environmentally sensitive farming but note that this is in reaction to policy rather than a proactive step, and do not reveal whether, or to what extent, this shift demonstrates an embracing of the underlying ideals of environmentally sensitive farming or is merely a shift made on pragmatic grounds. More recently, however, Lennox *et al.* (2012) have identified that changes in conservation policy have reduced landowner 'ability to leverage' in negotiations with conservation, which underpins the findings of this research – that conservation is becoming more 'successful' (or at least more powerful) in negotiating its boundaries with other land uses and has increased its influence in these negotiations in relation to other parties (e.g. farming and peat production).



Before moving on to discuss other perceptions of rewilding, the walking interview with Participant 49 (FAM) should be mentioned. This was slightly different from the other walking interviews in that it took place at Burtle Fishing Lakes rather than at the Avalon Marshes (see Figure 6.13) although the lakes are less than a mile, as the bittern flies, from the Avalon Marshes. As highlighted above, Participant 49 (FAM) spoke of the balance (or *unbalance*) between conservation and, in his case, fishing and voiced concern over the impact of wildlife on the fishing lakes, particularly that of predators. He highlighted the steps taken to limit this impact, saying that ‘the lakes have got otter fences to keep them out’ (see Figure 6.14) but lamented the inability to control wildlife using lethal force and argued that fish losses to wildlife seemed to be publicly acceptable in a way that other stock losses would not be:

it seems that people don't value fish as much as ... you know if there was a predator and it was killing animals all the time, like something killing sheep, people would do something about it. But fish ... because they're not nice, cuddly things with long eyelashes, they're not valued so much, I don't think (P49, FAM).

This comment raises an interesting point about how we value the companion species of rewilding, something which was also a concern for other participants. It should also be noted that Participant 49 (FAM) also mentioned the economic value of fish, with some of the larger fish being worth approximately £600. Their loss to predators would therefore have a significant financial impact on the angling industry and would be difficult, if not impossible, to compensate for in the way that compensation programmes are sometimes introduced to compensate farmers for the loss of livestock to (re)introduced predators (see for example Stohr, 2012).



Figure 6.13: Walking interview with P49 (FAM) at Burtle Fishing Lakes, near Avalon Marshes (source Mapbox, <https://www.mapbox.com/>, Maxar, <https://www.maxar.com/>, OpenStreetMap, <https://www.openstreetmap.org/>, open source).



Figure 6.14: Otter exclusion fence and warning sign at Burtle Fishing Lakes, near Avalon Marshes (photograph by the author).

The concern regarding the intrinsic value of species was evident when participants spoke of the changes in the species present in the Avalon Marshes landscape. There was a perception that the rewilding hadn't necessarily been good for all species, with participants suggesting that certain species (e.g. barn owls and ground nesting birds) had disappeared from the landscape, leading them to view rewilding somewhat negatively. Participant 30 (LAM) for example suggested that the landscape of rewilding, particularly the wetter landscape, does not suit species which were there previously:

when the water levels are kept higher in the spring, the land lies wetter, your ground nesting birds won't nest, birds don't nest in water. That land, it was never wet, or not as wet for as long as it is now, it tended to be drier. So, I think that has an impact, or a big impact on certain bird life.

He even went on to say that 'vulnerable' species in particular had suffered, describing nature as 'cruel': 'nature is a cruel thing really, survival of the fittest, and when certain animals move in and they have a free rein your vulnerable ones are going to go, and unfortunately I think that's what's happened' (P30, LAM). The language of this comment reveals a negative view of rewilding in which vulnerable species are lost to cruel nature without the managing hand of man to keep it in check. This view is supported by Participant 25 (PAM) who talks about species being lost from the landscape and an overall decline in biodiversity despite an increase in bioabundance,

You don't see many barn owls about because when it's all flooded and it's all wet there's no mice for the barn owls to feed on ... there was then [before the rewilding of the Avalon Marshes] more of a diversity of wildlife than what there is now. There's a lot more wildlife now but not the diversity.

These comments reflect criticism of rewilding in the literature which argues that rewilding will result in biodiversity loss in the medium and long term and that rare species will be particularly at risk (Navarro and Pereira, 2012; Lasanta, Nadal-Romero and Arnáez, 2015; Sandom *et al.*, 2018).

As with attitudinal data relating to landscapes, interview information regarding attitudes to rewilding in the Avalon Marshes was complemented with information gathered via visitor questionnaires. When asked whether they considered the conservation approach at the Avalon Marshes to be rewilding, 50 respondents said 'yes' while 29 said 'no' (21 respondents did not answer this question). Similarly to interview participants, questionnaire respondents gave levels of management as the main reason for not considering the Avalon Marshes rewilding, with a number of respondents suggesting that the Avalon Marshes are simply 'conservation' rather than rewilding. Interestingly, illustrating the conflation of rewilding with reintroduction, one respondent indicated that they did not consider the Avalon Marshes to be rewilding because 'species are not being introduced' while another respondent *did* consider the Marshes to be rewilding based on the 'assumption some new species have being [sic] introduced'. This finding supports other research which has shown that rewilding and reintroduction are often conflated in the public imagination (Townsend, 2016; Deary and Warren, 2018).

Other respondents who considered the Avalon Marshes to be rewilding did so predominantly because the Marshes involved the 'restoration' or 'creation' of 'habitat', or the restoration of a 'natural', 'older' or 'original' environment. Of these participants, a number mentioned that the Avalon Marshes 'just' met the definition of rewilding or that 'it sort of is [rewilding] to a degree ... but there is distinctly more management of the environment here than I would really associate with full on 'rewilding''. These comments illustrate both the many 'shades' of rewilding (Jepson and Schepers, 2016) and also that that if the Avalon Marshes *is* thought to be on the spectrum of rewilding, it is considered to be towards the lower end of the scale. Also, very interestingly, one respondent explicitly mentioned intervention as being a reason *for* considering the Avalon Marshes to be rewilding rather than, the more general view, of this being a reason to consider it *not* rewilding, saying 'the area at RSPB Ham Wall, although appearing naturally formed, was developed and planted by manpower'. This comment clearly links rewilding with ideas of habitat restoration or (*re*)creation in areas where landscape has been degraded (e.g. Corlett, 2016; Gammon, 2018), or with the concept of *active* rewilding, which takes an interventionist approach to restoration (Carver, 2016a; Sandom *et al.*, 2018). It also hints at the 'createdness' of

rewilding sites, as opposed to the 'authenticity' of those which have developed via 'natural processes' (Katz, 1998).

Of the 21 respondents who did not answer the question as to whether the Avalon Marshes is an example of rewilding, nineteen explicitly stated that this was because they did not know enough either about what was being done at the Avalon Marshes or about the past and present landscapes of the Marshes. It may perhaps have been useful to include the option for respondents to indicate that they did not know the answer to this question although this appears to have been captured by respondents leaving the 'yes' or 'no' boxes empty and indicating that they 'did not know' in the second part of the question where they were asked to explain why they had given the answer yes or no. Indeed, *not* including the option of 'do not know' may have encouraged people to form a judgment regarding the conservation activity at the Avalon Marshes rather than 'sitting on the fence'.

Respondents were next asked if they 'like[d] the way the landscape is being managed at the Avalon Marshes' with 84 answering 'yes', one answering 'no' and fifteen not giving an answer. While the answer to this question indicates that the respondents were overwhelmingly in favour of the conservation approach at the Avalon Marshes it is important to mention two points. First, all the respondents had chosen to visit the Marshes and were presumably unlikely to do so unless they liked the landscape and appreciated its condition. Second, because all bar one respondent indicated that they liked the management at the Avalon Marshes it was not possible to draw any distinctions between the attitudes and preference of those who considered the management to be rewilding and those who did not. A subsequent question was intended to tease out this information more subtly by asking respondents what they thought 'should happen in relation to 'rewilding' at the Avalon Marshes'. Unfortunately, a flaw was identified in this question which gave participants the options of: i. 'the landscape should go back to how it was before', ii. 'the landscape should stay as it is now', iii. 'the landscape should get a little bit wilder', or iv. 'the landscape should get a lot wilder'. The first option, 'the landscape should go back to how it was before', was intended to be interpreted as meaning that the landscape should go back to how it was before the rewilding started. Unfortunately, when analysing the answers to this question in conjunction with other answers from the same



respondents, it became apparent that some respondents had interpreted this option to mean that the landscape should go back to some kind of 'pristine' or pre-human state. The responses to this question must therefore be treated with caution but it seems safe to conclude that the majority of respondents (at least 65 of the 91 respondents who answered this question) thought that the landscape should get either a 'little bit' or a 'lot' wilder (see Figure 6.15 for all responses to this question). This would appear to indicate a generally sympathetic attitude towards rewilding of the Avalon Marshes by those who visit them.

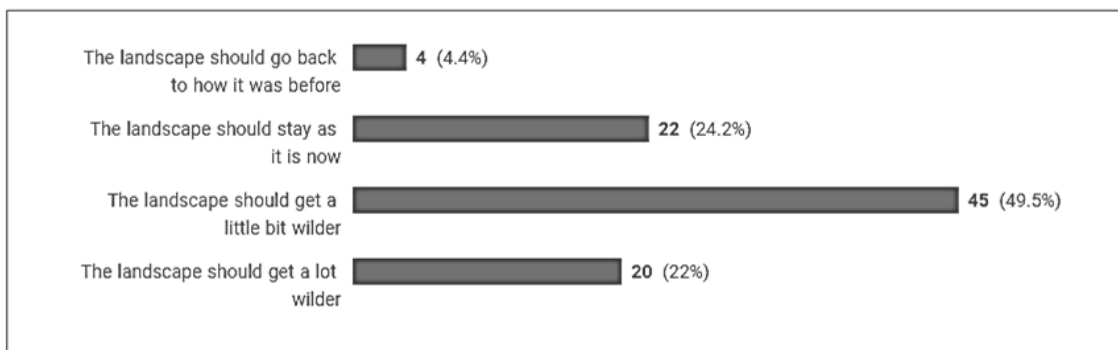


Figure 6.15: Visitor questionnaire responses to the question 'What do you think should happen in relation to 'rewilding' at the Avalon Marshes?'

## 6.5 Summary

This chapter has explored the landscapes of the Avalon Marshes, including the real, the historic, the mythical and the subterranean. Soil and water are both extremely important in the Avalon Marshes and the *waterscape* of the Marshes will be considered in more detail in Chapter 8. The peat soil, as discussed in this chapter, is an integral part of the Avalon Marshes – forming the literal foundations of the landscape and also providing a more figurative foundation for the Avalon Marshes as they have evolved in the places and spaces where the peat industry used to be. Negotiating this position for itself is not easy for rewilding in the Avalon Marshes, it must compete in people's minds with what the peat industry has been able to offer and it must do so in a culture which has a history of staunch opposition to changes in the landscape and the way it is managed. Agriculture is also an important land use and source of income in the Avalon Marshes, despite the land being marginal and difficult to farm. This means that rewilding in the Avalon Marshes must negotiate with two other, competing forms of land use which both present unique challenges but also opportunities.

Interviews with practitioners and stakeholders revealed similarly high levels of confusion over the term rewilding as was seen in expert interviews and in the literature. Considerable resentment towards rewilding was expressed in stakeholder interviews, with participants expressing frustration at what they saw as an imbalance between the needs of productive land use (in this case farming and peat production) and the needs of conservation. Negotiating its interface with farming and peat production is complex challenge for rewilding and this will be explored further in Chapter 8 in conjunction with the findings from Wild Ennerdale which are explored in the following chapter.

## Chapter 7: Wild Ennerdale

... oft, when on my couch I lie  
In vacant or in pensive mood,  
They flash upon that inward eye  
Which is the bliss of solitude;  
And then my heart with pleasure fills,  
And dances with the daffodils.  
(Wordsworth, [1807] 2016, p. 84).

‘a sort of national property, in which every man has a right and interest who has an eye to perceive and a heart to enjoy’ (Wordsworth, [1810] 2004, p. 93).

### 7.1 Outline

This chapter presents findings and discussion relating to the second of the two field sites for this research – Wild Ennerdale. It introduces the landscapes of Wild Ennerdale and explores the themes which emerged during analysis of eighteen interviews with stakeholders and practitioners of rewilding in Wild Ennerdale. As with the Avalon Marshes, participants were recruited via purposive sampling and chain referral, initially approaching members of the Wild Ennerdale Partnership and then using chain referral and further purposive sampling to recruit other practitioners and key stakeholders. As before, the preferred data collection method was the walking interview and again, where this was not possible, sedentary interviews were substituted. Data obtained during interviews were supplemented with data from an online visitor questionnaire which was promoted by a local café, on notice boards and social media accounts: 74 responses were obtained. All participants were asked to discuss how they valued the landscapes of Wild Ennerdale, how the landscapes of Wild Ennerdale presented boundaries to rewilding, and how those boundaries were negotiated. With respect to rewilding, practitioners were asked to discuss how they interpreted and conducted rewilding while stakeholders were asked to discuss how they perceived rewilding. The themes in this chapter follow from those identified in expert interviews and, together with the findings of the preceding chapter, will be built upon in the next chapter in a cross-case analysis of both field sites.



## 7.2 The landscapes and stakeholders of Wild Ennerdale

### 7.2.1 Encountering the landscapes of Wild Ennerdale



Figure 7.1: View over Ennerdale Water from Red Pike (photograph by the author).

Wild Ennerdale reveals itself only slowly, glimpses of its fells are caught and lost with the rises and falls of the road as the driver approaches, Ennerdale Water, the valley's eponymous lake, remains hidden until the last moment when it and the visitor emerge from the trees simultaneously, and its most famous peaks, Pillar Rock, Haystacks and Great Gable, reveal themselves only to the walker who ventures into the upper valley. On encountering Wild Ennerdale from the Bleach Green entrance, the visitor is presented with a mix of the 'artificial' and the 'natural'. Leaving the metalled car park behind, the walker soon reaches Ennerdale Water, lapping against its man-made weir and revetments. There is a choice of paths around the lake – the way to the left is a wide, well-formed track which follows the lake shore around to the Bowness Knott entrance where the visitor can join the forest road all the way to the head of the lake. The way to the right offers the walker a very different journey: starting gently enough through a grassy meadow, the trail quickly deteriorates to a single file track before petering out altogether as it, and the walker, scramble up and over Angler's Crag. The

route becomes increasingly entangled with nature as it continues towards the head of the lake with the 'path' often indistinguishable from the streams that run beside, over and sometimes along it. Whichever way is chosen, the routes converge on the banks of the River Liza, the river which feeds Ennerdale Water. The Liza meanders and braids its way through the valley, untrammelled by any human hand. Following the Liza leads the visitor further from 'civilization' and on into the upper valley where the fells climb higher and the plantation conifers start to give way, either to moorland or to deciduous saplings, native to the valley but introduced by human agency. This entanglement of the natural and the artificial is characteristic of Wild Ennerdale, its rewilding seeking to reduce human intervention yet using humans to catalyse the process of 'natural' regeneration.

Wild Ennerdale is synonymous, but not quite homologous, with the Ennerdale Valley, a valley in the Lake District National Park in Cumbria, north west England (see Figure 7.2 for a map of Wild Ennerdale and its boundaries). Ennerdale Valley is less than 50 miles from the Scottish border at Gretna Green and barely 10 miles from the banks of the Solway Firth which separates Cumbria from Dumfries and Galloway. Ennerdale Water has been described as the 'remotest' of the Lake District lakes (Visit Cumbria, 2019), a relative term which takes the urban centres of England's south east as its reference point. The residents of the west Cumbrian town of Whitehaven twelve miles away could justifiably disagree with the application of the term – Ennerdale is their 'local' lake (P18b, WWE), with lifelong residents of the area being intimately familiar with the landscapes of the valley. This was exemplified by the walking interview with Participants 18a and b (WWE) who can name, and have climbed, all the fells of the Ennerdale Valley. During the course of their walking interview, which covered the short distance from the Bleach Green carpark to the western edge of Ennerdale Water (see Figure 7.3 for a map of the interview), they pointed out and named the fells, including Banna fell, the first fell Participant 18a (WWE) climbed (see Figure 7.4). Nonetheless, Ennerdale Water is the most westerly of the lakes and the only one without a road running along or around it. In addition, its village, Ennerdale Bridge, is a mile from the entrance to the valley, meaning that it 'isn't where you would expect it to be within the valley' (P36, LWE) as compared to other Lake District valleys and villages where the villages are often nestled within the valleys themselves e.g. Buttermere. Thus, while the valley can

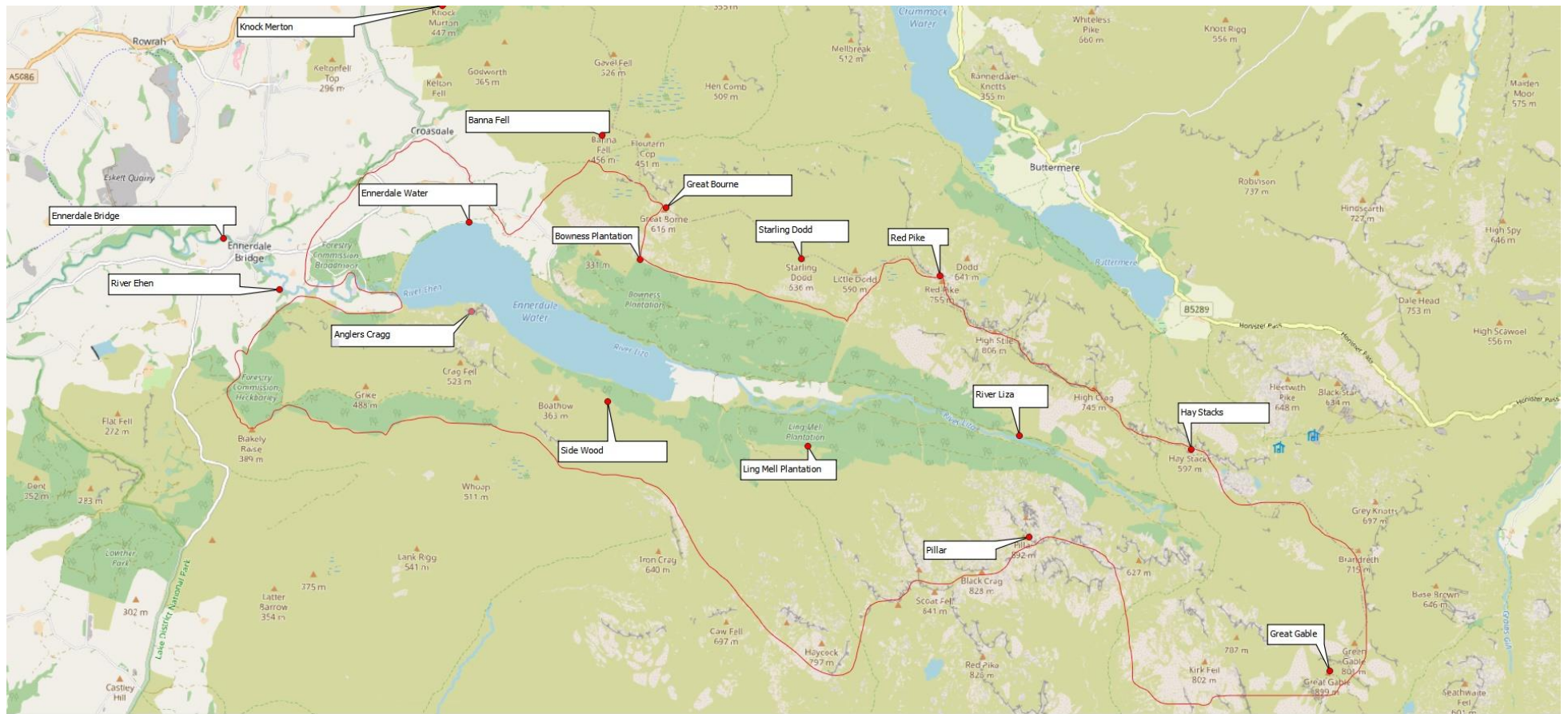


Figure 7.2: Wild Ennerdale Moor (source OpenStreetMap <https://www.openstreetmap.org/> and Wild Ennerdale <http://www.wildennerdale.co.uk/>).





Figure 7.3: Walking interview with P18a and b (WWE) from Bleach Green to the western tip of Ennerdale Water, Wild Ennerdale (source Mapbox, <https://www.mapbox.com/>, Maxar, <https://www.maxar.com/>, OpenStreetMap, <https://www.openstreetmap.org/>, open source).



Figure 7.4: Banna Fell viewed across Ennerdale Water from the western tip of the lake. The bench from which this photograph was taken was the destination of the walking interview with Participants 18a and b (WWE) from which they pointed out the familiar fells (including Banna) of their 'local lake': 'Knock Merton, Banna Fell, Blake Fell, Herdus or Great Borne whichever you prefer, Starling Dodd, Red Pike' (P18b, WWE) (photograph by the author).

justifiably be described as 'a little bit of a remote area' it is 'remote without being very far away from anywhere' (P36, LWE) i.e. the valley is remote in terms of access from the rest of England but not with respect to the people of west Cumbria. Indeed, a strong sense of ownership of the lake and the valley exists for those resident in its vicinity, as was evident in the interview material from Participants 18 a and b (WWE) and other participants who pointed out that those local to it describe it as their 'back garden' (P42, CWE).

In terms of landownership, the area (land and water) involved in the Wild Ennerdale Stewardship Plan (2006, 2018) is owned by either Forestry England, National Trust, Natural England, or United Utilities. This landownership corresponds almost, but not entirely, with the catchment of the Ennerdale Valley. These organisations manage the area as the Wild Ennerdale Partnership in-line with the stewardship plan which is created and agreed by all organisations. Three comparatively small parcels of land within the Ennerdale Valley catchment are privately owned and are therefore managed independently from the partnership. It is the land under the management of the Wild Ennerdale Partnership which forms the locus of this research.

### **7.2.2 Walking in the landscapes of Wild Ennerdale**

As with the Avalon Marshes, walking interviews proved a very rich method of data collection at Wild Ennerdale. Mirroring the technique employed at the Avalon Marshes, Wild Ennerdale participants were asked to select the walking route for the interview. This democratised the research to some extent (Holton and Riley, 2014) and provided 'privileged insight' (Evans and Jones, 2011) into the places of Wild Ennerdale which participants valued. Again, other-than-human participants played an important role in the interviews. Dogs, who accompanied two of the walks, showed how human and canine companions interact with and value the landscape. Birds both elicited conversation and were audible themselves on the interview recordings. Cattle were perhaps even more important than they were at the Avalon Marshes: Black Galloways were encountered and exerted their agency, lowing loudly and at times blocking the path. Herdwick sheep entered into the walking interviews too, though their participation, as in the rewilding project, was more peripheral.

Likewise, water shaped the interviews of Wild Ennerdale, often forming their focus, either as a route, with walks skirting the shore of Ennerdale Water, or as a destination, to check a dam, which fed a mini hydropower scheme, or to see the River Liza, the River Ehen or Moss Dub. Seeing the River Liza allowed me to see how the river is behaving without human attempts to govern its flow. Similar effects were in evidence on the River Ehen, though on a much smaller scale, and it was possible to see the freshwater pearl mussels<sup>113</sup> which the restoration measures in the Ehen are attempting to protect. Seeing Moss Dub provided a fascinating insight into the blend of the cultural and the natural – the pool was apparently created as wildfowling pond but this is now so long ago as to be almost forgotten and the pool is overgrown, with no trace of human artifice remaining. The rewilding practitioners at Wild Ennerdale want to further this process, and the process of rewilding at Wild Ennerdale more generally, by reintroducing beaver to the site, something which is also being called for, and done, in other parts of the UK (Sandom and Macdonald, 2015; Carver, 2016b; Crowley, Hinchliffe and McDonald, 2017a; Sandom and Wynne-Jones, 2019).

Walking the shores of Lake Ennerdale facilitated discussions of access, especially regarding the maintenance of paths in relation to the safety of those accessing rewilding sites; during the walking interview which followed the extremely rough path over Anglers Crag on the southern shore of Ennerdale Water the participant pointed out that a visitor had fallen from the path and died some years previously, highlighting the potential danger when people visit ‘wild’ places. The lake also showed evidence of the interaction between people and nature. Being a reservoir, it possesses a weir and revetments which constrain its natural processes. The practitioners of Wild Ennerdale may remove these once the lake ceases to be a reservoir but doing so would have significant consequences for the lake and its shore and also for the pearl mussels in the River Ehen which flows out of the lake. One lake side interview in particular was punctuated with the sound of waves lapping the shore and by the participant

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<sup>113</sup> Freshwater pearl mussels are an endangered species, with Scotland now thought to be home to approximately half the world’s recruiting populations (Skinner, Young and Hastie, 2003). England meanwhile has only one site where a population of freshwater pearl mussels is successfully recruiting, that being the River Ehen, thus making the river extremely important (WCRT, 2019).

pointing out revetments every time we encountered one. (See Table 7.1 for a summary of the interviews conducted in relation to Wild Ennerdale giving the role of each participant, the code used when referring to them in the discussion, and the type of interview conducted.)

## **7.3 Landscapes, boundaries and negotiations with rewilding**

### **7.3.1 Real and imagined landscapes and boundaries of Wild Ennerdale**

Being part of the Lake District National Park means that Ennerdale shares the associations which the Lake District more broadly brings to mind, conjuring up associations with the Romantic poets, especially Wordsworth, calling to mind images of shepherding, hill sheep farming, and Herdwick sheep, recently captured by James Rebanks in his book *A Shepherd's Life* (2016), and evoking memories of, or longings for, fell walking. Indeed, since the Lake District exists so powerfully in the collective imagination, holding 'all the loved places that the exile longs for' (Thompson, 1946, p. 3), Wild Ennerdale is, to some extent, present in our minds without our being there, perhaps without our ever going there, as a place we plan to visit, or just imagine we might visit. Participant 38 (LWE) attributed this largely to England's cultural heritage, especially the Lake Poets:

the Romantic poets probably are at the heart of it because everyone knows Wordsworth's 'Daffodils' and everyone sees pictures of Ullswater or wherever it was supposed to be where that poem was written ... I think anyone who's ever come here, or has read about it or seen it just seems to feel a kind of connection ... people who don't come to special places still feel quite a connection with them because it's that feeling of well if they did go, this is probably how I would feel about it.

Table 7.1: Practitioner and stakeholder interview participants at Wild Ennerdale

Participant	Role	Code <sup>114</sup>	Interview type
13	Forester (F)	FWE	Sedentary, at office
16	Ranger (R)	RWE	Walking (see Figure 7.13)
17	Ranger (R)	RWE	Walking (see Figure 7.10)
18 a, b	Rambler (W)	WWE	Walking (see Figure 7.3)
19	Business owner / manager (B)	BWE	Sedentary, at participant's home
20	Business owner / manager (B)	BWE	Walking (see Figure 7.11)
21 a, b	Business owner / manager (B)	BWE	Sedentary, at participant's home
22	Conservation advisor (CA)	CAWE	Sedentary, at office
33	Parish council representative (PC)	PCWE	Walking (see Figure 7.7)
34	Land owner / manager (L)	LWE	Sedentary, at participant's home
35	Conservationist (C)	CWE	Walking (see Figure 7.15)
36	Land owner / manager (L)	LWE	Sedentary, at participant's home
37	Policy officer (P)	PWE	Walking (no map recording)
38	Land owner / manager (L)	LWE	Sedentary, at office
39	Environmental farming advisor (E)	EWE	Sedentary, at café
41	Land owner / manager (L)	LWE	Sedentary, at participant's home
42	Conservationist (C)	CWE	Sedentary, at café
43	Conservationist (C)	CWE	Walking (no map recording)

<sup>114</sup> Used when citing participants. The initial letter(s) refer to the participant's role and the suffix 'WE' refers to Wild Ennerdale.



This sense of familiarity might be described as ‘deep’ (*sensu* Cloke and Jones’ (2001) notion of being ‘deeply familiar’) in that Wild Ennerdale feels familiar at some subconscious level, even if we have never been there, in a similar way to which Cloke and Jones (2001) suggest that an oft visited landscape can feel familiar even if its appearance is always changing. To borrow from Cloke and Jones (2001) we carry and ‘more or less consciously’ engage in our minds with ‘imaginative constructions’ of sheep, fells, shepherding, the Lakes, Cumbria, England, and the English countryside. Then, if we do visit, these combine with the receipts of our senses ‘to create complex sensory and imaginative, dynamic, collages of being-in-this-place’ (Cloke and Jones, 2001, p. 663).

Like the Lake Poets, sheep farming is instrumental in creating these popular imaginings of the Lake District but is also actively involved in the *physical* construction of the landscape. Reading the ‘material semiotics’ (Law and Mol, 2008) of the Lake District reveals that the traditional landscape is a ‘relational achievement’ (Cloke and Jones, 2001) between humans, sheep, stones and fells. The omnipresence of stone (one of the Lakes District’s ‘innate characteristics’ *sensu* Cloke and Jones (2001)) ‘necessitated’ its removal to create pasture for sheep, and the stone’s affordances allowed its formation into drystone walls to co-create these pastures by forming their boundaries, the walls in turn then become an innate characteristic of the Lake District; the stone shaped the practice of drystone walling and, commensurately, humans shaped the stone into drystone walls. The hardiness of sheep (which, if not an innate characteristic, became so via a relational achievement between human breeders and ovine genes to co-create this hardiness) allowed them to be grazed on fell land which was not suitable for other livestock, and the co-creation of enclosed pastures by humans and stones allowed farmers to separate their sheep flocks on in-bye<sup>115</sup> land during the breeding season. This enabled the development of distinct breeds, most notably in relation to the Lake District, the Herdwick (see Figure 7.5). The innate characteristics of the Herdwick then went on to shape farming practises with farmers developing breeding and showing techniques aimed at producing a ‘champion’ tup<sup>116</sup> (Rebanks, 2016).

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<sup>115</sup> Enclosed land near the farm as opposed to open, common fell land.

<sup>116</sup> Ram, male sheep.



Figure 7.5: Sheep in Wild Ennerdale (the sheep on the right of the picture with the white face and grey body is a Herdwick) (photograph by the author).

Another innate characteristic of sheep which has a co-shaping effect is their proclivity for place attachment which allows them to be ‘hefted’ to their section of fell. Hefting exploits the ovine tendency to form strong territorial attachments to place, allowing farmers to bond their flocks to a particular area to the extent that they can be farmed without fences (Gray, 2014; Armstrong, 2016). Hefting relies on a long-standing relationship with the land, i.e. generations of sheep must be kept in the same area and place attachment must be passed down from one generation to the next in order for the hefting to be maintained (Gray, 2014; Armstrong, 2016). Hefting then is a relational achievement between the sheep, their shepherd and the fell itself so that the sheep become accustomed to, and bonded to, their place in the landscape: the shape of the fells, the skill and attention of the shepherd, the behaviour of the sheep, and their ability to transfer their heft from one generation to the next, all contribute to creating the landscape. Thus, sheep, stones and fells have a ‘unique creative ability’ (Clope and Jones, 2001) to co-constitute the landscapes of the Lake District. As with the decline of the peat industry in the Avalon Marshes however, changes in sheep farming, particularly significant reductions in stock numbers, are leaving sheep

farming shaped, or even sheep shaped, holes (*sensu* Roy, 1997) in the Lake District. In the Ennerdale Valley this is making space for the co-creation of new places, with Wild Ennerdale attempting to foster natural and ecological processes so that a new landscape is formed as the result of a relational achievement between humans, cattle, trees and water.

Fell walking is perhaps no less an intrinsic part of the Lake District landscape than Romantic poetry or sheep farming, not least in the Ennerdale Valley. Alfred Wainwright was a fell walker and author who published many walking guides, particularly on the Lake District, including *A Coast to Coast Walk* ([1973] 1994). The Coast to Coast Walk features prominently in the Ennerdale Valley's past and present since the early sections of the trek take in the full length of the valley. At time of writing the Coast to Coast walk was experiencing a surge in interest following its inclusion in a British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) television programme entitled 'Wainwright Walks' (BBC, 2009). This was highlighted by Participant 20 (BWE) when she described interest in the route as having 'gone bonkers since old Julia, Julia Bradbury<sup>117</sup>, I think it featured in some TV programme very recently, and there's been a massive surge in it'. One further association between the Ennerdale Valley and Wainwright is that one of the valley's highest peaks, Haystacks, was his favourite fell. In accordance with his wishes, Wainwright's ashes were scattered on Haystacks, cementing his association with the Ennerdale Valley and entangling his memory with Haystacks, making it a popular destination for fell walkers.

Wainwright's books engender a respect for nature and inspire their readers to explore the outdoors, with visitors to Wild Ennerdale valuing the opportunity which the valley affords them to experience both these things. Those who responded to the online visitor questionnaire for this research associated Wild Ennerdale strongly with 'wilderness' (70%) and 'nature and biodiversity' (64%) and valued these attributes highly (see Figure 7.6 for visitor responses regarding the landscapes associated with Wild Ennerdale). 47% rated the chance to visit Wild Ennerdale in order to experience 'wildness' as highly valuable to them, 68% rated being able to come and get away from it all as highly valuable, while 55% rated the opportunity to come and connect with nature as highly

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<sup>117</sup> The programme's presenter.

valuable. By no means were nature and humans seen as mutually exclusive however, with no respondents identifying Wild Ennerdale as a place which belongs to nature and not people, and only 10% valuing it highly as a place where nature is left to itself, perhaps indicating the extent to which the Ennerdale Valley is, and is *perceived* as, a cultural landscape (which will be discussed in Section 7.3.2.1). Lastly, 63% of respondents stated that it was highly valuable to them to know that Wild Ennerdale was there, even if they couldn't always visit. This would seem to link back to the comment from P38 (LWE) regarding the connection that people have to the Lake District, and the sensations that they expect to experience if and when they do visit, and therefore to the argument that the Lake District exists very powerfully in the public imagination.

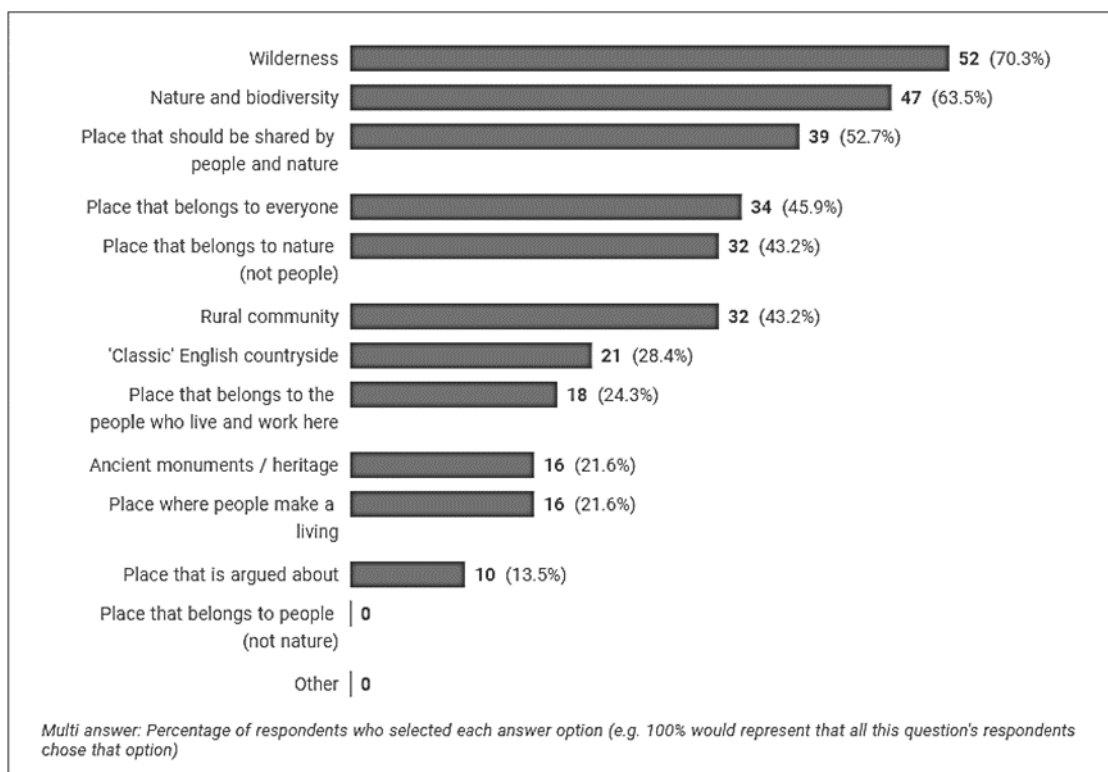


Figure 7.6: Visitor questionnaire responses to the question 'what landscapes do you associate with Wild Ennerdale?'

## 7.3.2 Rewilding's interface with the wider Lake District

### 7.3.2.1 Cultural landscape

Because the Lake District occupies a very special place in the English public imagination it presents an extremely complex landscape with which rewilding interfaces. Perhaps first and foremost the Lake District is a *cultural* landscape, created by a long interaction between humans and their environment (Linnell *et al.*, 2015), with commentators suggesting that 'what we really treasure [about the Lake District] is the combination of the wild and the cultivated which seems to have reached perfection' (Thompson, 1946, p. 6), i.e. that it is the kind of 'perfect symbiosis'<sup>118</sup> between nature and human management' described by Lasanta, Nadal-Romero and Arnáez (2015). The value of this cultural landscape has been recognised in the area's designation as a National Park: the Lake District National Park was designated in 1951 in recognition of its 'natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage' (LDNP, 2020a) and, as a National Park, provides a place of solace and recreation for millions of domestic and international visitors every year<sup>119</sup>. As discussed above, an intrinsic part of the Lake District's cultural value is its association with Wordsworth and the other Lake Poets and it was the combination of all these factors which led the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) to inscribe the Lake District as a World Heritage Site in 2017, recognising that:

[t]he combined work of nature and human activity has produced a harmonious landscape ... This landscape was greatly appreciated from the 18th century onwards by the Picturesque and later Romantic movements, which celebrated it in paintings, drawings

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<sup>118</sup> This notion of 'perfect symbiosis' echoes the idea of 'balance' between humans and nature, which peat / compost producers, land owners / managers and recreational fishery operators / angling associations in the Avalon Marshes highlighted as being disrupted and called for to be restored.

<sup>119</sup> The Lake District is the UK's second oldest national park, designated in May 1951, just one month after the Peak District (National Parks, 2018). A major reason for designating areas of the UK as national parks was in order to provide access to the countryside for recreation and this continues to be an important part of their function (National Parks, 2020); in 2017 (the most recent year for which figures are available) the Lake District National Park had 19.17 million visitors (LDNP, 2020b).

and words. It also inspired an awareness of the importance of beautiful landscapes and triggered early efforts to preserve them (UNESCO, 2017)<sup>120</sup>.

Changes to this landscape are therefore highly likely to cause consternation, and even controversy, among those who value the landscape in its current form. This is particularly true with respect to rewilding which has the potential to change the landscape in ways that are ‘radical’ and ‘unpredictable’ (Carver, 2007; Arts, Fischer and van der Wal, 2012; Lorimer and Driessen, 2013; Seddon *et al.*, 2014; Sandom and Macdonald, 2015; Svenning *et al.*, 2016; Jepson, 2016; Wynne-Jones, Strouts and Holmes, 2018; Drenthen, 2018; Gammon, 2018; Pettorelli *et al.*, 2018; Root-Bernstein, Gooden and Boyes, 2018; Jepson and Blythe, 2020) and will therefore almost certainly result in a landscape which is different from the ‘traditional’ Lake District landscape<sup>121</sup>. This, unsurprisingly, was a dominant theme which emerged from interviews, with

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<sup>120</sup> World Heritage sites are inscribed if they are of ‘outstanding universal value’ and display at least one of UNESCO’s selection criteria. The Lake District has been assessed as having three of these being:

- (ii) to exhibit an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town-planning or landscape design,
- (v) to be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, land-use, or sea-use which is representative of a culture (or cultures), or human interaction with the environment especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change,
- (vi) to be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance (UNESCO, 2020).

<sup>121</sup> Examples of management approaches in Wild Ennerdale which result in changes to the traditional Lake District landscape are: i. the planting of trees to create woodland which is therefore different from the traditionally tree-free fells grazed by sheep, ii. allowing dry stone walls to fall down as opposed to maintaining them as would have been done traditionally, iii. the replacement of sheep, which have traditionally grazed in the Lake District, with cattle, to act as a disturbance factor in the landscape – cattle ‘disturbance’ inevitably results in ‘mess’ e.g. poaching of the ground and damage to the bark and branches of shrubs and trees, and iv. removing the weir from Ennerdale Water which will result in a drop in lake level and therefore changes to the lake shore.

participants stating: i. how much people value the Lake District landscape in its current form, ii. how people are resistant to change generally, and iii. how people are particularly resistant to the changes associated with rewilding because it results in a landscape which is 'not traditional' (P35, CWE) and is 'messy' (P33, PCWE, P35, CWE, P43, CWE)<sup>122</sup>. The discussion of mess echoed the literature which acknowledges that rewilding uses 'practices that encourage less conventionally 'pretty' or 'beautiful' landscapes' and that because there is less management the preservation of 'aesthetically-valued qualities' or the avoidance of 'difficult aesthetic experiences' will not be possible (Prior and Brady, 2017; also Tree, 2018b). Deary and Warren (2018) suggest that management, at least in the short term, to avoid these difficult aesthetic experiences and create 'swift', 'positive' landscape change can help to negotiate these difficult 'teething periods' of rewilding.

The first of these concerns was evident in a comment from Participant 16 (RWE) who talked about how much people value what might be described as the classic Lake District view; 'you see across the tops of the fells and...it's a beautiful thing, everyone who comes to the Lake District loves that, standing on top of a fell and looking out into the distance and being able to see all the landscape around you'. This statement is supported by the fact that the view of Wastwater (one the Lakes Districts most iconic lakes) was voted 'Britain's favourite view' in 2007 (Visit Cumbria, 2020). Participant 16 (RWE) did however go on to acknowledge that this 'classic' view, which is valued so highly by the British public, is 'a manufactured landscape, it's not entirely natural'<sup>123</sup> and that '[t]he Lake District we all know and love is a product of the way that humans have used the land'. Self-evidently this presents a boundary to rewilding since rewilding prioritises 'natural' over 'cultural' landscapes.

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<sup>122</sup> Synonyms, and antonyms, to 'mess' or 'messy' were also used by participants e.g. 'abandoned' or 'rough' (P43, CWE) versus 'tidy' or 'uniform' (P22, CAWE), 'manicured' (P35, CWE), and 'neat', 'nice', or 'tidy' (P43, CWE).

<sup>123</sup> Participant 16's (RWE) comment clearly places humans as *apart from* rather than *a part of* nature.



Regardless of whether the landscape is 'natural' or 'cultural' however, it is, undeniably, highly valued and people are therefore very reluctant to see it change as evinced by quotes from other participants: 'I think the Lakes people feel very, very passionately about it and some people ... don't want to see it change at all' (P38, LWE), and:

people are super cautious about change, and people generally, when you're talking about a landscape, get very nervous when you start talking about changing things ... thinking back to when we started with Wild Ennerdale, I can remember comments like, 'why are you messing with my back garden, it's beautiful as it is' ... there's this fear that it's going to change for the worse (P42, CWE).

This attitude was countered by comments such as those from Participant 35 (CWE) who contended that changes to the Lake District landscape as a result of rewilding would alter but not diminish it, saying 'the views just change, you get views that are framed between the trees and they can be just as impressive'. He went on to say that 'to me it doesn't look messy' but acknowledged that 'to an awful lot of people ... [it] does' (P35, CWE). The attitude which Participant 35 (CWE) described was indeed expressed in comments from stakeholders who called for management of the Lake District generally and the Ennerdale Valley specifically to avoid just this sort of mess but also, perhaps more significantly, because they felt the need for human management of 'wild' places saying 'it's never going to be self-regulating, it's always going to need management ... if it was left to self-regulate it would all in my view just turn to scrub ... for me you have to manage wild places in this country' (P17, RWE). This participant went on to explain that this was because 'Wild Ennerdale is very much what people perceive as wild which isn't necessarily an actual wild landscape, it's an attractive landscape, so I think there'll always be a role for organisations to manage the land' (P17, RWE). This comment echoes those of Thompson whose statements, while now over 70 years old, seem just as relevant as ever: 'if we were to leave the Lake District entirely to nature it would soon become disorderly – unpleasantly disorderly by civilized standards' (1946, p. 15), highlighting our highly cultural perception of 'nature' and our anthropocentric view that nature 'needs' human management.



The walking interview with Participant 33 (PCWE) provided a particularly clear illustration of the negotiation between rewilding and an aesthetically pleasing landscape. The route of the interview followed the western shore of Ennerdale Water from the Bleach Green carpark almost to the Bowness Knott carpark (see Figure 7.7 for a map of the interview). *En route* the participant outlined the possibility of changes to the lake shore as a result of the lake's decommissioning as a reservoir. In the future this may result in the removal of the revetments and weir which currently contain the lake and regulate its level. If they are removed, the participant suggested that 'the water level will drop quite a lot in the lake, so it'd totally change this [western] end of the lake just because it would become a wetland habitat' but 'in the first years it would probably just be some mud flats' (P33, PCWE). Self-evidently mud-flats would present a very different and potentially '*difficult*' (Prior and Brady, 2017) aesthetic experience to the one currently enjoyed (see Figure 7.8).

### **7.3.2.2 Lake District National Park**

The Lake District National Park, of which Wild Ennerdale is part, is England's largest national park and a popular destination for domestic and international visitors. Being such a popular destination creates significant challenges for the National Park with the risk being that 'management starts to revolve around managing that sheer number [of visitors] and managing the [attendant] problems' (P37, PWE). Wild Ennerdale escapes this to some extent given, as noted earlier, its 'remote' location on the western edge of the Lake District, the fact that it doesn't have a road running around the lake, and because its village (Ennerdale Bridge) is some distance from the lake and the entrance to the valley. Participant 36 (LWE) highlighted this 'remoteness' with respect to the relatively few visitors to Ennerdale as compared to other Lake District valleys, while Participant 38 (LWE) highlighted it with respect to the fact that this enabled Wild Ennerdale's rewilding activities to go 'under the radar a little bit' due to not being 'under quite as much public scrutiny'. A recurring theme from the interviews however was the impression that this situation could change and that rising visitor numbers are likely to create problems for Wild Ennerdale in the future, even threatening its intrinsic value, particularly its 'wildness'. The most significant factors in this discussion were i. how to control access, ii. how to manage visitors and iii. what, if any, facilities should be provided.



Figure 7.7: Walking interview with P33 (PCWE) from Bleach Green to Bowness Knott along the western edge of Ennerdale Water, Wild Ennerdale (source Mapbox, <https://www.mapbox.com/>, Maxar, <https://www.maxar.com/>, OpenStreetMap, <https://www.openstreetmap.org/>, open source).



Figure 7.8: The western end of Ennerdale Water seen during the walking interview with P33 (PCWE). This is the area the participant was referring to when he mentioned potential changes to the lake shore (photograph by the author).

Access is perhaps the most significant of these, although they are all highly important. As already stated, and as was reiterated by participants (P18a, WWE, P33, PCWE, P36, LWE, P42, CWE), Ennerdale Water does not have a road running around it, although it does have a forestry road which runs along its northern shore. Being a forestry road, vehicle access on this is technically restricted<sup>124</sup>, however the road shares its route with a bridleway meaning that the gate at the road head cannot be locked and, consequently, is often left open. As a result, more cars drive on the road than are authorised to do so, leading to tensions with walkers, those who work in the valley, and Wild Ennerdale stakeholders who see Ennerdale's 'car-free' status as part of its wildness. Participants commented on the way that the absence of cars, as a direct presence and as in indirect presence through their noise, contributed to this feeling of wildness (e.g. P18b, WWE, P33, PCWE) and this was exemplified by Participant 42 (CWE) who said that 'one of the things we sell about Ennerdale is that it's a quiet, peaceful place, predominantly traffic-free, but on that first stretch, you can have a lot of vehicles passing you in day and most of them will be authorised ...but some of them aren't'. This was reinforced by Participant 20 (BWE) whose comment demonstrated the frustrations regarding these unauthorised vehicles:

I do take umbrage at vehicles on the track. That's a really massive part of the wild feeling for me, is that there are very few cars and vehicles coming down that track, that's what makes Ennerdale special. So I do get a little bit cross when I see just random people parking down the track for a picnic and a few beers (P20, BWE).

This permission and restriction of access is an interesting tension with regard to rewilding and the ability to regulate vehicle access is clearly already a significant issue for rewilding in Wild Ennerdale, something which appears likely to become more significant if visitor numbers rise.

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<sup>124</sup> Access is limited to forestry vehicles, those of the Wild Ennerdale partners, staff and visitors of the businesses within Wild Ennerdale, and emergency vehicles.

This negotiation of access can also be seen in comments from Participant 21b (BWE) which highlighted the tension between the reduction in human intervention inherent in rewilding, resulting (during the course of the field work for this research in 2019) in the poor state of repair of the forest road, and the way that this inhibits access to rewilding areas, something which rewilding seeks to promote: 'if the public goes up, supposedly to be seeing what is happening at Wild Ennerdale, they're struggling to go and see it because the access is difficult'. This tension was not limited to the road, with other participants making similar claims with regard to walking routes. For example Participant 39 (EWE) said that, with less management 'plants get bigger and harder and woodier and it's hard for people to walk through'. Participant 34 (LWE) saw the potential for a similar outcome as a result of lower grazing: 'the heather is becoming very tall and rank ... the sheep kept it cropped, kept it right'<sup>125</sup> i.e. the reduction of sheep grazing had allowed the heather to grow larger than previously, potentially limiting access. Another participant recognised that there was a 'balance to be struck ... between access for all and leaving routes as you find them' perceiving that in a rewilded landscape people 'wouldn't want us to come in and turn this [footpath] into a motorway' (P17, RWE). The path this participant was referring to is the one which goes up and over Angler's Crag on the southern shore of Ennerdale Water (see Figure 7.9). Indeed, the walking interview with Participant 17 (RWE) followed the track along the south western shore of Ennerdale Water from Bleach Green to Angler's Crag, ultimately encountering the path which he suggested people would not want to see 'turned into a motorway' (see Figure 7.10 for a map of the interview). The path is however disconcertingly rugged and Participant 17 (RWE) acknowledged that there were risks involved in not upgrading it:

it's fairly rough, fairly technical and as we go on a bit it gets very technical. We actually had somebody fall off two years ago and die ... But a route such as this in a rewilded landscape is very much about it's your own risk that you take to walk it.

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<sup>125</sup> This participant's comment about sheep keeping heather 'right' is also reminiscent of the 'balance' between nature and human activities, in this case farming, which other participants have spoken of and which rewilding threatens to subvert.





Figure 7.9: Angler's Crag viewed across Ennerdale Water from Bowness Knott. Just visible approximately a quarter of a way up the crag is the footpath which Participant 17 (RWE) discussed in his interview (photograph by the author).



Figure 7.10: Walking interview with P17 (RWE) from Bleach Green to Angler's Crag along the south western shoreline of Ennerdale Water, Wild Ennerdale (source Mapbox, <https://www.mapbox.com/>, Maxar, <https://www.maxar.com/>, OpenStreetMap, <https://www.openstreetmap.org/>, open source).

This comment highlights a clear boundary for rewilding to negotiate between creating or enhancing a sense of wildness while allowing safe access to that wildness. In the case of path maintenance this needs to be limited so that the path does not too clearly become a human artefact but does need to be conducted to a certain level in order to enable access to rewilding sites in a safe manner. This balance may be different from that which people are used to in other conservation sites, where access and safety are privileged over sense of wildness. There may then need to be a period of adjustment, and further negotiation with publics, regarding the type of access so that areas and levels of responsibility are determined and agreed. In this instance for example Participant 17 (RWE) suggests that access to Wild Ennerdale is at visitors' 'own risk' – something which visitors may not fully appreciate.

What is interesting in relation to road access to Wild Ennerdale is that while the absence of a road around Ennerdale Water is unrelated to the development of Wild Ennerdale (the road was an absent presence long before the development of Wild Ennerdale) it is almost certainly a factor which has contributed to Ennerdale's potential as a rewilding site. This is first because there is significantly less vehicular traffic in the Ennerdale Valley than other Lake District valleys and second, perhaps even more importantly, because the absence of a road has contributed to Ennerdale's 'remoteness' and thereby inhibited its development as 'honeypot' site, as compared to, for example, Buttermere or Wasdale in the neighbouring valleys. While this, and even the restriction of access on the forestry road, is unconnected to the actions of the rewilding partnership, Participant 20 (BWE) saw it as 'dovetail[ing] nicely into the Wild Ennerdale agenda'. That agenda is to reduce car traffic in the valley to enhance the 'peace and tranquillity' (which many participants identified as being highly valued about the landscape e.g. P18b, WWE, P19, BWE, P20, BWE, P21a, BWE, P33, PCWE, P36, LWE, P42, CWE) and thereby enhance the sense of wildness in the valley (P42, CWE).

Related to the issue of vehicle access to Wild Ennerdale are the two car parks which serve it – Bowness Knott on the northern shore and Bleach Green on the southern side. Both of these car parks are, unusually for the Lake District, free from parking charges, a fact commented on by Participant 18a (WWE). Several stakeholders mentioned plans to remove these car parks, something

which may cause considerable consternation if done, partly because of the extent to which it would reduce the accessibility of the lake and the valley and partly, similarly to the issue of changes to the cultural landscape, purely because it would be a change to the status quo. Both sentiments were captured by a comment from Participant 18a when he said: ‘somebody was saying well why don’t they close this carpark [Bleach Green], but the thing is ... people have come up here all their lives and [if] they couldn’t manage it, it would be a shame’. These views were echoed by Participant 33 (PCWE) who saw Bleach Green as an access point which enabled ‘the elderly or even disabled, ... [to] get to the lake,’ while the Bowness Knott carpark offered ‘a lot of people the opportunity to get ... close to the valley, and the Wild Ennerdale side of it’ and that ‘if you took Bowness Knott car park out, you’re denying’ that access. A major issue here is not simply the lack of access but the *removal* of access, because the car parks have ‘always been there, they’ve always been used’, meaning that a removal of them would require a ‘total shift in people’s mind [because] they would say you’re denying people access’ (P33, PCWE). This sentiment is broadly reflected in the literature, with Höchtl, Lehringer and Konold (2005) noting declining accessibility as a negative consequence of rewilding. While there may be an argument for avoiding the creation of *new* roads or car parks (indeed Boller *et al.* (2010) found that publics were generally opposed to the creation of new roads) there may also be an argument for the retention of *existing* access, including roads and carparks but especially paths which Boller *et al.* (2010) found publics were in favour of retaining.

To consider the other points mentioned at the start of this section, i.e. how to manage visitors and visitor facilities, the needs of different kinds and rising numbers of visitors need to be negotiated by Wild Ennerdale. Despite its ‘remoteness’ the Ennerdale Valley is not exempt from the Lake District’s popularity, with Participant 36 (LWE) describing it as ‘a Mecca for people walking’ and identifying it as ‘the birthplace of British rock climbing on Pillar Rock<sup>126</sup>’. This has the potential to create a delicate boundary for Wild Ennerdale to negotiate as exemplified in a comment from Participant 17 (RWE): ‘over time this is probably

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<sup>126</sup> Pillar Rock is the highest fell in the Ennerdale Horseshoe, the ring of fells which engirdle the valley and is, as stated by Participant 36 (LWE), purported to be the birthplace of rock climbing in the Lake District (UKC, 2019).

going to become more popular nationally and I think that'll be a double-edged sword'. The implication here is that Wild Ennerdale will face a tension between welcoming increasing numbers of visitors (attracted partly through Wild Ennerdale's own initiatives to encourage ecotourism<sup>127</sup> and partly as the valley becomes better known e.g. as a result of the increased interest in the Coast to Coast walk discussed earlier) and maintaining the very thing which attracts those visitors, which stakeholders value, and which Wild Ennerdale is seeking to promote i.e. the 'peace and quiet' (P18, WWE, P19, BWE, P20, BWE, P21a, BWE, P33, PCWE, P36, LWE, P42, CWE) and that it's not 'overrun by tourists' (P18b, WWE, P19, BWE, P20, BWE, P21a, BWE<sup>128</sup>). Boller *et al.* have dubbed this phenomenon 'fascinating remoteness' and note that the 'crucial dilemma for tourism development in remote areas is the paradoxical situation that the installation of tourism facilities and services can reduce the experiential qualities of these areas that attracted the tourists in the first place' (2010, p. 320). This dilemma is evident at Wild Ennerdale where the increase in visitors is raising the question as to what, if any, facilities should be provided. Participant 17 (RWE) saw this as a 'challenge ... of managing people' and questioned whether 'if numbers do go up, are the facilities of a level that can manage that?' – as he points out for example there are currently 'no toilet facilities in th[e] valley'. This would lead to the conclusion that there may *not* be sufficient facilities but the solution to this may not be as straightforward as simply providing more facilities. For example, beyond the most basic level of facilities there are questions as to whether Wild Ennerdale 'want[s] a visitor centre, does it warrant a bigger car park ... interpretation and if you put interpretation in are you removing the wildness?' (P17, RWE). This was reiterated by Participant 33 (PCWE) who raised a similar point regarding the lack of facilities but likewise recognised that such facilities compromise 'wildness', reflecting the rewilding principle which seeks to reduce or

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<sup>127</sup> Participant 38 (LWE) explained that this is something which is being considered, saying 'we've shifted our focus from just creating Wild Ennerdale to inviting people to come and enjoy it. And people have always come and enjoyed it obviously, but that idea that we could be making a more explicit offer.'

<sup>128</sup> It is salient to note that Participants 19, 20, and 21 are all business owners / managers and that the businesses they run are *tourism* businesses. What they are highlighting here is not only their own appreciation of Wild Ennerdale's peace and quiet but that of their clients and that this is the very thing which attracts their clients.



remove human artefacts (e.g. Deary and Warren, 2018), saying 'should there be more signs, should there be some seating? I mean, if you put a couple of benches in along here, it's not rewilding, but it's giving people the opportunity to sit and look at it'. This comment highlights a similar tension as is raised in relation to rewilding and access i.e. rewilding purports to encourage human enjoyment of wild places and yet deliberately removes or does not offer some of the things which facilitate that enjoyment e.g. easy access (in terms of roads, car parking and paths), seating, interpretation boards, toilets, visitor centres etc.

All walking interviews captured a sense of the 'fascinating remoteness' of Wild Ennerdale which participants so valued but a comment from Participant 20 (BWE) perhaps best exemplified the sentiment. The interview was conducted while walking a circular route around the Bowness plantation (see Figure 7.11 for a map of the interview). No other people were encountered during the walk, which afforded views of the high fells of the upper Ennerdale Valley (see Figure 7.12). When asked what she valued about the landscape of Wild Ennerdale Participant 20 (BWE) responded, 'the peace, the absolute peace, the lack of busyness, it is a very, very quiet valley'. Ironically, the rewilding of Wild Ennerdale could result in an increase in visitor numbers and therefore a reduction of wildness – something which Wild Ennerdale will need to negotiate carefully.

### **7.3.2.3 UNESCO World Heritage Site**

As well as being an English national park the Lake District has been a UNESCO world heritage site since 2017. Being a world heritage site presents its own, peculiar, boundary to rewilding but the fact that this boundary has been created so recently is particularly interesting – while the boundary is still in the process of consolidating it is still somewhat malleable and is therefore still very much in a phase of active negotiation. The reasons for the Lake District's inscription as a world heritage site were very much in evidence during interviews, with participants particularly mentioning the presence of historical artefacts in the Ennerdale valley (e.g. P13, FWE, P16, RWE, P36, LWE, P41, LWE). Perhaps the most significant artefacts are the remains of stone longhouses; these stone works present a boundary to rewilding in and of themselves but also as a physical manifestation of the 'outstanding universal values' which contributed to the Lake

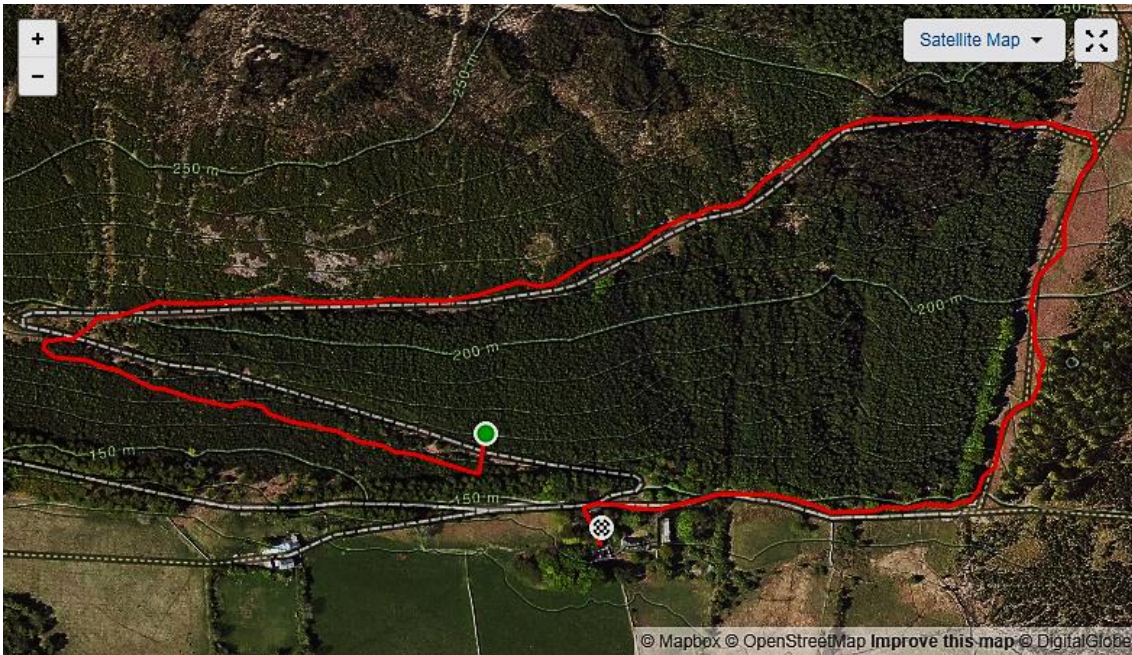


Figure 7.11: Walking interview with P20 (BWE) around the Bowness plantation, Wild Ennerdale (source Mapbox, <https://www.mapbox.com/>, Maxar, <https://www.maxar.com/>, OpenStreetMap, <https://www.openstreetmap.org/>, open source).



Figure 7.12: View of the high fells in the upper Ennerdale Valley, Wild Ennerdale seen during the walking interview with Participant 20 (BWE) (photograph by the author).

District gaining world heritage status. With respect to the former for example, one participant chose the route of his walking interview specifically to showcase the 'scheduled ancient monuments' in the area and as an opportunity to discuss the 'idea of rewilding and how compatible it is when you've got things like archaeology in the area' (P16, RWE) (see Figure 7.13 for a map of the interview). The route of this interview was a loop around the Bowness plantation and did indeed encounter scheduled ancient monuments (see Figure 7.14). Participant 16 (RWE) was able to discuss the management required to preserve these sites despite the fact that such management is theoretically contrary to the ideals of rewilding, saying 'you can see there's these clearings around them [the stone works] to ensure they're not damaged by tree growth and roots and windblown trees and things like that'. This need for management highlights a tension for rewilding in that while 'archaeologists recommend that sheep grazing is the best thing to preserve these kinds of structures' (P16, RWE), a tenet of Wild Ennerdale is the reduction of sheep grazing, reducing the ability of sheep to perform this role. This results in a trilemma; i. continue with sheep grazing in order to maintain the integrity of the archaeology but which runs contrary to Wild Ennerdale's principles, ii. replace this function with volunteers which again maintains the availability of the archaeology but which contravenes another tenet of Wild Ennerdale, and rewilding more generally – that of the reduction of human intervention, or iii. allow the structures to be 'lost'. In negotiating this trilemma Wild Ennerdale have opted to use volunteers (P16, RWE), exposing themselves to criticism from stakeholders that 'the whole principle of rewilding it would appear requires the use of lots and lots of volunteer hours' (P36, LWE) i.e. high amounts of human intervention, despite seeking to reduce human intervention, thus illustrating the impossibility of negotiating this boundary in a way which resolves all aspects of this trilemma.





Figure 7.13: Walking interview with P16 (RWE) around the Bowness plantation, Wild Ennerdale (source Mapbox, <https://www.mapbox.com/>, Maxar, <https://www.maxar.com/>, OpenStreetMap, <https://www.openstreetmap.org/>, open source).



Figure 7.14: Archaeological site within the Bowness plantation, Wild Ennerdale. Note the felled tree in the background as indicative of tree clearance to protect the integrity of this archaeological site (photograph by the author).

With respect to the other boundary (i.e. the historical artefacts being a physical manifestation of the outstanding universal values of the Lake District as a world heritage site), several participants mentioned the complexities of negotiating the boundary between the Ennerdale Valley as a rewilding site and as a world heritage site. Part of this arises from the policy of world heritage inscription, which does not permit the kind of 'compensatory benefit' measures that other designations accept:

the guidance is that you shouldn't be accepting negative change to the world heritage site by saying there's compensatory benefits to the public or to the landscape or to something somewhere else, wildlife or whatever it is. Now, UK planning legislation for heritage says that if something has what they term 'a less than substantial effect' you can compensate for that effect ... but the world heritage guidance ... says you can't do that, you can't take compensation for losses to the values of the world heritage site, so that's really difficult (P37, PWE).

Participant 22 (CAWE) described just how challenging these world heritage regulations are for rewilding to negotiate:

those [regulations] are quite frustrating for a project to deal with, a new designation that's coming in and saying well actually what you've been doing you can't do anymore, because we're going to stop everything changing, and the existing landscape is the one we value, therefore you can't change it to anything else that you think's more valuable or you can't deliver more for the general public because you would change the landscape.

Both of these comments clearly demonstrate the difficulty for rewilding in negotiating this boundary. First there is very little scope for negotiation or compromise due to rigid UNESCO policy. Second, there would appear to be very little ambit for rewilding within this policy – Participant 37 (CWE) claimed that benefits to wildlife were of secondary consideration compared to the outstanding universal values of the Lake District, and Participant 22 (CAWE) emphasised the



prohibition on landscapes changing as constraining something which is central to rewilding with its emphasis on dynamism and its rejection of set goals or targets.

A key point in the comment from Participant 22 (CAWE) is that since it is the *existing* landscape which world heritage status recognises and values, the Lake District's inscription as a world heritage site has resulted in a proliferation of boundary work from Wild Ennerdale's stakeholders, as he went on to describe:

people are really trying to find their way around it [the world heritage site regulations] and there's various factions who have different interpretations of what can or can't be done, all of whom are peddling their particular view on how important X, Y or Z is and what you can and can't do ... people push very hard to push their particular point of view as to interpretation.

This was echoed by another participant who said that:

because world heritage designation is quite new, I think we're going through a process of setting a baseline for interpreting the OUVs, the outstanding universal values, and it's a cauldron of tension ... at the moment because we're setting baselines and because lots of people want to, in my opinion, have control over what that baseline is (P38, LWE).

Such attempts to control what is important and what becomes the baseline is a classic example of boundary work as set out by Star and Griesemer (1989) who describe 'entrepreneurs' as conducting boundary work by reinterpreting 'concerns to fit their own programmatic goals'. Thus, in the Lake District, rewilding entrepreneurs are attempting to reinterpret the world heritage designation to align with their rewilding strategy. Although boundary work can be, and often is, ongoing, it currently appears to be time critical for Wild Ennerdale since, because the world heritage inscription is recent, what is valuable about the landscape is still open to negotiation but may become harder to negotiate later once the 'baselines' are established, given the rigidity of UNESCO criteria.

Boundary work was also clearly evident in relation to Herdwick sheep, the presence of which is a significant attribute of the Lake District's cultural landscape according to the successful nomination for the Lake District to become a world heritage site (LDNP, 2015). Advocates of rewilding attempted to downplay this element of the world heritage designation, emphasising that the Herdwick 'isn't a rare breed, there are an awful lot of them, there are 21,000 Herdwick sheep around the place' (P38, LWE) and claiming that the method of Herdwick farming has been 'twisted' away from the traditional model which earned the Lake District its world heritage status:

changing patterns of farming and increases in disposable income for farmers through subsidy have twisted that farming model. So not only are Herdwicks going away for the winter to quite rich lowland areas and then having twins, but they're also getting bigger and less hardy, and they're requiring more food. So when they come back to the farm, they can't go onto the fell with their single lamb and they don't last as long as long on the fell because they're not as hardy. So that's changing the model of farming (P38, LWE).

This was countered by proponents of sheep farming who insisted that sheep farming continued to be 'an integral part of the whole of Lake District management system' and highlighted its importance in the world heritage designation (P36, LWE). The *heritage* of sheep farming was an important aspect of this boundary work, with Participant 41 (LWE) talking of the 'heritage that's gone into them sheep' and emphasising that certain flocks have been in an 'area of land for potentially hundreds if not thousands of years'. These comments from Participant 41 (LWE) are in direct opposition to those of Participant 38 (LWE) who suggested that this heritage had been lost. Rewilding then is in a critical position, needing to successfully negotiate which aspects of Wild Ennerdale should be valued according to the world heritage designation while the negotiation period is still open.

### **7.3.3 Rewilding's interface with farming**

Despite the sites being approximately 230 miles apart, rewilding in Wild Ennerdale shares the same boundaries with farming as it does in the Avalon Marshes, that is it interfaces with farming which used to take place in the valley, with farming which still takes place in the valley, and with farming which neighbours the valley, notably on Kinniside Common and Stockdale Moor (P41, LWE). Temporal and spatial boundaries are however far less distinct in Wild Ennerdale than they are in the Avalon Marshes. Sheep cross temporal boundaries, being an integral part of Wild Ennerdale's past and present, and spatial boundaries, occupying the valley freely, irrespective of landownership, and therefore rewilding project, boundaries. Some physically constructed boundaries (fences and dry-stone walls) to control otherwise unconstrained sheep movement still exist from Wild Ennerdale's past, both within and around the valley, and will it seems have a role in its future. Humans also cross temporal boundaries, since farming livelihoods have stretched from the past into the present and look to extend into the future, and spatial boundaries, with farmers grazing their sheep both inside and outside the Ennerdale Valley.

As has already been discussed, and has been made explicit in comments from participants, farming, specifically the traditional Lake District pastoral farming system, is an intrinsic part of the Lake District's (cultural) landscape (P39, EWE) and, by extension, the Wild Ennerdale landscape. Farming is highly valued by residents of and visitors to the area for its cultural and heritage aspects, the livelihoods it sustains and the communities it supports, and the tourism attraction it affords. As a result, negotiating the boundary with farming can be difficult and delicate for rewilding. While many of the cultural and heritage aspects have been discussed in the previous section one element which has not yet been given sufficient attention is that of (Herdwick) sheep and the (Galloway) cattle which are replacing them. This section will therefore focus on; i. the position and role of livestock within Wild Ennerdale, ii. farming livelihoods and rural communities, and, iii. tourism, as well as the more practical boundary negotiations between farming and rewilding regarding walls and fences, or rather their absence.



### 7.3.3.1 Boundaries between the traditional, the native and the natural

When Monbiot (2013), now (in)famously, described the British uplands as ‘sheepwrecked’ by farming he created ‘a bit of a ding dong’ (P35, CWE) in the Lake District, traces of which were still evident in the interviews for this research. On one hand participants argued that not only is sheep farming ‘an integral part of the whole of lake District management system’ but that it can be done in a way that has a positive impact on biodiversity: ‘put a few more sheep in there, recreate the balance and everybody will be happy and your grass will be better, you’ll have more biodiversity<sup>129</sup>’ (P36, LWE). Conversely, other participants argued that the Lake District fells were ‘very degraded ... very impoverished, very uniform, poor structure, low biodiversity, low carbon ... ecologically it’s falling apart, it’s eroding, we’re losing soil, we’re losing carbon, we’re losing water, we’re losing diversity’ (P22, CAWE), a comment which very much chimes with the discourse on rewilding which frames the uplands as ‘overgrazed and denuded’ and propounds rewilding as a remedy to this (e.g. Carver, 2007). These diametrically opposed ways of viewing the landscape represent what is perhaps the most difficult boundary for rewilding to negotiate in Wild Ennerdale, and in England and the UK more broadly. The first perspective values landscape in its current form, as a *cultural* landscape which ‘reflects how man has interacted with nature over many generations’ (P22, CAWE), and therefore resists changes to this. The second derides the current landscape as a *degraded* one but values it for its rewilding potential and the scope to restore its ecological processes (Carver, 2007).

While Monbiot’s (2013) comment certainly ignited debate about sheep farming in the uplands it has not been particularly effective as a negotiation technique since it has made many farmers defensive in the face of what they see as attacks on them and their way of life, as was evident in the interview material e.g. ‘constantly saying, ‘it’s your fault, it’s your fault, it’s your fault’ ... going into a negotiations saying ‘I’ve come in here to tell you how crap you are’, it puts people’s backs up’ (P39, EWE). Similar themes were detected in the expert interviews where Participant 11 (LE) said that approaches such as this have undermined the ‘nuanced conversations’ which protagonists in the debate were

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<sup>129</sup> This comment is again reminiscent of that made by stakeholders in the Avalon Marshes who suggested that farming maintained the ‘balance’ of nature which would be disrupted if farming was withdrawn. This very much subscribes to the ‘man as manager’ approach.

having and has driven people back to their 'entrenched positions'. Participant 11 (LE) traced the origins of the recent antagonism to 'the writing of *Feral* [(Monbiot, 2013)]' as does the literature, which notes that the book is 'condemned' for 'polarising and antagonising stakeholders' (Sandom and Wynne-Jones, 2019, p. 222).

Participants did however suggest a more constructive way of negotiating the boundary between farming and rewilding by not viewing the two activities as mutually exclusive. For example Participant 39 (EWE) suggested that successful negotiation was about 'getting people to think it's not all about one thing, it's not all about birds, it's not all about rewilding, it's not all about food production, it's about everything and it's about working with people to put the right thing in the right place'. There was even evidence that this may be beginning to happen, with Participant 42 (CWE) at pains to emphasise that Wild Ennerdale was not seeking to remove sheep farming from the Ennerdale Valley. This distances the Wild Ennerdale Partnership from radical calls, such as those by Monbiot (2013), that sheep farming in the uplands should cease altogether, and attempts to allay the fears of farmers whose view of rewilding has been formed by such comments. Rather, Participant 42 (CWE), and other participants, insisted that sheep farming, and farming more generally, could and should continue in the Ennerdale Valley and that the Wild Ennerdale Partnership recognised the cultural value of this. For example Participant 42 (CWE) stated that Wild Ennerdale was 'certainly not a retreat away from farming a landscape ... we recognise [the cultural tradition] and we want to continue that into the future, it's just doing things a bit differently ... it's not about ending sheep farming in Ennerdale at all'. Participant 43 (CWE) also saw room for (sustainable) farming but, like Participant 39 (EWE), emphasised the need for better communication to 'promote' the fact that farming and rewilding can co-exist: 'there's a place for sustainable farming, farming with nature, absolutely, and I think we should be promoting that as well ... that we can support farming, we can support business if done well.' This comment alludes to a need for a change in rewilding's communication, or negotiation, style – at the moment it is creating the impression that rewilding excludes farming and other commercial land use while Participant 39 (EWE) suggests that it needs to convey the opposite message.

Interestingly there is a deeper undercurrent in the debate regarding sheep farming in the Lake District, and the uplands more generally, which relates to their status as not being native to the UK. Participant 13 (FWE) stated that sheep are ‘not naturally part of our high fells’ and Participant 22 (CAWE) emphasised that sheep ‘aren’t really native here’. Participants 35 (CWE) and 38 (LWE) noted the ‘Mesopotamian’ origins of sheep, highlighting that they are therefore not native to the UK and also, more importantly, that they have not co-evolved with the British flora, meaning that their mode of grazing is incompatible with sustainable floral growth. It is this incompatible grazing style, they argued, which has led to the ‘bare’ (P16, RWE) and ‘degraded’ (P22, CAWE) condition of the uplands. Based on this argument there is certainly a move to reduce (although, as per the comment from Participant 42 (CWE), not eliminate entirely) the number of sheep grazing in in Wild Ennerdale. This was acknowledged by practitioners who said that sheep numbers would be reduced and replaced either with cattle, specifically Black Galloway cattle, or with ‘nothing’<sup>130</sup> (P22, CAWE). Replacing sheep with cattle introduces a different form of grazing (P22, CAWE, P42, CWE), with the cattle performing the role of a large herbivore, acting as a disturbance factor (with their poaching of the ground and their grazing and browsing habits) (P22, CAWE, P34, LWE, P35, CWE), and filling a trophic niche (P38, LWE) as an analogue for the (now extinct) auroch. While the Galloway is a domestic cattle breed, and is much smaller than the auroch would have been, it has the same general form and can perform a similar role and function within an ecosystem. Indeed, in contrast to their comments regarding sheep, practitioners emphasised that cattle *were* native, or at least that their ancestors (the auroch) were (P22, CAWE) and were therefore much better suited to, and compatible with, the ecosystem of the Ennerdale Valley, the Lake District generally, and the UK more broadly. The way in which the boundaries of the roles of these cattle are negotiated with and within rewilding will be discussed in the next chapter (Chapter 8, Section 8.3).

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<sup>130</sup> Participant 22 (CAWE) spoke of how, in some instances, the Wild Ennerdale partnership had removed sheep from the Ennerdale Valley and ‘replaced them with nothing’ – an interesting illustration of how *non-intervention* (that is, replacing sheep with ‘nothing’) can be an intervention in itself.

The agency of the Black Galloway cattle was particularly noticeable during the walking interview with Participant 35 (CWE) (see figure 7.15 for a map of the interview). Not only did the cattle become participants in the research, being present during the interview itself (see Figure 7.16) and on the audio recording of it, but, during the course of the walk, Participant 35 (CWE) was able to point out their impact on the landscape, saying that it led to:

a really interesting dynamism in the habitat ... you end up with this mosaic of structure, instead of this homogeneous bowling green, and the fundamental difference between the nibblers, the sheep, and the deer I suppose to a degree, and the cattle is in the way that they eat. Cattle wrap their tongues round and rip, so you get these areas where there can be regen[eration].

This comment highlights the role that other-than-human species play in landscape generally and rewilding specifically and also highlights the value of the walking interview in this research.

As was seen in the literature (discussed in Chapter 3, Section 3.2.3) and from expert interviews (discussed in Chapter 5, Section 5.4.3), the debate over the place of native and non-native species is an important one, both in conventional conservation and in rewilding. While conventional conservation is, traditionally, concerned with maintaining a distinction between native and non-native species and with preserving ecosystems in an idealised state *without* non-native species (Katz, 1998; Milton, 2000; Navarro and Pereira, 2015) rewilding is less clear in its stance towards them. It purports to strive to protect environments and ecologies rather than preserving them in a static state which would, in theory, admit the potential which non-native species can offer (Brown, McMorran and Price, 2011; Pearce, 2015; Jepson, 2016; Carver, 2016a; Bakker and Svenning, 2018; Wynne-Jones, Strouts and Holmes, 2018). Nonetheless a reluctance to fully embrace non-native species is evident within the school of rewilding which adopts a 'pristine baseline' approach i.e. an attempt to return to an idealised ecosystem assemblage free of disturbance from humans or (other) invasive species (von Essen and Allen, 2016). This was clearly evident in the comments from participants who denigrated sheep as not native and therefore the 'wrong'



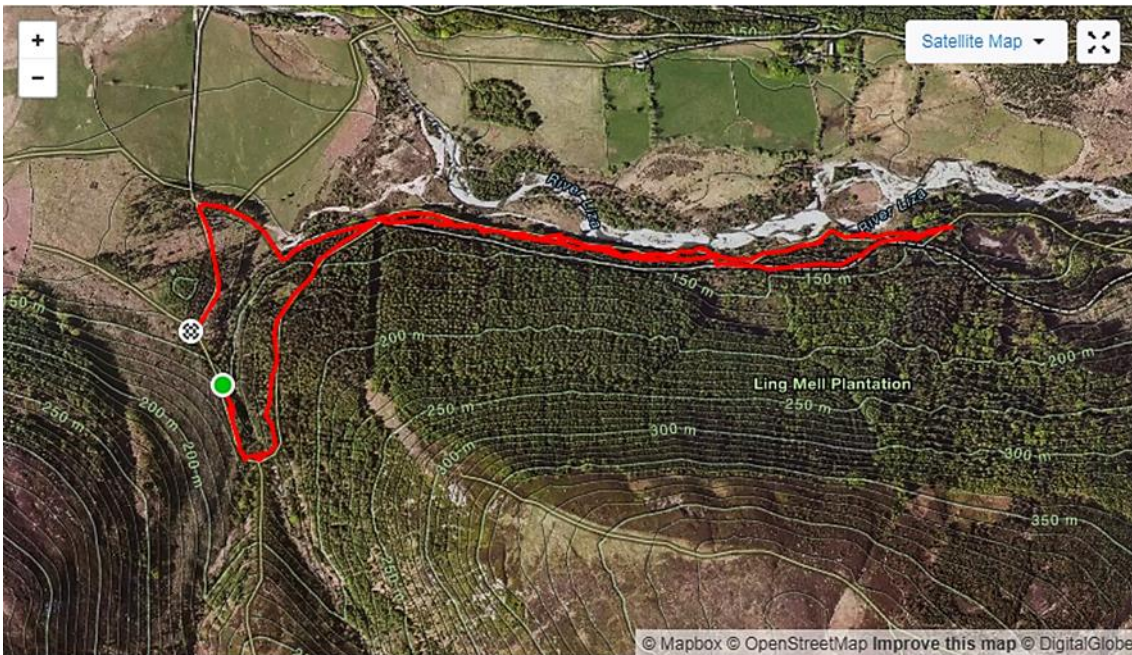


Figure 7.15: Walking interview with P35 (CWE) along the River Liza and in the Lingmell plantation, Wild Ennerdale (source Mapbox, <https://www.mapbox.com/>, Maxar, <https://www.maxar.com/>, OpenStreetMap, <https://www.openstreetmap.org/>, open source).



Figure 7.16: Black Galloway cattle near the Lingmell plantation, Wild Ennerdale encountered during the walking interview with Participant 35 (CWE) (photograph by the author).

kind of grazing herbivore (Ryder, 1964; Kijas *et al.*, 2012) and yet valorised the role of cattle who *are* seen as native and are therefore perceived as interacting differently with the UK's vegetation, playing a *valued* role as disturbance factors (Orlando, 2015). This links back to the clear preference that experts displayed for native species (see Chapter 5, Section 5.4.3) and could even be linked to the nationalist sentiment which it has been suggested is associated with Brexit (Garrard, 2020).

### 7.3.3.2 Constructing and deconstructing boundaries

The reduction of sheep numbers in the Ennerdale Valley and their (partial) replacement with cattle has seen a change in the constructed boundaries within and around the valley: boundaries which are either physical, for example fences and drystone walls, or territorial and relational, established through the hefting system. One of the tenets of the Wild Ennerdale partnership is the 'blurring' or softening of boundaries (P42, CWE) and in some instances this involved the removal of hard, physical boundaries, either through the deliberate removal of fences (P36, LWE) or by allowing drystone walls to 'gently fall[...] down' (P38, LWE). This removal does however present difficulties, especially since Wild Ennerdale shares a boundary with neighbouring landowners which cannot be erased as simply as by removing a fence.

While the traditional hefting system of the Lake District exists in the Ennerdale Valley it is not inviolable – sheep are opportunists, seeking out more favourable grazing where and when it is available, and being drawn in to the 'vacuum<sup>131</sup>' (P36, LWE) left by the removal of other sheep from the landscape. This reduction of sheep in the Ennerdale Valley, and the fact that there is no boundary fence between Ennerdale and its adjoining commons, has 'knackered the hefting system up' (P41, LWE), something which could, potentially, result in permanent changes to the landscape as, not only is the cultural landscape lost, but the 'management techniques required for ... [its] conservation' (Lasanta, Nadal-Romero and Arnáez, 2015, p. 101) are also lost. Participant 41 (LWE) considered this 'criminal' since the sheep are 'not just bought and fired out there [i.e. on to the fells], they've been with that area of land for potentially hundreds if

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<sup>131</sup> This again is reminiscent of Roy's (1997) 'holes in the universe' i.e. there is a sheep shaped hole (vacuum) in the Ennerdale Valley where the sheep used to be.

not thousands of years, they've been there for a long, long time'. This quote relates to the long-term connection of sheep, and farmers, to the land, and their relational achievements in creating the Lake District landscape. More seriously, it draws attention to the threat to that creative achievement which rewilding poses by destabilising the 'human–animal–place' (Gray, 2014) relationship which exists in Ennerdale, and other Lake District valleys.

A related problem exists with regard to the removal (or lack of maintenance) of fences between fells and woodland creating the potential for sheep to enter the woods which participants suggested could cause problems for farmers and sheep. Problems for farmers occur because since 'fences have been removed ... the woodland and the fell ground can run together ... sheep get in the woods, you can't get them back out, it's like looking for a needle in a haystack' (P36, LWE). This point was emphasised by Participant 16 (RWE), 'good luck finding a sheep if you lose it in here [woods]', and Participant 41 (LWE) who said that there would be 'massive issues with being able to gather them [sheep] and get them out of there [woodland]' (P41, LWE). Health problems for sheep occur if they 'get[...] maggots on them' (P41, LWE) and while being in woodland does not increase a sheep's risk of cutaneous myiasis<sup>132</sup> *per se*, the difficulty in locating them renders their inspection to detect signs of the disease extremely difficult, thus potentially delaying treatment or even inhibiting it altogether. These comments highlight human discomfort with the companion species of rewilding crossing the boundaries of the domestic and the wild (c.f. Lorimer and Driessen, 2013) and also highlight the difficult ethical questions which this poses. These sheep are domestic and are still, at least theoretically, entitled to human care and attention. Their participation in rewilding may however hinder or disrupt this level of care, leaving the sheep in a liminal space between the boundaries of the domestic and the wild and therefore between boundaries of care (Keulartz, 2009; Lorimer and Driessen, 2013; von Essen and Allen, 2016). This will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

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<sup>132</sup> Cutaneous myiasis is an infestation of the skin by maggots (NADIS, 2020b).



These issues have resulted in the reinstatement of some walls and fences (P36, LWE) which illustrates the ebb and flow of this negotiation; boundaries are removed and then, because of the way companion species of rewilding express their agency without these boundaries, the boundaries are replaced. Participants emphasised that these boundaries should be the responsibility of Wild Ennerdale saying that they are ‘the responsibility of Wild Ennerdale to maintain, if they don’t want animals coming in they should maintain the boundary line’ (P17, RWE) and if ‘they’re not going to want stock in there, if that’s the case, then they’re going to have to maintain boundaries, they’ll have to, to keep sheep out’ (P41, LWE). Literal boundary maintenance then may become just as much a part of the negotiation of rewilding’s boundaries as the metaphorical boundary maintenance which goes with boundary work (Star and Griesemer, 1989).

### **7.3.3.3 Boundaries of production and finance**

Participants from Wild Ennerdale echoed the themes seen in the interview data from expert interviews (e.g. P1, EE and P11, LE), regarding the way in which farming ‘underpins the community system’ (P39, EWE), and highlighted the potential consequences for rural communities of removing, or at least destabilising, farming. This removal or destabilisation was seen as occurring due to the way sheep farming is being rendered unviable by incremental reductions of stock numbers due to environmental regulations and rewilding initiatives (P41, LWE), and also due to the loss of land and farm houses to rewilding projects (P21b, BWE, P36, LWE). Another major factor put forward in the literature for the unsustainability of upland sheep farming is its overall low profitability, suggested reasons for which include low lamb prices, rising operational costs and changes in agricultural support payments, which create an uncertain and volatile fiscal environment, although the literature also notes the correlation between the introduction of agri-environment payments and the reduction in sheep numbers (Thompson, 2009).<sup>133</sup> Further to this Thompson noted that, even in 2009, sustainability in hill sheep farming was ‘only achieved with economic support

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<sup>133</sup> The introduction of agri-environment payments is one of a number of changes in farm support which have contributed to the reduction of sheep numbers – another significant change related to headage payments. Headage payments were a form of agricultural support linked to the number of stock held and which incentivised an increase in stock numbers. When agricultural support was decoupled from headage, stocking numbers decreased (Swinbank, 2010).



payments' (2009, p. 73) – these support payments have now changed significantly as a result of Brexit and the withdrawal of the UK from the Common Agricultural Policy, and the introduction of the ELMS.

Nonetheless, participants resented the reduction of sheep numbers, seeing it as 'wrong to completely rid it [the Ennerdale Valley] of stock and farming, and a farming community that's been there for thousands of years' (P41, LWE) and repeating the assertion that farming is an intrinsic part of the Lake District: 'commercial activity is part of the Lake District, it's not Yellowstone National Park, it's not an ancient wilderness, it's a working environment' (P36, LWE). By contrast, practitioners and proponents of rewilding argued that they did not seek to either remove or destabilise farming and that they saw a place for rewilding and farming to co-exist, albeit with a modified form of farming, for example with extensive cattle farming as opposed to (relatively more) intensive sheep farming:

we want that grazing element to continue, but not to as great an extent with sheep, getting hardy cows in that will just bring a different way of grazing within that landscape, and you're still with a farmed animal and it's still an income for the farmer, it's just a different way of farming, but certainly not a retreat away from farming a landscape (P42, CWE).

They also countered that rewilding was not destabilising farming but that sheep farming itself was inherently unsustainable: 'the costs of those sheep are negative and farmers are only making money because they get paid a subsidy cheque or they get paid an agri-environment cheque' (P22, CAWE). This was reiterated by Participant 38 (LWE) who not only suggested that 'they're [farmers] relying on the [government payment] cheque through the door for their money' but that sheep farmers need other sources of income because farming is financially unsustainable: 'they have other income streams as well which you have to have'. Again this pragmatic approach is evident in the literature which illustrates the need for upland farms to diversify in order to be profitable (Thompson, 2009; Morris, Henley and Dowell, 2017).

This was in turn countered by farmers who argued that if sheep farming was unviable it was because of enforced stock reductions:

when are they going to stop reducing them so far that it becomes almost unviable? To just keep, I dunno, say two hundred sheep, you couldn't make a living off that, you just couldn't. You need to keep numbers up to make a living. It's weight of numbers that makes it worthwhile. And also, if you only had two hundred, god forbid but you could lose two hundred in a snowstorm one winter (P41, LWE).

This coercive way in which farmers were compelled to change their farming systems and reduce their stock was highlighted by another participant who said:

we were pretty much obliged to enter into a very high-level stewardship scheme ... we had to reduce the number of sheep that we grazed on the fell land. We have to take them all off that area of land during the winter, which is something that under a traditional Lake District farming system you wouldn't do. It's not something that would be considered sensible (P36, LWE).

These comments are indicative of the active negotiation in the debate which is occurring over the boundary between rewilding and farming in the Ennerdale Valley, with financial justification being claimed by both sides and money apparently being employed as a somewhat coercive negotiation tool in some instances. It is however also linked to the wider issue of government payments for agriculture and how they are allocated.

#### **7.3.3.4 Boundaries of and to (eco)tourism**

As previously discussed (in Chapters 5 and 6), ecotourism related to rewilding is often suggested as an alternative to farming as a way of creating and sustaining rural economies. Indeed, ecotourism is sometimes proposed as a way of, at least partially, *reconciling* farming and rewilding with farmers engaging in ecotourism activities to supplement their income from food production (Lorimer and Driessen, 2014; Navarro and Pereira, 2015; Pettorelli *et al.*, 2018). Wild Ennerdale is no exception to this but, being part of the Lake District, its

negotiation of the boundaries between farming, ecotourism, and what might be termed 'conventional' tourism, becomes highly complex.

This is, first, because there is already a considerable amount of tourism in the area, some of which is the result not of Wild Ennerdale but of Lake District attributes more generally which rewilding, potentially, threatens to diminish. Secondly, some of this tourism is 'local' (P36, LWE) and therefore does not introduce money to the area. Thirdly, as has been discussed, a significant tension exists between increasing (eco)tourism to Wild Ennerdale and the risk of detriment to the very quality which inspire those tourists to visit. This quality can be attributed to the ephemeral concept of 'wildness' (P13, FWE, P16, RWE, P35, CWE) but can also, more pragmatically, be ascribed to factors such as quietness, low visitor numbers and lack of cars and traffic noise, which an *increase* in tourism is likely to change. Wild Ennerdale then, like other places which possess 'fascinating remoteness', needs to negotiate ecotourism carefully so as not to diminish the very qualities its visitors value (Boller *et al.*, 2010).

Returning to the first of these issues, i.e. the Lake District's existing popularity as a tourist destination, participants emphasised that tourists appreciate the Lake District, including the Ennerdale Valley, in its current state. For example Participant 39 (EWE) stated that 'you do need to consider how far you go [with rewilding] because there's a knock-on effect with ... the tourism industry, people say that we can do ecotourism, but the Lake District is enjoyed because it's managed'. This point was also made by others who suggested that visitors enjoyed seeing active engagement in the landscape e.g. 'somebody said to me he was putting some straw out to feed a cow, and all these Japanese tourists started taking photos. He asked what they were doing, they said, 'this is why we came to the Lake District, this is for us what the Lake District is about'' (P39, EWE) and

people are more interested in that [traditional farming systems] than a few trees, they like to see people doing things, if we're trying to walk sheep down the lake shore or wherever because we've gathered them from the fells, walk them along the lake shore down to the lower pastures, it's like some sort of photographic frenzy (P36, LWE).

According to these participants therefore, rather than attracting visitors, rewilding could actually see a decrease in tourism.

With regard to the second point, while practitioners at Wild Ennerdale echoed the views of the literature and experts that ecotourism could provide an income source for the Wild Ennerdale Partnership, and bring revenue to the area more widely, stakeholders argued that the probability of this was low. In favour of ecotourism, practitioners suggested that they had 'got quite a product to sell' (P35, CWE) and that as they 'go down the road of growing the ecotourism element of Wild Ennerdale, it will have more benefits even for people living in the valley than it had before' and to the 'the economic sustainability' of the Wild Ennerdale partnership (P38, LWE). Stakeholders by contrast argued against this position on the grounds that tourism is not currently bringing revenue to the area and that it lacks the potential to do so. Participant 36 (LWE), for example, pointed out that tourism to Wild Ennerdale is 'not tourism that leaves any revenue behind [because] it's semi-local tourism, it's dog walkers, it's mountain-bikers from the local former mining towns'. He went on to suggest that Wild Ennerdale will continue to lack appeal for visitors from a wider area, certainly at the scale which would be required to generate significant income simply because it *is* wild:

it hasn't generated much income, which we were promised, 'Wild Ennerdale, people are going to flock to it from all over the world.' They don't. It's a wood. They're more likely to go to Whinlatter visitor centre<sup>134</sup> aren't they and swing about on ropes and go to the tearoom and so forth... people seem to enjoy having something to do. If you come to a wild area you have to find your own thing to do and there doesn't seem to be very many people doing that (P36, LWE).

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<sup>134</sup> Whinlatter Forest is owned by Forestry England and while it is a working forest it also provides considerable facilities for visitors, certainly as compared with Wild Ennerdale, e.g. alpaca walks, a high ropes course, mobility scooters, mountain bike and Segway rentals, play areas, and a visitor centre, café and shop (see <https://www.forestryengland.uk/whinlatter>).

This comment reflects how difficult it can be to monetise rewilding, especially if rewilding projects are to avoid charging for access to the countryside, something which was cautioned against in the expert interviews.

In relation to the third point, participants explicitly cautioned against trying to attract more tourists saying that ‘there are some people that don't like an influx of public into the area ... [it] can create tensions’ (P17, RWE) and that in other parts of the Lake District high numbers of tourists had become an issue to the extent that ‘we're starting to think [of] comparisons between places like Venice, Edinburgh, and an anti-tourist feeling that's starting to happen’ (P37, PWE). Rewilding practitioners who called for the instigation of ecotourism did however demonstrate an awareness that any such tourism should be ‘in keeping’ and that they wanted to be able to ‘allow lots of people to come and see things but without spoiling the place’ or ‘damaging what's there’ (P38, LWE). Negotiating the boundary between rewilding and ecotourism successfully is likely to require a highly strategic approach (Boller *et al.*, 2010), and the balance between conservation and tourism is something which National Parks as a whole do not always achieve (Sharpley and Pearce, 2007).

## **7.4 Rewilding of Wild Ennerdale**

### **7.4.1 Interpretation and praxis of rewilding in Wild Ennerdale**

The practitioners involved in the ‘stewardship’, as they would term it, of Wild Ennerdale are scarcely more comfortable with the term rewilding than those undertaking similar work in the Avalon Marshes. Wild Ennerdale's first stewardship plan took effect in early 2006 but, according to that same plan, was the ‘culmination of five years of discussions’, with a memorandum of understanding, using the appellation ‘Wild Ennerdale’, signed in 2002 (Wild Ennerdale, 2006). Given that Wild Ennerdale adopted that title at least as early as 2002, the employment of it predates rewilding as a concept gaining significant currency within media discourse in the UK, something which happened circa 2009 (Jepson, 2016). From this perspective then, the adoption of the name Wild Ennerdale preceded the term rewilding becoming fashionable and in turn controversial, something which did not happen until after 2013 when Monbiot's (2013) *Feral* further popularised and subsequently problematised the term (Jørgensen, 2014; Jepson, 2016; Prior and Brady, 2017; Tanasescu, 2017;

Gammon, 2018; Deary and Warren, 2018; Pettorelli *et al.*, 2018; Sandom *et al.*, 2018).

The controversy has resulted in Wild Ennerdale partners being at pains to distance themselves from the term rewilding, insisting that the naming of Wild Ennerdale predated rewilding's popularity (or *unpopularity*) as a term, and emphasising their reluctance to rename the partnership now either to associate or dissociate themselves from the rewilding movement. Participant 13 (FWE) made this explicit when he said 'we've steered clear of using it [rewilding] partly because we'd developed our own language beforehand and so we talked, before rewilding became a term you heard in the UK, we were using terms like 'sense of wildness' to describe what you felt like to be in a wild place'. Participant 16 (RWE) made a similar point, emphasising the fact that Wild Ennerdale was named independently of the discourse around rewilding, instead rising 'organically' from the sense that people get from being in Ennerdale Valley: 'it wasn't necessarily aimed at being a rewilding place at the time, that more came organically, the label of 'wild', and anyone who's spent some time in the valley can probably totally understand that'. Likewise, Participant 35 (CWE) drew attention to the way that the concept of 'wild' is closely associated with Ennerdale Valley: 'the premise for calling it 'Wild Ennerdale' was that 'wild' was just the collective feeling we had, that the valley gave us all when we talked about it'. He went on however to highlight a recurring issue when talking about wildness or rewilding – the lack of suitable alternative words, saying that "natural processes led management decision making Ennerdale' is not particularly easy to trip off the tongue is it?' (P35, CWE), redolent of comments in the literature which point to the difficulty of finding a word *other* than rewilding which conveys the same meaning while also evoking similar feelings of inspiration and optimism (Carver, 2016a).

Participants were highly conscious that the term rewilding had generated significant interest in the years since Wild Ennerdale was named, with Participant 35 (CWE) saying that rewilding had entered 'far more into the public conscience'. Meanwhile Participant 22 (CAWE) said that 'maybe ten years ago, [they] would have described [them]selves as rewilding' but that they would not do so now. He said that the current reluctance stemmed from '*Feral*, from George Monbiot and some of that [reluctance] has just come more recently with the media getting

interested and there being maybe again more polarised debate about what the uplands are for or what land's for' (P22, CAWE). Indeed, Participant 22 (CAWE) was extremely reluctant to use the term rewilding, saying that the word: i. had 'lost its definition', ii. become 'toxic' (a point also made by P35 (CWE) and echoing the words of Sandom *et al.* (2018)), iii. become inextricably associated with 'debate about predators' (another point also made by Participant 35 (CWE) and also Participants 38 (LWE) and 42 (CWE)), iv. is perceived to 'exclude people rather than include people', and v. 'doesn't help in any way explain what we're trying to do'. For this reason he said that there was 'no value in pursuing what it does mean' and that rewilding is 'just not worth using' 'because we've got other ways of describing what we're trying to do that maybe are more easy for people to come on board with, and don't have the toxicity associated with them' (P22, CAWE). This participant went so far as to claim that 'none of us would describe ourselves as rewilding' because it 'just gets people off the wrong way', and stated that they instead 'describe [them]selves as a natural processes project, where we're letting natural processes take more of a hand in determining the outcomes' (P22, CAWE). Participant 42 (CWE) made a similar point, although not so forcefully, saying that 'we tend not to use the term 'rewilding' I guess because we never have done ... it's not something that we feel we've needed to change our name to adapt to'. This is a similar point to that made by practitioners in the Avalon Marshes who were reluctant to change the name of their project to involve themselves in a movement which they predated (see Chapter 6, Section 6.4.1).

Wild Ennerdale is, nonetheless, part of the 'European Rewilding Network', a fact which it advertises proudly on the homepage of its website, saying that 'Wild Ennerdale is excited to be a member of the European Rewilding Network' (Wild Ennerdale, 2019) thereby allying itself with rewilding. Participant 38 (LWE) stated that the Wild Ennerdale Partnership made the decision to join the European Rewilding Network to enhance their ability to visit other rewilding sites, and to grow the rewilding 'network' and knowledge 'exchange process'. Indeed, contrary to Participant 22's (CAWE) assertion that 'none of us would describe ourselves as rewilding' other practitioners *did* refer to Wild Ennerdale as rewilding, albeit sometimes to admit the ambiguity of the term. For example Participant 16 (RWE) said:

I think it's quite a broad stroke approach that Wild Ennerdale takes to rewilding and probably a lot of people would look at it and you could dispute whether it is truly rewilding or not ...I think you could definitely argue as to whether this is rewilding or if it isn't rewilding.

Meanwhile Participant 38 (LWE) said that she saw rewilding as 'allowing natural processes to lead for the benefit of nature and people' and emphasised that this was the interpretation which Wild Ennerdale used in its stewardship plan. Indeed Participant 38 (LWE) was deliberately invoking Wild Ennerdale's 'vision', stated in its stewardship plan and on its website, 'to allow the evolution of Ennerdale as a wild valley for the benefit of people, relying more on natural processes to shape its landscape and ecology' (Wild Ennerdale, 2006, 2019).

Together with associating itself with the term rewilding (most notably by joining the European Rewilding Network), Wild Ennerdale also displays the other factors identified in this research as demonstrating 'family resemblance' (Wittgenstein, 1968) to rewilding (see Chapter 4, Section 4.2.2.1): it operates at large scale (4300 hectares), it seeks to increase biodiversity and restore ecological functioning, and it aims for a reduction in human intervention and a corresponding increase in natural autonomy<sup>135</sup>. These last two points in particular, especially by comparison to the Avalon Marshes and the level of management which occurs there, position Wild Ennerdale within the 'nature led (active culture)' segment of the rewilding typology created for this research (see Chapter 4, Section 4.2.2.1) i.e. Wild Ennerdale encourages natural, ecological processes to resume and/or continue, with human intervention to facilitate, accelerate or moderate this process. Given, then, that Wild Ennerdale is, in every practical sense, a case of rewilding, it becomes a further requirement of this research to examine the way in which it is perceived as being such.

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<sup>135</sup> Quotes from participants which illustrate this approach are; 'we describe ourselves as a natural processes project, where we're letting natural processes take more of a hand in determining the outcomes' (P22, CAWE), 'we'd describe ourselves as restoring ecology' (P22, CAWE), 'we can have some fantastic wild, natural processes within this valley ... just allowing the river to do what it does, for a start' (P35, CWE) and 'it's all about scale and that greater emphasis on nature' (P42, CWE). These comments are reinforced by the words of Wild Ennerdale's stewardship plan which, as quoted above, states that it aims 'to allow the evolution of Ennerdale as a wild valley ... relying more on natural processes to shape its landscape and ecology' (Wild Ennerdale, 2006, 2019).



## 7.4.2 Perception and reception of rewilding in Wild Ennerdale

A dominant theme in the way stakeholders perceived the rewilding of the Ennerdale Valley was that of abandonment. This is perhaps unsurprising given that land abandonment in and of itself is one interpretation of rewilding and can also be a tenet of other interpretations (Höchtel, Lehringer and Konold, 2005; Navarro and Pereira, 2012; Jørgensen, 2014). What was of note in stakeholder responses however was the negative attitude to abandonment, associating it with connotations of ‘deserting’ or ‘forsaking’ land rather than the sense of ‘relinquishing control to another’ (in this case the ‘other’ being nature), or even the sense of to ‘release, set free or liberate’, the prefix ‘a’ making it the negation of ‘bandon’ being ‘dominion’ or ‘control’ (OED, 2020g). Participant 39 (EWE) explained that this was true with regard to perceptions of rewilding generally (‘when you think of rewilding, you basically think of just land abandonment’) and the rewilding of Ennerdale specifically, giving the example of a group of farming students who were taken to visit Wild Ennerdale and their perception being that ‘what they saw was just tantamount to land abandonment’.

Participant 36 (LWE) was even more specific, drawing attention to Low Moor End Farm, a farm at the entrance to the Ennerdale Valley which was purchased by United Utilities as part of ‘compensatory measures’ they were obliged to put in place in response to ‘adverse effects on the River Ehen SAC [Special Area of Conservation]’ (United Utilities, 2014). The participant was clear both that he considered the farm abandoned and that he considered abandonment to be rewilding, saying that United Utilities ‘bought a little farm in the bottom of the valley, just outside the village, and they have abandoned that, that is what I would consider to be rewilding’ (P36, LWE). He noted however that ‘we haven’t to use the word ‘abandon’, because the Wild Ennerdale people get really, really angry if we describe it as abandonment, even though they’ve left the house empty and it’s falling down’ (P36, LWE). In his view this was because the practitioners at Wild Ennerdale make a distinction between ‘abandonment’ and ‘rewilding’, perhaps to avoid the negative connotations of abandonment (although by replacing abandonment with rewilding they are perhaps stepping out of the linguistic frying pan and into the linguistic fire).

Practitioners recognised that Low Moor End Farm was, in the view of stakeholders, abandoned but attributed this to stakeholder's lack of a 'long term view' of the process of rewilding and also to the way in which the appearance of the land offended their aesthetic sensibilities:

this land is a bit of a bone of contention with some of the locals because they look at this and think it's abandoned and it's awful ... I can understand what people say, it does look abandoned and all the rest of it, but it's that long-term view that you have to take with these things (P43, CWE).

Stakeholders however gave different, less superficial reasons than aesthetic qualities for their concern over abandonment. First was the perception that rewilding resulted in the cultural element of Wild Ennerdale's landscape being disregarded and devalued, potentially resulting in the loss of that landscape. Second was the concern that the rewilding of one area simply transposes environmental problems to another area (c.f. criticism in the literature of rewilding as neo-colonial or neo-imperialistic in that it outsources food production, and the associated environmental degradation, to other countries so that rewilding can occur in the host country e.g. Navarro and Pereira, 2012; Fairlie, 2013). Participant 17 (RWE) articulated the (perceived) lack of appreciation for the value of the area's cultural landscape when he said 'people look at this landscape and think generations of farmers have farmed it, they've removed all the rocks, there's a lot of blood and sweat gone into it to make the land productive and what they see UU [United Utilities] doing is letting it go to waste' (cf similar ideas in the literature discussed in Chapter 3 that cultivation represents progress, mastery over nature, and the result of many generations of labour (Ingold, 2000; Carver, 2007; Tsing, 2012)). Participant 21b (BWE) meanwhile highlighted the risk that the legacy of those generations could be lost, saying of Low Moor End Farm that it had 'been a working farm for hundreds of years but because they're rewilding that, they're taking the opportunity away' i.e. taking away the opportunity to continue the farming tradition.

The transposition of environmental problems from one place to another was also expressed by this participant, saying that the abandonment of the farmhouse at Low Moor End meant that:

now they have to build another house because that house doesn't exist anymore, so, it's a mad, mad way of rewilding because all you're doing is the neighbouring town now has to build more houses and expand into their wilder areas because you're trying to take the human factor out of a wild place' (P21b, BWE).

A similar point was made by Participant 36 (LWE) although he focused more on the human rather than the environmental impact of abandoning land to rewilding saying that 'there's kids in the village [Ennerdale Bridge] that have to move to Cleator Moor<sup>136</sup> because they can't get a house'. This comment hints at the rural depopulation which rewilding has been suspected of causing (Jones and Comfort, 2020), a subject which is entangled with the loss of farming and the damage to rural communities as explicated by Participant 39 (EWE). His comments related not to Low Moor End Farm specifically but to the rewilding of farms generally, which he saw as 'massively controversial' because of the 'issue of farms for the next generation' with the risk that, if the tenancy on a National Trust farm becomes available the 'National Trust say no, our policy is we're going to rewild that and rent out that building as a holiday cottage or rent it out on a commercial basis that ... doesn't speak well to farmers because it's just another blocker in that succession (P39, EWE). The succession which this participant is concerned about is the succession of older farmers by the younger generation and the difficulty for young farmers entering the business. This has been identified by Lobley, Winter and Wheeler (2019) who note the increasing age of farmers in England. Removing farms from productive agriculture for rewilding purposes is seen by Participant 41 (LWE) as exacerbating this problem.

Rural depopulation is a significant topic – while the literature notes that concern exists in relation to rewilding *causing* rural depopulation (e.g. Sandom and Wynne-Jones, 2019; Jones and Comfort, 2020) a much more common theme is of rewilding occurring where rural depopulation and land abandonment has already taken place (e.g. Navarro and Pereira, 2012; Ceausu *et al.*, 2015; Lorimer *et al.*, 2015; Navarro and Pereira, 2015; Jepson, 2016; van der Zanden *et al.*, 2017; DeSilvey and Bartolini, 2018; Jones and Comfort, 2020). It is important to note however that this literature focuses heavily on rural

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<sup>136</sup> A small town four miles west of Ennerdale Bridge.

depopulation and subsequent land abandonment in continental Europe as opposed to the UK. In the UK rural land values are higher than in many other European countries certainly as compared to Bulgaria, Croatia and Romania for example which have some of the lowest land prices and are home to several of Rewilding Europe's most ambitious projects (Eurostat, 2018; Rewilding Europe, 2020a). High land prices in the UK reduce the likelihood of land abandonment, thus limiting the opportunity for rewilding to *follow* rural depopulation but raising the possibility of *inducing* it. This subject will be returned to in the conclusion of this thesis.

In addition to concerns around the praxis of rewilding, stakeholders also had concerns over the term's meaning, mirroring the confusion in the literature and among experts and practitioners. Participant 37 (PWE) saw rewilding as 'not meaning anything', 'in danger of being hijacked' and 'meaning too many different things to too many different people', cf Prior and Brady (2017) and Hayward *et al.* (2019) who note rewilding's lack of an agreed definition, and Jørgensen (2014) who describes the term as plastic. For this reason, he saw it as more useful to 'tell people what you're actually doing, as opposed to using this concept [of rewilding]' (P37, PWE). Meanwhile, other participants discussed whether 'Wild' Ennerdale was wild or not, and therefore whether or not the term rewilding was applicable. Participant 33 (PCWE) argued that Ennerdale is already wild, so 'what do you mean by rewilding?' while, conversely, P34 (LWE) argued not only that Wild Ennerdale is *not* currently wild but also the improbability that 'anything will end up as wild, so rewilding isn't a true definition'. This participant noted however the positive connotations that rewilding can have (echoing the literature which describes rewilding as 'inspiring' e.g. Sandom *et al.* (2013), Arts, Fischer and van der Wal (2016) and Sandom and Wynne-Jones (2019)) and that it is therefore 'a word that's used for effect, rather than for a true description' (P34, LWE). Similarly, Participant 19 (BWE) talked about the term's value for 'marketing' purposes, especially in terms of getting people 'interested' in what's happening with both of these comments indicating rewilding's status as a buzzword. Conversely, other participants saw the implications of the term rewilding as wholly negative, saying that 'using words like rewilding doesn't help' (P37, PWE) and that the word rewilding 'gets people wound up' (P36, LWE). Both these participants related the negative connotations of rewilding to its association with

the (re)introduction of large mammals (beaver, grizzly bears, lynx and wolves in the case of P36 (LWE) and boar, lynx and wolves in the case of P37 (PWE)).

Participants also questioned whether the activity in Ennerdale could really be considered rewilding asking 'isn't it just land management? Isn't it just land management to improve what it is?' (P33, PCWE). In particular participants highlighted the contradictions inherent in the definitions and praxis of rewilding, questioning the extent to which rewilding can or cannot involve management. Participant 36 (LWE) was particularly vociferous on this point, first highlighting the 'contradiction' inherent in the management of roe deer in the valley, with 'stalkers in there blowing their heads off all over the place', while the Wild Ennerdale partnership are purporting to be reducing human intervention. He saw this approach to management as inconsistent, particularly in relation to whether things are 'wild' or 'natural' (reminiscent of debates over the distinction between nature and culture and whether humans are part of or apart from nature (e.g. McKibben, 1990; White, 1995; Bowker, 2000; Nye, 2000; Helmreich, 2005; Carver, 2007; Brown, McMorran and Price, 2011; Cassidy, 2012; DeMello, 2012; Seddon *et al.*, 2014; Head, 2015; Saunders, 2016)):

the whole principle of rewilding it would appear requires the use of lots and lots of volunteer hours to make it properly wild so where do we draw the line between 'wild' and 'management'? If we've got loads of people in there removing undesirable species and replacing them with desirable species, that's not rewilding. That's not natural processes. That's management. That's farming or forestry. That is doing something to deliver an outcome. That is positive commercial management (P36, LWE).

Participant 41 (LWE) was equally convinced that, strictly speaking, rewilding should not involve management saying 'to me rewilding means just let it grow on its own, don't manage it in any way whatsoever, no management at all'. This is not to suggest however that he thinks this is a good approach, saying that 'eventually what you'd end up with is really a lot of rubbish if you didn't manage it ... [and that] there's got to be some kind of management ... there's got to human intervention' (P41, LWE). This illuminates a difficult boundary for rewilding to negotiate – criticised on one hand for betraying its principles if human intervention

is involved and, on the other, for resulting in landscape deterioration *without* human involvement.

Regardless of the debate among practitioners and stakeholders as to whether or not Wild Ennerdale is an instance of rewilding, 67% of visitor questionnaire respondents considered that it was (in answer to the question 'do you consider what is being done at Wild Ennerdale as rewilding?'), compared to 33% who did not. The most common reason given for considering Wild Ennerdale a rewilding project was its afforestation with a variety of native trees that were not considered 'cultivated', as opposed to the non-native Sitka spruce monocultures of previous, commercial forestry in the valley. Meanwhile the level of and/or perceived need for management was the main reason for not considering Wild Ennerdale to be rewilding. One particularly interesting comment came from a respondent who answered 'no' to the question of whether they considered what was being done at Wild Ennerdale as rewilding but, when asked why they thought that, responded: 'the place is left to rot and is called rewinding [sic] as they don't have to spend any money that way, the forests are a mess with little wildlife in certain areas. The fella [sic] are being damaged as a result of sheep reduction and fell encroachment'. That is, this participant does not consider Wild Ennerdale to be a case of rewilding, instead seeing it as neglect, i.e. being 'left to rot', but does see what is happening there as being 'dressed up' as rewilding in order to gild a management technique that enables the landowners to not 'have to spend any money'. This idea of rewilding being done for convenience or cost saving reasons was also something which Participant 36 (LWE) mentioned: 'this whole idea of rewilding became very popular within the Forestry Commission, because it basically meant they didn't have to do anything' and illustrates negative attitudes towards rewilding's motives and its outcomes.

Irrespective of whether or not they considered it to be rewilding, 90% of respondents answered 'yes' to the question 'do you like the way the landscape is being managed at Wild Ennerdale?' while 10% answered no. Other questions on this theme give a little more information regarding the way rewilding at Wild Ennerdale is perceived with 95% of respondents thinking that what is happening is either making no change to the landscape or making it better (giving an answer of four or higher to the question 'do you think what is happening in Wild Ennerdale

is making the landscape better or worse, where one is much worse and seven is much better’) with only 5% thinking that what is happening is making the landscape worse (giving an answer of three or lower). As discussed in the previous chapter, a problem was identified with the question which asked respondents what they thought ‘should happen in relation to ‘rewilding’ at Wild Ennerdale’. Because of the potential for respondents to misinterpret the option ‘the landscape should go back to how it was before’ as meaning that it should return to some rewilding baseline, as opposed to the intended interpretation that it should return to how it was before any rewilding commenced, the results from this question are unreliable. Nonetheless, it can be said that 72% of respondents thought that the landscape of Wild Ennerdale should get wilder to at least some degree (see Figure 7.17 for all responses to this question).

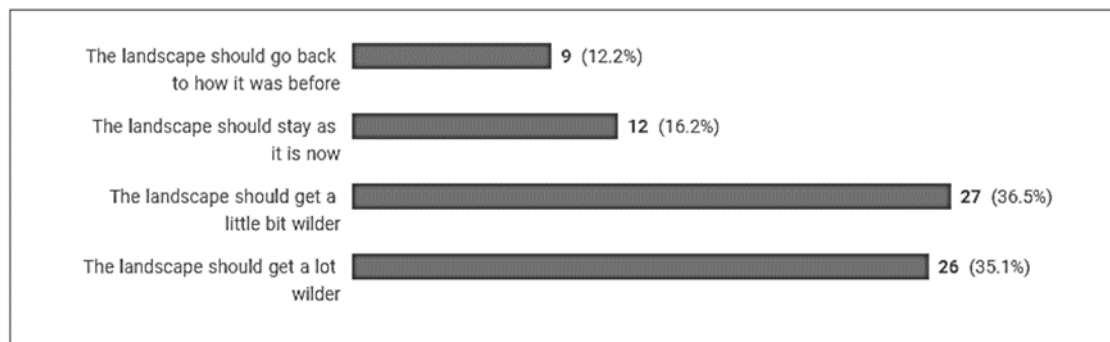


Figure 7.17: Visitor questionnaire responses to the question ‘What do you think should happen in relation to ‘rewilding’ at Wild Ennerdale?’

## 7.5 Summary

This chapter has explored the unique landscapes of Wild Ennerdale, and the Ennerdale Valley and Lake District within which it is located. The salient landscapes with respect to Wild Ennerdale as a rewilding initiative are the cultural landscapes of the Lake District National Park, most notably that of pastoral sheep farming and also, related to this, the 'idyllic' landscape which attracts national and international visitors. Also important is the UNESCO world heritage landscape which includes the literary landscape of the Romantic poets, although the Lake Poets did not feature as prominently in this research as other cultural forms which appeared to have had a greater impact on popularising the Lake District in the contemporary public imagination, specifically the writings of Wainwright (1994) and contemporary interpretations of this (e.g. television programmes).

All of these landscapes were highly valued both for their intrinsic and economic worth, evoking strong sentiments from participants who felt passionately about their individual interpretations of the Ennerdale Valley. The landscapes were valued for the history they contained, the livelihoods they supported and the sanctuary they offered. Changes to these landscapes, such as those generated by rewilding, were therefore often regarded critically, with scepticism or even suspicion, and the negotiation of the boundaries between rewilding and these landscapes was viewed by participants as polarising. Indeed, the term rewilding itself was often received with misapprehension and misgivings, creating confusion and conflict as often as it inspired. The way the boundaries between these landscapes and rewilding are negotiated has been explored specifically in relation to Wild Ennerdale in this chapter. In the following chapter these findings will be taken in conjunction with the findings relating to the Avalon Marshes and a cross case analysis of the two sites will be conducted with a particular focus on the process of negotiation.



## **Chapter 8: Between the water and the wild**

### **8.1 Outline**

This chapter follows on from Chapters 6 and 7 by offering a cross case analysis of the Avalon Marshes and Wild Ennerdale. In taking a cross case approach this chapter explores the landscapes and boundaries of rewilding from a broader perspective. In particular it focuses on the way the boundaries which landscapes present to rewilding are negotiated and draws comparisons between the two sites. It considers the negotiation of human, other-than-human, and abiotic boundaries in turn. Human boundaries are considered to exist between rewilding and stakeholders local to the rewilding site as well as visitors to the area. Biotic other-than-human agents are the companion species of rewilding and boundaries with them are considered from a biopolitical perspective, examining the positions which companion species occupy within rewilding initiatives and the way they are regulated by humans. A summary of the biopolitical modes of companion species of rewilding is developed and is offered in Table 8.1, those modes being species as self-determining agents, species as analogues, species as proxies for humans and species as expendable objects. Finally, the negotiation of boundaries with abiotic agents is considered, the primary abiotic agent in question at both field sites being water. Water is considered in terms of its agency and ability to create landscapes, its behaviour towards archaeology, flooding, and the maintenance of the status quo with regard to water at each site – this means specific things in each case: water levels and drainage in the Avalon Marshes, and drinking water and freshwater pearl mussels in Wild Ennerdale.

### **8.2 Negotiating human boundaries**

#### **8.2.1 Negotiating with stakeholders**

One of the most surprising findings of this research was the call by stakeholders for more consultation with regard to rewilding projects. When asked about ways rewilding's boundaries could be better negotiated, the overriding theme from stakeholder responses was the need for improved communication. This was surprising and even disappointing given that the study of science and environmental communication has long been highlighting the need for effective communication of environmental issues to publics (Burgess, Harrison and Filius,

1998; Cox, 2003; Bucchi, 2008; Trench, 2008; Jones-Walters and Çil, 2011; Wyborn, 2015; Turnhout *et al.*, 2020). In particular these scholars highlight the need for dialogic communication and, preferably, consultative, participatory, and even co-production approaches as opposed to top down, deficit style approaches.

Effective communication appeared to be particularly lacking in Wild Ennerdale with several stakeholders highlighting it as deficient, saying for example that there was 'not enough explanation to the local people' about why things are done in Wild Ennerdale (P17, RWE), 'very, very little communication between us and the Wild Ennerdale people' (P36, LWE) and that 'for years there's been arguments about lack of consultation, lack of involvement of people' (P33, PCWE). Perhaps most interesting of all was a comment from Participant 19 (BWE) who said there was a feeling that:

Wild Ennerdale starts probably at the end of the lake and it's managed by a team of people who don't refer to the community ... it's almost like there's an[...] invisible line and it's not really ever crossed in terms of communication and the community being involved as a whole.

This comment is particularly striking in a research project investigating boundaries and how they are negotiated. The participant perceives an invisible boundary as existing between Wild Ennerdale and Ennerdale Bridge which is a barrier to communication and, by extension, to engagement of the village community with the rewilding project generally.

By contrast, practitioners talked a great deal about how they communicated regarding rewilding in Wild Ennerdale e.g. via a quarterly newsletter (13, FWE), on their website (P13, FWE, P16, RWE), through their partnership officer (P13, FWE, P16, RWE), one of whose roles was to be Wild Ennerdale's 'eyes and ears and our immediate contact with local communities' (P13, FWE), by social media (P13, FWE), with people who volunteered to assist with the project (P16, RWE, P22, CAWE, P42, CWE, P43, CWE), and in a reciprocal agreement whereby representatives of Wild Ennerdale and the Ennerdale and Kinniside Parish Council attend alternate council and partnership

meetings (P13, FWE, P16, RWE, P35, CWE, P38, LWE, P42, CWE, P43, CWE). It became apparent however that what practitioners were describing was predominantly an educational (i.e. 'deficit model' (Burgess, Harrison and Filius, 1998; Bucchi, 2008; Trench, 2008)) or engagement approach to communication rather than the consultative and participatory approach now called for (e.g. Burgess, Harrison and Filius, 1998; Cox, 2003; Bucchi, 2008; Trench, 2008; Jones-Walters and Çil, 2011; Wyborn, 2015; Turnhout *et al.*, 2020). This was evident in comments such as from Participant 13 (FWE) in relation to Wild Ennerdale's approach to social media: 'we try and build up, through that social media feed, people's understanding of rewilding and ecosystem restoration'. The focus on engagement was acknowledged by another participant who recognised that during the 'consultation' on the Wild Ennerdale stewardship plan 'we're not asking them to decide what we do ... it's more of an engagement exercise' (P35, CWE). The approach was also evident from the stakeholder perspective with one participant saying: 'we are involved in a lot of the discussions, although in some respects, we're *told* about them, rather than *asked* about them' (P34, LWE, emphasis added). This indicates that while communication is occurring, its methods are ineffective, hence the perception of stakeholders that they are *not* communicated with – what they are noting is a lack of *genuine* communication, or rather *consultation*.

Another weakness in Wild Ennerdale's communication was the failure to acknowledge 'lay expertise' (Turnhout and Neves, 2019). This point was made very strongly by Participant 36 (LWE) who felt that the knowledge of landowners in the area wasn't being utilised, despite their having a great deal to offer, particularly with regard to the unique characteristics of the area, saying 'why don't you [Wild Ennerdale practitioners] come and listen to us and then possibly some of the mistakes that are being made can be avoided' and:

the knowledge that is accrued through generations of farming, passed from one generation to the next, allows us to work alongside nature, be part of nature, be part of it, be the dominant species within that particular area, and make sure that everything else in that area manages in the way that it needs to.

This second comment raises an interesting point in that the ideas conveyed are somewhat at odds with those of rewilding, possibly indicating an inherent incompatibility between the views of farmers and those of rewilders, hampering efforts to negotiate the boundary between farming and rewilding and find a position which is acceptable to both parties. The participant very much identifies humans as part of nature (see discussion in Chapter 2), describing them as the dominant species, an anthropocentric point of view which is contrary to the ecocentric philosophy of rewilding. His comment also demonstrates an interventionist approach – by being the ‘dominant species’ we are ensuring ‘that everything else in that area manages in the way that it needs to’, again something which is incompatible with the ‘hands off’ approach of rewilding (Corlett, 2016; Carver, 2016a).

A similar picture emerged in the Avalon Marshes where stakeholders saw the need for rewilding practitioners to ‘keep talking to the community’ (P45a, PCAM), to ‘listen, listen to the farmers’ (P30, LAM), and for rewilding practitioners and stakeholders to ‘work together more’ (26, PAM). Again, practitioners asserted that this was done, although not via as many channels as in Wild Ennerdale, the main method of communication highlighted being via consultation on management plans (P32, CAM and P40, CAM). Scope for fuller consultation was however apparent since Participant 40 (CAM) said that ‘the management plan ... we make available to *key stakeholders* certainly, we consult on a *final draft* or a *late draft* of the management plan’ (emphasis added). Participant 40’s (CAM) comment reveals that consultation on the management plan is not inclusive since only ‘key stakeholders’ are involved in the process. Nor is it *genuinely* consultative since it is only a ‘late’ or even ‘final’ stage document which is circulated.

Again, similarly to Wild Ennerdale, other criticisms of communication relating to the Avalon Marshes was its lack of a dialogic approach (rather, at times, taking a directive style) and its disregard of lay expertise. Both of these were clearly illustrated in comments from Participant 30 (LWE) when he said ‘consultation would be about just trying to achieve what Natural England are trying to achieve, so it's not actually asking us what we think's best. It's saying ‘well look this is what we need to do, can you do that?’ and:

I said to someone one day that when we were growing up we used to have lots of lapwing chicks and curlew and snipe, all those sorts of birds rearing chicks on our land. And he said 'I don't know, I can't see that' he said 'because we've got no records'. But no one didn't need records because they were there, and they knew what fields they would be nesting in next year because they'd nested in that field and the chicks would come back to that field. When you have someone tell you that, it's almost classing you as a liar, and that ain't good, people don't like that. People won't talk then once you start saying things like that.

This participant's comment highlights the damaging consequences which disregarding lay expertise can have on negotiations; it is not only that potentially useful information is missed, but barriers are created which could be detrimental to future negotiations and cooperation.

What makes these apparent failures in communication particularly surprising is that rewilding practitioners clearly recognised its importance. Participant 15 (CAM), for example, emphasised the importance of consultation saying 'I don't think we can do anything out here [the Avalon Marshes] without having a lot of the stakeholders on board' and went on to say that you have to 'take the people with you ... because if you don't do that there will be suspicions, there will be concerns and worries'. Corresponding comments were made by practitioners in Wild Ennerdale who said that 'the way people that live locally perceive the project is really important as to how successful it can be' P16 (RWE) and 'if you want to secure big change in the long term, you need to take a community with you' (P22, CAWE). Practitioners did however set caveats in relation to consultation, acknowledging that they did not consult on everything 'because if we consulted on everything that we did we would really struggle to get things done' (P32, CAM). This sentiment was echoed almost precisely by a practitioner from Wild Ennerdale who said that 'there's a limit to how much [consultation] you can do, spend your whole time doing that and not actually getting anything done if you're not careful' (P35, CWE). These comments suggest that communication is something which is viewed by practitioners as peripheral

rather than integral to rewilding, and rewilding success, and provide one explanation for the apparent failures in communication at both field sites.

Equally, practitioners acknowledged that effective consultation could be difficult to achieve, either in terms of getting people involved or in terms of reaching consensus. For example Participant 32 (CAM) highlighted the difficulties attendant with getting representative consultation across stakeholder groups saying, 'it's really funny because it doesn't matter how much you encourage people to come and consult, quite often you'll only get the usual people turning up and people don't take that opportunity to get involved'. While the notion of 'hard to reach' (Nisbet and Scheufele, 2009) groups is well recognised within public engagement literature, it is not enough for rewilding to acknowledge the problem, steps must be taken to address it. Accepting rather than challenging this situation demonstrates a lack of sophistication with regard to consultation and knowledge of publics and, according to Nisbet and Scheufele (2009), it may even be unethical not to attempt to engage as wide an audience as possible by using as many communication channels as are available.

Following on from ethical considerations relating to consultation, a comment from Participant 22 (CAWE) illustrated that consideration must be given to what use is made of information gained as part of consultation since, even if stakeholders do participate in consultation they are not necessarily in favour of the outcome:

you've got a choice of either saying, 'sod you, we're going to do this,' or you've got a choice of maybe going a little bit more slowly and trying to take people with you which is generally what we'll do. But sometimes you go a bit more slowly and you don't take the people with you anyway and you think well we tried.

This participant's comment illustrates a desire to reach agreement or resolution during negotiation which, as he shows, is not always possible and may not always be *necessary*. Participant 13 (FWE) for example says 'we don't necessarily need to aim to come to agreement, we simply want a process where people can air their views and understand why we're doing things even if they don't agree with those necessarily'. This view is reminiscent of Haraway's 'staying with the

trouble', a notion which, according to Haraway requires us to focus solely on the present rather than treat it as a 'pivot between awful or edenic pasts and apocalyptic or salvific futures' (2016, p. 1). Haraway's (2016) comments are particularly apposite for rewilding which summons both awful and edenic pasts (e.g. the environmental degradation of anthropogenic landscapes and the idealised, pristine ecosystems which preceded human impact (Deary and Warren, 2018; du Toit and Pettorelli, 2019)) and also apocalyptic and salvific futures (e.g. predictions of accelerating biodiversity collapse and rewilding as an almost magical solution to our environmental problems (Pereira *et al.*, 2010; Weintrobe, 2013; Pievani, 2014; McCallum, 2015)). With respect to negotiations, Haraway goes on to say that staying with the trouble requires us to engage in 'unexpected collaborations' because '[a]lone in our separate kinds of expertise and experience, we know both too much and too little' (2016, p. 4). I would argue that in negotiating its boundaries, rewilding needs to engage in these unexpected collaborations more openly and honestly because rewilding expertise and experience by itself knows too little and yet is at risk of knowing too much (i.e. believing that it knows enough) and therefore discounting the lay expertise that could engage with it.

Part of the challenge in 'coming to agreement' may be because of an issue raised by other participants – the difficulty, or even impossibility, of 'pleasing everybody' especially when 'you've got a proportion of diehards, their families have been there for many, many years, and the 'incomers', like us who come in and want to change everything' (Participant 45b, PCAM). This notion of 'incomers' or 'outsiders' was also apparent in Wild Ennerdale e.g. 'we can't have dominant, I don't like using the word, outsiders, coming in and suddenly telling us what's best for our communities, or our environment, our whole social structure, changes things' (P36, LWE). This identification, and *resentment*, of conservation ideals being imposed on a rural community from the outside links back to ideas of armchair rewilding and, perhaps even more seriously, 'the agency of people in rural areas ... [going] unacknowledged' and rural people being 'acted upon ... by environmentalists' (Shucksmith, 2018, p. 164) i.e. they are *objects* rather than *subjects* in their own communities.

How then to move forward with respect to the negotiation between farming and rewilding? Participants highlighted that, as discussed above, more communication is needed since 'everything goes wrong [when] people just do things without speaking' and that if rewilders 'don't have the community on their side life will be very difficult for everybody' (P45a, PCAM). It was not simply a case of *more* communication however, participants noted that communication needed to be done *differently*. Participant 26 (PAM) emphasised the need for communication to be a two-way process in which all parties 'work together and understand everybody's needs' by remaining 'open minded', not 'shut[ting] down straight away' when something is suggested. It was noted however that this would require a change in language and negotiating style, as described by Participant 39 (EWE):

if you're trying to get farmers to engage with it [rewilding], go into a more collaborative, cooperative approach rather than this finger pointing. All this stuff about climate change and livestock, every time you mention climate change and livestock again it's just something else that puts up a barrier, so they won't engage with that side of the movement.

This comment highlights the way that introducing blame to negotiations creates a combative rather than a constructive, collaborative atmosphere. Instead, as part of more genuinely consultative communication, negotiations could adopt a tone of mutual responsibility and mutual benefit as recognised by Participant 21b (BWE) who identified the need for establishing 'common goals' and 'work[ing] with each other'. This was echoed by Participant 36 (LWE) who suggested:

creat[ing] a valley plan that is genuinely inclusive, that doesn't take its farming advice ... from an expert in the National Trust who has never sheared a sheep, who has never dosed a cow<sup>137</sup> ... Let's have a proper steering group that includes everyone. Let's be open about it. Let's not call it rewilding, let's call it 'Ennerdale Valley management' ... be inclusive, involve people, create some jobs, maintain some jobs and accept that commercial activity is part of

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<sup>137</sup> This links back to ideas of lay expertise being discounted in negotiations.



the Lake District. It's not Yellowstone National Park, it's not an ancient wilderness. It's a working environment.

What this participant has suggested however, compromises some of the ideals of rewilding e.g. 'management' implies human intervention and 'commercial activity' implies a consumptive land use both of which are at odds with rewilding (Höchtel, Lehringer and Konold, 2005; Navarro and Pereira, 2012; Lorimer and Driessen, 2014; Lorimer *et al.*, 2015; Tanasescu, 2017; Gammon, 2018). The question then becomes to what extent can, or should, rewilding compromise in its negotiation with other land use. One way in which this can perhaps be done is via extensive farming as part of a larger rewilding system, something which is discussed in the following section.

### **8.2.2 Negotiating with and through pioneers**

In both field sites for this research, extensive farming was suggested both as a means of providing benefits to rewilding projects and of offering a way for productive farming (in the economic and in the food production sense) to continue, meaning that rewilding and farming could coexist within a landscape. Given that the move from conventional, often intensive, farming to an extensive model is something of a 'cultural shift' (P42, CWE) and can present a 'mindset challenge' (P39, EWE), Participant 32 (CAM) saw the need for 'brave land owners' to act as pioneers and 'demonstrate to other landowners that it is possible' to manage land differently. Participant 46 (CAM) also highlighted the need of having someone who can be a 'champion', 'lead by example' and thereby offer 'a positive message and ... demonstrate that there is a benefit to people who are actively taking part [in rewilding]'. This links strongly to the concept of (farmer) knowledge exchanges, in which farmers rely on, and learn from, advice from fellow farmers especially with regard to new practices (Wood *et al.*, 2014).

This same thought process was clearly evident in Wild Ennerdale where rewilding practitioners spoke of deliberately recruiting a partner with whom they could work and who could act as a 'pioneer' (P13, FWE, P22, CAWE). This pioneer needed to be less 'risk averse' (P22, CAWE, P34, LWE) than those in the sector were usually perceived to be, in order demonstrate to other, *more* risk averse, farmers that the new way of working was 'safe and therefore you ... [can] feel more confident to go ahead' (P22, CAWE). The role of the pioneer was also

seen as instrumental in negotiating the cultural boundary (i.e. instigating the cultural shift described above) between rewilding and a farming sector which is resistant to change, being 'hard-wired into a different way of thinking, generationally hard-wired' (P35, CWE), and where a lot of 'people do what they've always done, not for any particular reason other than they've always done it, or their parents always did it' (P22, CAWE). Rewilding relied on pioneers in its negotiations with farming to help overcome this cultural boundary of belief that things 'can't be done' differently by 'break[ing] th[e] ice and ...and show[ing] that actually it can be done' (P22, CAWE). This use of pioneers illustrates the necessity for rewilding to collaborate with stakeholders, rather than trying to operate in isolation.

Pioneer farmers were present in both the Avalon Marshes and Wild Ennerdale. In the Avalon Marshes, in addition to his own farm, a local farmer holds the tenancy of 'Canada Farm' (owned by Natural England and situated within Shapwick Heath) and grazes this, and other areas of the Avalon Marshes, with Highland cattle. A similar situation exists at Wild Ennerdale where a farmer holds several National Trust tenancies in or near Wild Ennerdale and grazes parts of Wild Ennerdale with Black Galloway cattle. In both sites the role of these pioneers was not just in demonstrating a different approach but in being able to talk about their experience (P13, FWE). Participant 46 (CAM) described this as 'farmer to farmer' or 'peer to peer' communication and saw it as a crucial form of communication and as being a way in which 'change is facilitated' because:

it's no good if you're just talking technical stuff or throwing a model at somebody. It might make a lot of sense to me and give me confidence, but it just doesn't work for most people who know their land. They don't need a model to tell them what's going to happen, they know'<sup>138</sup>.

Again this echoes the findings of Wood *et al.* (2014) that farmers 'privilege farming experience' in knowledge transfer interactions. Additionally, this form of

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<sup>138</sup> Participant 46's (CAM) comments regarding 'people who know their land' reflect the comments of Participants 30 (LAM) and 36 (LWE), above, who emphasised the depth of local (farming) knowledge and the benefits that this lay expertise could therefore offer.

peer to peer communication may also assist with accusations of armchair rewilding and the sense that a 'new culture' is being imposed by exogenous forces, by allowing people with 'local credibility ... who can be persuasive and tell a good story' to drive the transition, thereby avoiding 'forcing' the new culture on communities but rather encouraging them to 'own' it (P46, CAM). In this way agency is, at least partially, restored to rural communities.

### **8.2.3 Negotiating with visitors**

Beyond those rural communities, visitors to rewilding areas are another stakeholder group to consider in rewilding negotiations. As part of the visitor questionnaire conducted at each field site, visitors were asked if they had heard about any consultation regarding rewilding in the area and, if so, whether they had been involved. Responses in the affirmative were low with only 13% of respondents from the Avalon Marshes answering 'yes' to the question 'have you heard about any meetings or discussions (including online discussions) about how the landscape is being managed at the Avalon Marshes?'. Affirmatory responses were higher in Wild Ennerdale but still relatively low with only 26% of respondents answering 'yes' to the same question in relation to Wild Ennerdale. Levels of engagement with the consultation process were similarly low with only 33% and 26% of respondents stating that they had been involved with the consultation at the Avalon Marshes and Wild Ennerdale respectively. It should be noted however that respondents were a mix of local, national and international visitors to the rewilding sites and thus those visiting from further from the rewilding sites were less likely to be aware of any consultation.

Very few visitors responded to the supplementary question of why they hadn't got involved in the consultation process (only seven at the Avalon Marshes and twenty-one in Wild Ennerdale) so it is not meaningful to discuss these results in a quantitative sense. Some of the responses given when the respondents selected the option 'other' are however interesting. In relation to the Avalon Marshes one respondent answered 'Not publicized enough. Found out about anything too late', perhaps indicative of a need for improved communication from rewilding practitioners if they wish to engage more people with the consultation process. In Wild Ennerdale, one extremely telling response was 'Already involved in the project and didn't want to listen to some of the inevitable biased whinging.'

Evidently, this is a respondent who is involved with the Wild Ennerdale project in some way and who therefore gets information via other sources. Their response is illustrative of how polarised the negotiations relating to rewilding can be and how difficult it can be to create meaningful dialogue given that stakeholders, such as this one, hold 'entrenched positions' (Thirgood and Redpath, 2008) and can be unwilling to even listen to views which are contrary to their own.

Another response from Wild Ennerdale was that 'It was better that volunteers who live in the immediate area went [to consultation events]'. From other answers given by this respondent it was apparent that they volunteered with the Wild Ennerdale project so this answer is not as exclusionary as it may first appear i.e. that only those who volunteer with Wild Ennerdale should be involved in the consultation process. Rather, this respondent is deferring to volunteers who live in the 'immediate area' as opposed to volunteers, like themselves, who live further away. It is worth noting however that this respondent answered '13 miles' to the question 'how far did you travel to get to Wild Ennerdale?'. This suggests that they take a hyperlocal view as to who can 'legitimately' be involved in negotiation regarding the rewilding of Ennerdale, and does therefore indicate a somewhat exclusionary standpoint, thereby raising very interesting questions regarding who can legitimately be involved in consultation regarding a rewilding project, or indeed any (conservation) project.

Such an idea may be linked to the concept of 'nimbyism' – public resistance to proposed changes or development in their 'back yard', hence, 'not in my back yard' (NIMBY). As discussed in the chapter relating to Wild Ennerdale, there is certainly evidence of a strong sense of local ownership of the valley, with those resident in and around Ennerdale referring to it as their 'back garden' (P42, CWE), with such attitudes clearly having the potential to evoke nimbyism. It can however be difficult to evaluate what constitutes a 'back yard', with Michaud *et al.* (2008) finding that opinion did not vary in relation to proximity to a site of proposed oil drilling in the way that might have been expected – there was no correlation between views on the oil drilling and proximity to or distance from it. The sense of what constitutes one's back yard may then be a subjective rather than an objective assessment and therefore publics may make their own assessment as to whether their participation in consultation regarding rewilding

is legitimate or not. This may be relevant to the concept of armchair rewilding, where urban residents feel entitled to have an opinion in favour of rewilding even though they may be distant from it and will be least affected by its immediate / direct impact (Bauer, Wallner and Hunziker, 2009; Arts, Fischer and van der Wal, 2016).

Very interestingly there was a marked shift in attitude in Wild Ennerdale with regard to current or future consultation with 52% of respondents answering 'yes' to the question 'if there were meetings or discussions (including online discussions) now would you get involved?', as compared to the 26% who actually *had* taken part in consultation in the past. The much smaller shift in the Avalon Marshes, from 33% of respondents who *had* taken part in consultation to 38% who *would* take part in consultation cannot be considered a significant finding. The predominant reason given from both sites as to why respondents would get involved in future consultation was that of 'interested in what's happening / want to learn more' with 78% and 73% giving this answer from the Avalon Marshes and Wild Ennerdale respectively. This increase of interest in consultation highlights the need for *ongoing* consultation in rewilding projects. In the case of Wild Ennerdale the shift in responses could indicate that this is something which is lacking (or that there is a perception that it is lacking) and/or could indicate an immediate need for consultation in the short term.

## **8.3 Negotiating other-than-human boundaries**

### **8.3.1 Agency and the creation of landscape**

Earlier in this thesis I argued that agency, being the capacity to determine outcomes (Rees, 2017), is possessed by humans *and* other-than-human-animals. During the course of this research it became necessary to extend this recognition of agency to include the other-than-animal companion species of rewilding (particularly plants, but also, in theory at least, fungi, protozoa and bacteria) and even abiotic factors (specifically, in the field sites studied for this research, water), something which is also acknowledged by Latour (1993) and Haraway (1991). I also suggested that this possession of agency meant that other-than-human species, and even abiotic factors, had the ability to create landscape (see Chapter 2, Section 2.3.3.1). Taking this as the case, the 'relational achievement' (Whatmore, 1999) of humans and other-than-human

agents to co-create the landscapes of the Avalon Marshes and Wild Ennerdale through the process of rewilding is considered here, as is the way in which the process is negotiated. Since these co-created landscapes are 'worlds ... [where] people, plants and animals are ... in the process of being mixed up' (Whatmore and Thorne, 1998, p. 437) they involve the delicate negotiation and renegotiation of boundaries.

With regard to agency, participants at both field sites recognised the agency of other-than-human agents (biotic and abiotic), speaking of them 'doing their own thing' (e.g. P32, CAM, P34, LWE). This was however often prefaced with the notion that humans 'let' (P22, CAWE, 32, CAM, P43, CWE) or 'allowed' (P17, RWE, 34, LWE, P35, CWE) them to do so e.g. 'we tend to let our reed beds do their own thing' (P32, CAM), the implication of this being that these agents are exercising their agency only by human consent. The role which other-than-human agents (can) play in creating landscapes was not discussed to any great extent by participants although two comments were of particular interest. First, in Wild Ennerdale, other-than-human agency was described as destroying itself and, by extension, landscape, with agency being attributed to an entire valley side: 'the southern side of the valley ... that is degrading very, very quickly, into something that will eventually kill itself' (P36, LWE). It is possible to draw an inference from this that if a valley has the ability to destroy itself / the landscape, it also has the ability to (re)generate itself / landscape, something which was alluded to by other participants who spoke of 'natural regeneration' (P35, CWE, P36, LWE, P43, CWE) and which is reminiscent of Foreman's (1992) reference to the 'living earth rewilding itself'. Second, in the Avalon Marshes, Exmoor ponies were identified as helping to create and maintain 'suitable habitat for ground-nesting birds' (P31, CAM). Since the ponies are creating habitat they are also, arguably, creating landscape and therefore provide evidence of the way in which other-than-human agents *can* create landscapes, suggesting that we are wrong to 'locate agency, will, creativity and the capacity for action solely within the human subject' Wylie (2007, p. 200) i.e. we should acknowledge agency in other-than-human agents. I attempt to do this, recognising that humans are not the only agents in the 'making of ... wild places', that wild places are co-created by humans and other-than-human agents, and seeking to redress what Whatmore and Thorne (1998) call the 'erasure' of other-than-human agents from this process.

### **8.3.2 Companion species and the creation of landscape**

There are many companion species of rewilding in the Avalon Marshes and Wild Ennerdale but the species which was predominantly discussed by participants, and which will therefore occupy the majority of the discussion here, was cattle. Also important were reeds and trees and these will also be touched upon.

#### **8.3.2.1 Animal machines, human proxies**

Von Essen and Allen (2016) question whether companion species create landscapes on their own behalf or as human proxies. Furthermore, they suggest that not only are these companion species not (necessarily) exerting their agency on their own behalf, but that their agency is often constrained by ‘ad hoc human intervention’ (von Essen and Allen, 2016). They refer to this employment and then curtailment of the agency of companion species as the imposition of ‘goldilocks standards’ whereby companion species are required to be ‘wild but not too wild’ (von Essen and Allen, 2016). As discussed in Chapter 2, I prefer the concept of ‘bear conditions’ since conditions are rarely ‘just right’ from the companion species perspective but only from the human perspective. Rather, from the companion species perspective, their status oscillates between being either ‘too wild’, in that they are excluded from the care associated with domestication (or captivity), or not wild enough in that they are denied the autonomy associated with wildness (von Essen and Allen, 2016). Evidence, or at least partial evidence, of this can be seen in both the Avalon Marshes and Wild Ennerdale.

Cattle appear to be the rewilding ‘tool’ of choice in the Avalon Marshes and Wild Ennerdale (although goats and ponies were also used in the Avalon Marshes and deer were present in Wild Ennerdale although they were (somewhat) independent of the project rather than intrinsic to it), being deployed as proxies for humans in both sites. This was explicitly acknowledged in the Avalon Marshes where Participant 14 (CAM) stated that ‘we have livestock grazing here, which is a management tool’. Participant 30 (LAM) highlighted the way in which ‘labour’ by cattle is replacing machinery, ‘we do grazing with livestock whereas it would be done with machinery maybe’, and Participant 40 (CAM) acknowledged that labour, saying ‘they [the cattle] do a good job for us’. These comments exemplify the way that cattle are being recruited to act on behalf

of humans, often performing roles in 'difficult parts of the site' that would otherwise be hard to manage (P32, CAM). This was also evident in Wild Ennerdale although the identification of cattle as tools or machines was less explicit and rather *implicit* in the way that participants discussed the cattle, describing them as 'doing the things that the management group wanted the cattle to do ... achieving the goals' (P16, RWE) and as 'useful in their little heavy-footed way' (P20, BWE) i.e. poaching the ground. This last comment, particularly, leads on to comments from several other participants who emphasised the role that the cattle played within the ecosystem as 'dynamic' forces (P38, LWE) and 'disturbance' factors (P22, CAWE, 34, CWE), with Participant 34 (LWE) saying that the cattle 'provide the disturbance the [Wild Ennerdale] partnership look[s] for'. These comments illustrate how the cattle are being enrolled as dynamic forces to provide a disturbance factor in a rewilding project i.e. they are acting as proxies for humans by performing ecological restoration on their behalf (von Essen and Allen, 2016).

It is interesting that both the Avalon Marshes and Wild Ennerdale have chosen cattle as a key companion species of their rewilding projects rather than horses or deer for example (while horses are present in the Avalon Marshes they play a much smaller role than cattle and although deer are present at Wild Ennerdale they were not actively included in the project). This choice is illustrative of how rewilding is negotiating its boundaries – enrolling cattle allows them to be simultaneously part of a rewilding project and an extensive farming system, thereby facilitating rewilding's negotiation of its boundaries with farming. This also assists in some of the complex ethical questions raised by rewilding with respect to animals 'that are neither domesticated nor wild' (Jepson, 2016). For example, cattle numbers can be controlled by slaughter as part of routine farming rather than having to engage in culling or allowing them to die of 'natural' causes (e.g. starvation, disease or injury) both of which can cause public concern regarding animal welfare (Keulartz, 2009; Lorimer and Driessen, 2013; Lorimer and Driessen, 2014). Cattle also have a far less complicated 'association with categories of wildness and domestication' than horses (see DeSilvey and Bartolini, 2018) or deer (see Linnell *et al.*, 2015). While, in the UK at least, cattle can be positioned relatively firmly within the category of domestic, horses and deer cross the boundary between the wild and the domestic. DeSilvey and



Bartolini suggest that the terms “wild” and “domestic” do not adequately describe the characteristics of the ongoing relationship between people and horses’ (2018, p. 9) while, with respect to deer, Linnell *et al.* point out that it is often ‘difficult to say under which contexts animals are wild and under which they are domestic’ (2015, p. 981). The deployment of cattle as human proxies therefore avoids the potentially more problematic negotiation with species which would occupy more complex places and roles within rewilding especially since current biopolitical modes (including those identified during this research) still adhere to the wild / domestic dichotomy noted by Keurlatz (2009) despite the fact that the companion species of rewilding do not fit neatly within these categories (Jepson, 2016).

### **8.3.2.2 Analogue species**

In acting as disturbance factors and dynamic forces within the Avalon Marshes and Wild Ennerdale ecosystems, cattle were also discussed by participants as performing the role of analogue for extinct or extirpated species. Again, this was made either more or less explicit, with participants sometimes referring to the extinct auroch (P22, CAWE), sometimes simply to large herbivores (P34, LWE), and sometimes only to the cattle as filling an ecological or trophic niche within the ecosystem (P38, LWE). In particular this was referenced in relation to the size of the cattle and their grazing habits, as compared to sheep, and the benefits which they therefore offered.

Participant 22 (CAWE) highlighted that cattle are ‘a native grazer in that they’re descended from auroch’ implying that they can therefore act as an analogue for the auroch and also emphasising their native status, again as compared to sheep which were described by participants as not native, having originally come from Mesopotamia (P35, CWE, P38, LWE). The specific way in which cattle graze was also seen as important, with participants emphasising that grazing by cattle differs from grazing by sheep e.g. ‘the fundamental difference between the nibblers, the sheep ... and the cattle is in the way that they eat. Cattle wrap their tongues round and rip, so you get these areas where there can be regen[eration]’ (P35, CWE), and ‘they don’t selectively graze, they just rip out everything with their tongues and their mouths and they take coarse stuff as well as fine stuff’ (P22, CAWE). This was seen as needed not only since it was a ‘different way’ of grazing (P22, CAWE, emphasis added) but because it was a

'different *trophic level* of grazing ... to replicate what would've been there before' (P38, LWE, emphasis added). The comment from Participant 38 (LWE) focuses on two distinct, and important, roles for the cattle, first occupying a specific 'trophic level' and second being analogues for 'what would've been there before' e.g. aurochs.

The size of cattle was also considered important, with their physical bulk being exploited in the cause of ecological restoration. Participant 22 (CAWE) highlighted how cattle 'create regeneration niches, because they're a bit heavier [than sheep] so their footprints become regeneration niches, they don't compact the soil' and Participant 34 (LWE) explained how the 'poaching' of the ground created by the cattle's hooves is 'the disturbance the partnership look for, pushing seeds into the ground, helping them germinate'. This employment of cattle as analogues for their extinct or extirpated ancestors is widely discussed in the literature on rewilding and the Avalon Marshes and Wild Ennerdale can be seen as aligned with this approach to the companion species of rewilding (e.g. Gillson, Ladle and Araújo, 2011; Lorimer and Driessen, 2013; Jørgensen, 2014; Lorimer *et al.*, 2015; Lorimer and Driessen, 2016; Jepson, Schepers and Helmer, 2018).

### **8.3.2.3 Expendable objects**

Despite all the benefits and 'services' that companion species of rewilding were seen to offer it appeared that they were, at times, considered to be expendable, either in terms of their presence not being required on a permanent basis, or more seriously, in terms of their lives being treated as dispensable. Though no participant stated this latter position outright, several participants spoke of the risks that they were prepared to expose companion species to (again, this was particularly the case with regard to cattle) and only one spoke of any attempt to mitigate these risks.

Given the experimental nature of rewilding, these risks were often unknown, something which is recognised in the discourse on rewilding (e.g. Nogués-Bravo *et al.*, 2016). This was stated clearly in relation to Wild Ennerdale where cattle had not been present in the valley for '70 years', with one participant explaining that when the introduction of cattle was proposed 'everyone said we were crazy, because we didn't know what disease there may be, or animal health problems, on land that's never been farmed for a long time ... it was said that we

would have trouble with Redwater,<sup>139</sup> with ticks' (P34, LWE). Other participants made similar comments about the experimental nature of (re)introducing cattle to Wild Ennerdale and the negative consequences that were predicted e.g. 'all the other farmers, said they'd [the cattle] be dead, belly-up in the lake within weeks' (P35, CWE) and 'all of the other farming community around him said that won't work, you can't do it, the animals will be dead, they'll be floating in the lake' (P22, CAWE). Participants went on to explain that, for the most part, these dire predictions had not been borne out, but only Participant 34 (LWE) spoke of the care that had been taken to ensure that this was the case, saying that they intended to 'keep a good eye on them [the cattle]', and 'if things were going wrong, we could hopefully spot it and right it'. This suggests that, for the other participants at least, these cattle are considered somewhat disposable<sup>140</sup> and are wittingly exposed to unfavourable conditions which, as was acknowledged by participants, would be too harsh for less hardy breeds e.g. Participant 32 (CAM) 'some of the more commercial animals, if you tried them on this land they wouldn't do so well<sup>141</sup>'. Indeed Participant 34 (LWE) noted that Forestry England had specifically wanted a 'hardy breed' of cattle for Wild Ennerdale for this reason.

This disposable status was also evident, albeit in a less serious form, in the way in which cattle (and other grazers) were only temporary members of the Avalon Marshes ecosystem, with participants explaining that the cattle are 'not a complete part of the process within our site ... they come and go' (P40, CAW). This point was reinforced and extended by another participant who explained that, in this case ponies, 'are seasonal and they'll get taken out, we have contracts with people who bring them in ... they just get used on different sites and ... [they get taken out] when the gorse isn't growing to an extent and they've done their bit' (P31, CAW). This comment illustrates the utility (in controlling gorse) and the

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<sup>139</sup> As discussed in Chapter 6, Redwater was similarly of concern in the Avalon Marshes, where participants noted that the cattle 'need to inherit the protection' (P40, CAM) for the disease – note here the reliance on the cattle's own agency to (immunologically) counter the disease rather than on human action.

<sup>140</sup> It would also be possible to argue that the cattle were viewed as 'consumable' given that in both sites they were part of a 'working farm system' (P40, CAM) and therefore liable to be slaughtered for human consumption.

<sup>141</sup> This comment was made in relation to the Exmoor ponies at the Avalon Marshes but applies equally to the Highland cattle.

expendability of the ponies, in that once that have 'done their bit' their presence is no longer required or even desired.

#### **8.3.2.4 Self-determining agents**

Lastly with respect to the companion species of rewilding, responses from participants highlighted the way in which species could display agency independent of their human companions. This was evident in comments from participants at both field sites. With respect to the Avalon Marshes, Participants spoke of species doing things of 'their own accord': 'things are coming in of their own accord' (P14a, CAM) and 'a lot of wildlife birds came there [the Avalon Marshes] on their own accord' (P28, PAM). Very similar comments were made by participants at Wild Ennerdale e.g. 'all we can do I think is try and make the habitat the highest quality that it can be so maybe they'll [golden eagles] come over of their own accord one day' (P16, RWE) and 'we were looking at pine marten reintroduction, but we took advice from the Vincent Wildlife Trust and ... they didn't want us to do that because they wanted it to happen naturally' (P38, LWE). These participants are alluding to the agency of companion species in performing 'auto-rewilding' (Tsing, 2017; Ward, 2020), demonstrating their autonomy by self-reintroducing to rewilding sites, and also, certainly in the case of pine marten in Wild Ennerdale, exhibiting rewilding's preference for changes to occur as a result of natural processes rather than human intervention.

Similarly, participants at Wild Ennerdale emphasised the processes involved in the regeneration of woodland and the agency of woodland in regenerating itself:

we've done a whole load of planting in that upper end [of the valley], hundreds of thousands of trees, not to create a wood, but to create a seed source, because actually we're interested in the process, not the outcome. So the process is to say 'right here's a load of seeds we're throwing into the system, away you go woodland, regenerate yourself' (P22, CAWE).

Indeed, participants from Wild Ennerdale attributed considerable agency to trees, with Participant 35 (CWE) describing Sidewood (an ancient birch-oak woodland on the southern side of the Ennerdale Valley) as ‘marching up the hill’ while Participant 36 (LWE) said that they were ‘seeing the non-indigenous conifer trees slowly marching up the hillside’. It is notable that comments made later in the interviews with these two participants revealed that Participant 35 (CWE) was portraying the agency of the trees in a positive light while Participant 36 (LWE) was depicting it in a negative way. For Participant 35 (CWE) Sidewood was exerting its agency and marching up the hill in order to ‘expand’ and ‘regenerate’. For Participant 36 (LWE) the ‘non-indigenous conifer trees’ were exerting their agency to ‘invade’ new territory.

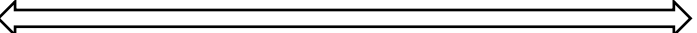
A similar expression of autonomy was also evident, though to a lesser extent, in relation to the cattle in Wild Ennerdale. While participants discussed the way in which the cattle’s agency could be enrolled by humans (as tools or machines) or even permanently curtailed (by slaughter), they also alluded to elements of autonomy in the cattle’s existence in that they are, as ‘a domesticated animal, given a lot different parameters, and a lot different area to do what [they] want[...], rather than to do what [their] keeper decides’ (P34, LWE). Participants discussed the way that cattle exert their agency within these new, somewhat ‘de-domesticated’ (Lorimer and Driessen, 2013) parameters, with Participant 34 (LWE) emphasising their freedom to roam the Ennerdale Valley: ‘they could roam, they could do their own thing, whether it be under trees, whether it be in the water, in the river, and in the lake, up high on the fells’ and ‘they go into the forest in times of heavy rainfall, for shelter, and they’ll go higher up on the slopes in times of hot weather, to try and get away from the flies, and get a bit more air, wind’. Participant 35’s (CWE) comments similarly emphasised the cattle’s liberty to go where they liked and that, as a result, they were able to express their preferences, which in turn had positive effects on the landscape saying, ‘there’s routes that the cattle go, totally favour, and areas they just ignore entirely so you end up with this mosaic of structure’. The language used by participants here was different from earlier comments where the cattle were described as being ‘let’ or ‘allowed’ to behave in a certain way. In these examples the cattle are free to express their agency without needing permission from humans, illustrating their status as self-determining agents.

### 8.3.2.5 Biopolitical modes of the companion species of rewilding

The roles that companion species play in rewilding, which this research has revealed and explored, has enabled me to develop a typology of biopolitical modes of the companion species of rewilding. This typology outlines the regulation of the life and death of the companion species depending on which position they occupy (see Table 8.1). It is important to note that while the examples given are all other-than-human *animals*, the typology could be applied equally well to all other-than-human *species*; the other-than-human animals have been selected for illustrative purposes due to their presence and visibility in the Avalon Marshes and Wild Ennerdale. It should also be noted that the ‘boundaries’ between the modes are not fixed. Species can cross them and even be subject to more than one mode at any one time. For example animals can serve as proxies for humans and as analogues for other species at the same time while also being treated as expendable objects e.g. the Exmoor ponies at the Avalon Marshes. Meanwhile a species could move from one of the other modes to become a self-determining agent through the process of feralisation i.e. a process by which ‘domestic animals return to the wild and produce self-sustaining populations’ (Neaux et al., 2020). Feralization (and de-domestication) are highly relevant to biopolitics since the animals involved are in a liminal state as regards to their ‘wildness’ – the extent to which they can, or should, be considered ‘wild’ or ‘domestic’ can be questioned and this in turn has significant implications as to the amount of human care (if any) which they receive (Gamborg *et al.*, 2010). The biopolitical modes are those outlined in the preceding four sections: species as proxies for humans, species as analogues, species as expendable objects, and species as self-determining agents.

All of the species described by these modes are involved in the ‘multispecies landscapes’ of rewilding (Tsing, 2012) but, as yet, with the exception of the mode relating to species as self-determining agents, there is little evidence of the ‘radical tolerance’ of other species (Campbell, 2006), or the ‘shift from a biopolitics as a *control over life* to a biopolitics of *living with*’ (Lorimer and Driessen, 2013, emphasis added) which rewilding calls for. Whereas the mode of biopolitics with regard to self-determining agents could be described, to adapt Foucault (1976), as ‘let live and let die’ the other biopolitical modes (proxies, analogues, expendable objects) are the classic Foucauldian ‘make live and let

Table 8.1: Typology of the biopolitical modes of the companion species of rewilding (after Lorimer and Driessen, 2013).

Description	Species as self-determining agents	Species as analogues	Species as proxies for humans	Species as expendable objects
Aim	Species act autonomously.	Species act as analogues for extinct / extirpated species, filling an ecological niche.	Species perform tasks / fulfil roles on behalf of humans often acting as tools or machines.	Species are human subjects.
Location of agency	Interspecies or species level	Interspecies or species level	Species or individual level	Species or individual level
Life	Let live logic: life is valued as part of a functioning ecosystem.	Make live logic: life is valued for what it replaces rather than for its own sake. The species as a whole is valued more highly than the individual.	Make live logic: life is valued from an instrumental perspective for the role that these species play. Individuals and even species are not necessarily valuable if other individuals or species exist which could perform the same role.	Make live logic: life is not valued, these species are considered disposable.
Death	Let die logic: death is undesirable at a species level but acceptable at an individual level. When death occurs at individual level it is 'natural' and bodies are left in situ.	Let die logic: death of the species is to be avoided, as is the death of individuals if possible, although individual deaths are not necessarily considered important, especially if the species is not threatened.	Let die logic: death of the individual and species are to be avoided if possible but it is not necessarily critical to do so.	Let die logic: death (or presence) is irrelevant. These species as dispensable.
Example	Freshwater pearl mussels in the River Ehen.	Black Galloways performing naturalistic grazing in Wild Ennerdale.	Red Devons performing conservation grazing in the Avalon Marshes.	Exmoor ponies performing conservation grazing in the Avalon Marshes.
Illustrative quotes from interviews	'We're trying to recover a population that's on the brink of extinction' (P43, CWE) i.e. they are important at species level.	'As soon as we put them [the Galloways] in, everything changed in terms of the nature of the sward, we got much more regeneration, we got much richer swards coming through, we've got dung beetles in their cow-pats' (P22, CAWE) i.e. they are filling an ecological niche.	'We have livestock grazing here, which is a management tool' (P14a, CAM) i.e. they are performing a task.	'They're seasonal and they'll get taken out. We have contracts with people who bring them in' (P31, CAM) i.e. they are dispensable.
Level of autonomy	Unconstrained ability to express agency  Ability to express agency is constrained			

die' (Foucault, 1976). In the case of the freshwater pearl mussels in the River Ehen for example, Wild Ennerdale partners are doing what they can to protect the lives of the mussels but, in line with the ethos of rewilding, they are doing so via the restoration of natural processes and then relying on the agency of the mussels to effect an auto-recovery. Thus, this mode of biopolitics is not coercive in the sense of 'make live, let die' (Foucault, 1976) since the mussels are not being *made* or *forced* to live, but *let* live, in that they are *allowed*, or even *enabled*, to live, perhaps more in line with a sense of 'flourishing' (Haraway, 2003; Tsing, 2012). It is also extremely important to note here that this 'let live, let die' approach to self-determining agents is likely to be evident only because no large carnivores are involved in rewilding at the Avalon Marshes or Wild Ennerdale. If that situation were to change the biopolitical approach to self-determining agents may be significantly revised.

## **8.4 Negotiating abiotic boundaries**

Having discussed the way in which rewilding is negotiated with biotic agents it is also necessary to consider the negotiation with abiotic agents, specifically in the case of this research, water, which possesses, and exerts, considerable agency. Water runs through this thesis, pervasive and permeating in the Avalon Marshes, often violent and uncontrolled in Wild Ennerdale. In the Avalon Marshes water is very much omnipresent: indistinct and diffuse. In Wild Ennerdale, while it has many sources, water is most strongly associated with the River Liza, the river which runs into Ennerdale Water and which impresses itself so powerfully upon the landscape.

Despite, or even because of, being extensively drained the Avalon Marshes continue to be defined by water. The negotiation with water not only dictates the water levels in individual pastures and marshes but delineates the whole landscape – literally channelling it into a rectilinear pattern, thereby



providing a visual mnemonic of the presence of water in the landscape<sup>142</sup>. Given that, in many places, the scapes of the Avalon Marshes are co-constructed by reeds and water, the boundaries of the Marshes are, by nature, fluid and have a tendency to dissolve and blend into one another. Water then infuses all aspects of the landscape sometimes saturating, sometimes flooding but always present and always something for the human occupants of the landscape to negotiate.

Water also, very literally, defines Wild Ennerdale, with participants explaining that the working boundary of the Wild Ennerdale initiative is the watershed of Ennerdale Water (P16, RWE, P34, LWE, P35, CWE). A comment from Participant 16 (RWE) illustrated how natural boundaries or processes dictate the boundaries within which the human agents in Wild Ennerdale work: ‘the best way to look at the boundaries are a natural watershed, so the whole catchment area of this lake is included in the Wild Ennerdale management partnership and that’s where the boundaries are in terms of physical and what we’ve got written down on maps’. This participant’s use of the word ‘natural’ is interesting – Wild Ennerdale is defined by a natural, in this case water, boundary. By contrast, while the Avalon Marshes are also very much delineated by water, the boundaries are human, as is immediately obvious from their shape, highly regular, even regimented, compared to the irregular boundary of Wild Ennerdale, (refer back to Figures 6.3 and 7.2 for an illustration of this on the area maps of the Avalon

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<sup>142</sup> Further reminders that the area of Somerset in which the Avalon Marshes are situated is as much a *waterscape* as it is a *landscape* can be seen in the names of its places and people. The village of ‘Meare’ (from ‘mere’: ‘a sheet of standing water; a lake; a pond, a pool’ and also ‘a marsh, a fen’ (OED, 2020h)) lies between the Shapwick Heath and Westhay Moor reserves. A local business is named ‘Marshes Peat’ which one might assume is named for the wetland before learning that the proprietor’s surname is Marsh, indicative of the way that the inhabitants are often deeply rooted in the landscape, or rather steeped in the waterscape. Slightly further away, are the towns of Highbridge and Bridgwater, indicating the towns’ relationships with water.

Marshes and Wild Ennerdale<sup>143</sup>), and water refuses to recognise or respect these human rather than self-imposed boundaries, as will be discussed in the next section.

#### 8.4.1 Agency and the creation of landscape

While being something of an all-pervasive presence in the Avalon Marshes, water here is calm, gentle, even sluggish, often 'requiring' human intervention to mobilise it. Its agency is similarly docile and acquiescent (or perhaps aqua-escient cf Haraway (2016)), 'cooperating' with its human companions in their rewilding efforts; participants made comments such as 'just add water' (P7, AJE) and 'water does a lot of the work for you' (P40, CAM), illustrating the way in which the agency of the water is recruited into rewilding efforts. Part of this was seen to be due to the fact that the 'desires' of humans and water were in alignment, that is the humans want to *restore* a wetland and the 'landscape wants to *be* a wetland, it wants to be wet' (P32, CAM, emphasis added). Nonetheless, this exploitation of water's agency does co-opt water into the role of proxy for humans in their rewilding efforts in the same way as was done to cattle (see also Nash, 2005 on the co-creative agency of humans and water).

Humans did however have to negotiate with water regarding boundaries, something which was difficult since, as acknowledged by Participant 46 (CAM) 'water doesn't respect boundaries'. What this participant was referring to was that water in the Avalon Marshes does not respect the boundaries imposed on it by

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<sup>143</sup> The maps of the walking interviews also revealed this shaping of the landscape – something which became an incidental but interesting and surprising finding of this research. In Wild Ennerdale the interview routes followed irregular paths, inscribing correspondingly irregular, even 'natural', forms on the map. By contrast, the walking interviews in the Avalon Marshes were 'channelled', more or less unconsciously, in a similar way to which water in the landscape is channelled, so that they ran in straight, often perpendicular, lines (refer back to Chapters 6 and 7 for maps of walking interviews). This also illustrates how the research landscape can influence and shape research methods as much as research methods can select and define the research landscape.

humans, which has consequences for the practitioners and stakeholders of rewilding. In particular water does not respect (land) ownership boundaries, meaning that changes to water level in one area have, literal, flow on effects to other areas. For example, Participant 30 (LAM) highlighted that having conservationists as neighbours, rather than the peat producers they have replaced, resulted in changes in water management which have effects on his land: 'because a lot of the land has reverted back to conservation ... whereas the peat companies used to drain land, now obviously the water's come back in'. Relatedly, other participants made it clear that changing water levels on one's own land was often not possible without control of water in other areas of the catchment: 'in an ideal world, we'd have it [the water level] much higher and the land up there would be wetter as well, but it would mean owning land two, three, four miles that way [points across the marshes]' (P14a, CAM). This difficulty in negotiating with water often means that humans have to negotiate water levels with each other as well, reaching a compromise regarding the levels, as described by Participant 32 (CAM):

it'd be up to the IDB [Internal Drainage Board] board themselves to decide what water levels are, and we're involved, we're one of the partners involved but we're not the only partner and as you can imagine there's lots of different interests so it's not a really simple thing ... you've got to try and find that balance.

This participant's comments highlight the difficulty of balancing competing interests in rewilding's negotiation with other land use, especially since the water exerts its agency and refuses to cooperate.

Water in Wild Ennerdale is, by contrast, a very different agent. While there are several water sources and bodies in the Ennerdale Valley, participants focused on the River Liza and the river will therefore occupy the majority of the

discussion here<sup>144</sup>. The Liza rises on Great Gable and flows down through the Ennerdale Valley to supply Ennerdale Water which is in turn drained by the River Ehen. According to one participant ‘the river Liza is talked about as one of the wildest rivers in England’ (P42, CWE), a testament to the agency which is attributed to it (cf Woods who describes wildness as ‘the autonomy of the more-than-human world where events ... occur largely because of their own internal self-expression that is independent of civilized forces’ (2005, p. 177)). This agency is evident in the way that participants described the river’s behaviour, saying that it ‘did its own thing’ (cf similar comments from participants regarding biotic agents in the valley discussed above):

‘the river was doing its own thing ... regardless of what we did ... and it was violent sometimes, the river would take out chunks of the landscape ... the River Liza can choose to jump 200 meters and take out half the forest, chomp it up and smash it up and spit it out and stop playing with it again in one winter (P13, FWE).

Comments from another participant reinforced this view, albeit representing the Liza’s agency as somewhat more measured, saying that the river, ‘meanders where it wants’ (P22, CAWE). Other participants however tended to talk of ‘allowing’ the River Liza’s behaviour, again in a similar way to which they spoke of permitting the behaviour of biotic agents, for example ‘the river is allowed to just run where it will’ (P17, RWE) and ‘allowing the river to exhibit natural processes and to reclaim its floodplain’ (P35, CWE). Whether the River Liza is exerting its agency only by human assent or independent of this, it is having a significant influence on the valley and its landscape. Indeed, some participants went on to talk about the way in which this influence extended *beyond* the Ennerdale Valley and flowed into other areas. For example Participant 13 (FWE) spoke about what the Liza could teach the Wild Ennerdale Partnership: ‘we’ve

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<sup>144</sup> Other significant water sources and bodies are rain, the Lake District being known for its high rainfall (LDNP, 2020c), Ennerdale Water, the large lake in the valley bottom, and the River Ehen which flows out of Ennerdale Water.

started to realize how the River Liza can tell us a lot about managing rivers and water courses'. Meanwhile Participant 35 (CWE) spoke of how he was 'inspired' by the Liza: 'the river has really very much inspired a lot of my work elsewhere'. These comments illustrate that rewilding's negotiation with water is very much a two way process, with rewilding influencing water and water influencing rewilding.

#### **8.4.2 Negotiating archaeology**

Water behaves very differently towards archaeology in the Avalon Marshes and Wild Ennerdale; in the Marshes, water protects and preserves archaeology, in Ennerdale, water threatens and even destroys it. This destructive tendency created a dilemma in Wild Ennerdale between the desire to allow the River Liza to continue to assert its agency and the wish to conserve historical artefacts:<sup>145</sup>

[the] river is being left a bit more to its own devices, not canalized or channelled in any way like it has been in the past, and that, at the moment, is starting to undercut some archaeology because of how it's meandering through the valley and it's a question of do you want to go and put in big gabion boxes and revetments to try and protect the archaeology or is it the sort of thing that you just have to document the archaeology as best you can but keep all the documents in order, make sure the surveys are done, and just allow the river to wash it away? (P16, RWE).

There is no such tension in the Avalon Marshes where water is actively encouraged into areas where historical artefacts are known to lie buried in the peat soil since 'waterlogged environments are very important, and if the waterlogging ceases, oxygen gets in the peat, it starts decaying, it starts shrinking, and materials such as wood start decaying and will eventually

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<sup>145</sup> cf Chapter 7, Section 7.3.2.3 which describes a similar dilemma in relation to historical artefacts, vegetation, and human or other-than-human processes to remove this vegetation in order to preserve the availability of the archeology.

disappear, so basically, the archaeology of the area needs to be kept wet to survive' (P48, AAM). Despite appearing somewhat contradictory, in both case sites the actions of the water, and the behaviour of the conservationists towards it, are in alignment with rewilding. In Wild Ennerdale the way in which the River Liza is allowed to, and *does*, assert its agency is compatible with the tenets of rewilding which seek an increase in natural autonomy and therefore an increase in wildness (Arts, Fischer and van der Wal, 2016). In addition to this the river is removing human artefacts from the landscape and therefore reducing (evidence of) human intervention in the landscape, another tenet of rewilding ( Navarro and Pereira, 2012; Lorimer *et al.*, 2015; Tanasescu, 2017; Gammon, 2018; Pettorelli *et al.*, 2018). The River Liza could then, in some ways, like the water in the Avalon Marshes, be interpreted as acting as a proxy for humans in their ecological restoration project. In the Avalon Marshes, by contrast, water is not permitted so much agency, but its presence is beneficial to the creation and maintenance of the wetland habitat which the Avalon Marshes rewilding initiative is seeking to promote. The water co-creates this landscape, both serving as a proxy for humans and acting on its own agency.

### **8.4.3 Negotiating flooding**

Being waterscapes as well as landscapes, both the Avalon Marshes and Wild Ennerdale are prone to flooding. The strategies for responding to flooding at or around each site are however diametrically opposed; in the landscape of which the Avalon Marshes are a part, a highly interventionist approach attempts to prevent flooding occurring, while in Wild Ennerdale a *non-interventionist* approach is taken to the extent that Participant 42 (CWE) stated that they were not necessarily *trying* to prevent flooding. Rather, they are attempting to view flooding differently, not as something which needs to be avoided but as something which can have benefits and should therefore be accepted or even appreciated:

The management in the upper reaches of the valley is definitely helping the river to respond to flood events generally. I don't like to say mitigate against flooding because I think we see flooding as a

negative thing and that's because we always think about the human consequences of flooding, where flooding is a natural phenomenon; flooding can bring great benefits for landscape, for wildlife, for ecology. It's just that we're trained to think about downstream and flooding communities. And that is devastating, even now people are still recovering from the last storm, Storm Desmond<sup>146</sup>. So the human impacts are just awful and last many, many years but I think we need to change the way we think about flooding, it can bring positive effects if there's space in nature for a river to be able to do its thing and to have more connection with that flood plain (P42, CWE).

This comment reveals a very different attitude towards flood 'management' in Wild Ennerdale than is typical, and the resultant management, or perhaps rather *lack* of management, is having several impacts which affect the River Liza's response to high volume flow. First, the river can access its floodplain and 'spread out' (P22, CAWE, P35, CWE), second, since it is not canalised in any way, its usual channel pattern is meandering, meaning that it 'loses energy' (P22, CAWE), and third, the 'coarseness' (P22, CAWE), 'roughness' (P43, CWE) and 'scrubbing up' (P42, CWE) of the valley bottom, all assist in 'slowing the flow' (P22, CAWE, P38, LWE, P43, CWE) of flood water, enabling it to 'drop its bedload' (P35, CWE). Participants noted that all of this 'attenuated' (P35, CWE) the force of the water and therefore 'alleviated' (P17, RWE) the negative consequences for humans downstream, with several participants using the example of Storm Desmond to illustrate this (c.f. Carver, 2016b on rewilding as assisting in flood mitigation). Participant 38 (LWE) said that 'the impact that Storm Desmond had on Ennerdale

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<sup>146</sup> Storm Desmond was a storm in December 2015 which affected the UK and Ireland and whose most severe impacts were seen in Cumbria where large volumes of rain fell, with Honister Pass, less than 6 miles from the head of Ennerdale Water, 'recording 341.4 mm of rainfall in the 24 hours up to 1800 GMT on 5 December 2015' while Thirlmere, just under 12 miles away, recorded 405mm of rain in 38 hours during the same event (Met Office, 2015). The storm caused flooding to 5200 homes in Cumbria and Lancashire (Met Office, 2015).

compared to other valleys ... was virtually none ... and Ennerdale Bridge wasn't threatened by flooding'. Other participants highlighted how differently the Liza had behaved compared to other Lake District rivers (P22, CAWE, P35, CWE) and suggested that the naturalistic approach to (non)management of the Ennerdale Valley was why it was affected so differently from neighbouring valleys which had comparable amounts of rain and yet experienced significant detrimental effects from flooding:

in Ennerdale the way that the management techniques work and the way that the river Liza takes its own course meant there wasn't anywhere near the amount of flooding coming out of the mouth of this valley compared to some of the other valleys, even just over the other side of the head of the valley (P16, RWE).

While, as these comments reveal, practitioners of rewilding are convinced of the merits of more naturalistic approaches to flooding, stakeholders are less convinced and, as will be discussed, this is an important part of the negotiation of rewilding's boundaries.

By stark contrast, water around, and even in, the Avalon Marshes is intensively managed in an attempt to avoid flooding, with participants explaining that it is the 'pump system, that keeps it [flooding] under control' (P14c, CAM) and that 'if you were to switch the big pumps off down the road [Gold Corner Pumping Station] then it would flood quite regularly and probably quite deep flooding as well' (P46, CAM). Participants highlighted the tendency of the land to flood and the 'conflict' with water to try and prevent this from happening, giving another hint to the water's agency, e.g. 'this land gets very, very wet very, very quickly so when it rains it's a natural flood plain' (P32, CAM) and there is 'a big conflict between getting water off the land' (P40, CAM). Part of the propensity of the Avalon Marshes and the surrounding area to flood is due to the heavily modified nature of the landscape. Intensive peat extraction and farming has resulted in a loss of peat and also in the drying and shrinkage of the remaining peat, meaning that 'the land has sunk ... [the area around the Avalon Marshes]



is now the lowest part of the landscape, it's two metres AOD<sup>147</sup> (P46, CAM). While this has contributed to the creation of the Avalon Marshes reserves it has also increased the overall wetness of the surrounding land and its likelihood of flooding:

Catcott [Complex] itself, of course, was arablised and damaged and sunk, and that's why it's now a bird reserve ... he [the farmer] drained the peat, [the land] sunk tremendously, couldn't farm it anymore, sold it to the Wildlife Trust for a big profit, and they turned it into a Nature Reserve (P46, CAM).

Participant 46 (CAM) went on to suggest that it was this significant alteration of the landscape which necessitated a correspondingly significant intervention in order to drain it:

we've heavily modified our catchments ... there's a lot of issues with rapid runoff ... probably if we had a more absorbent, functional catchment, it would be different, we would have perhaps more stable conditions than we might do if we weren't managing water. We have bought into doing lots of things to move the water on and it's quite hard to kick that habit really. Once you start going down that path then it's quite difficult to give it up completely (P46, CAM).

This participant's use of the expression 'kick the habit' implies that intervention to control water develops into a kind of dependency, something he further emphasised in other comments saying that 'most people want to see lots of dredging going on ... it's quite a hard thing to shift people away from' and that even though 'it's almost better to intervene less ... it's not in our culture' (P46, CAM). This links to the idea that interventions often need to be active and visible in order to satisfy stakeholders (Cassidy, 2019).

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<sup>147</sup> AOD refers to 'above ordnance datum', with mean sea level usually providing the reference point for ordnance datum.

Similarly to Wild Ennerdale, landscape management within the Avalon Marshes could be seen to be a reaction against this habit of intervention and an attempt to find another way of negotiating with water. Participant 40 (CAM) highlighted the benefits of more 'natural' landscapes in handling water:

if it's a rough, natural landscape, if it's a wooded landscape ... undrained landscape, then water hitting that, it's well known a. it's slower moving and b. it's got much more chance of being absorbed into the ground. Whereas if you've got water hitting a maize field or whatever it's just going to run straight off and run down to the bottom. So, a more natural landscape has many, many ways in which it can manage the movement of water, or accommodate, absorb the movement of water or attenuate the movement of water.

Also similarly to Wild Ennerdale, participants from the Avalon Marshes used a recent, major flood to illustrate their point, claiming that, even despite the higher water levels favoured by conservation, the Avalon Marshes reserves were still capable of absorbing and storing water during floods (P40, CAM, P46, CAM, P47, PAM):

our own reserves are quite wet and actually they can be used as areas to store water. So for example in the big flood of 2013/2014, that winter flood, the water levels in our lakes and things for example came right up and we were able to hold water in our system ... what the nature reserves do is they act as a sponge and they are able to absorb water (P32, CAM).

Stakeholders however took the contrary view, that higher water levels exacerbated flooding:

the conservationists wanted the south drain kept higher for wildlife purposes, but never mind about that could create flooding because if you have it higher, then obviously the ground's wetter, and that will affect the farmers because when you get a downpour then the

ground's wet to start with, so there's nothing to soak up so then they can't get on their land and farm it properly (P25, PAM).

These opposing views again illustrate the difficulties in negotiating rewilding's boundaries when practitioners and stakeholders are approaching the negotiation from such polarised perspectives.

Participants at both field sites recognised that a significant factor in rewilding's negotiations with water and flooding was a decrease in people's resilience to and tolerance of such things. This was particularly the case in the Avalon Marshes where participants pointed out that 'traditionally' residents of Somerset were accustomed, and *acclimatised*, to flooding every winter and that houses were built on two levels with living quarters on the top floor and boat storage and accommodation for animals on the ground floor, with boats being essential as a way of negotiating the flood waters (P32, CAM, P46, CAM). Participants also noted however that society would be unlikely to tolerate such conditions now seeing 'a direct conflict between what people expect from a modern landscape and the wateriness of that landscape ... people's housing expectations are a bit different to what they were 300 years ago ... they're used to drainage as it has been over the last five decades' (P40, CAM). Participant 46 (CAM) made a similar point saying, we have 'modern lifestyles, expensive carpets and washing machines that need drainage and things like that so as a set of communities, I don't think we would cope particularly well [with flooding]. We've lost some of those capabilities of living in a wetter landscape'. A similar phenomenon was evident in the Wild Ennerdale area with Participant 35 (CWE) explaining that there used to be 'a lot less infrastructure in the flood plain[s]' of rivers meaning that there was less infrastructure to be damaged or destroyed by flooding when it occurred. More recently however, with the 'building [of] more and more houses' in 'low lying areas' (P39, EWE) communities have become less resilient to flooding c.f. Lane, Landström and Whatmore (2011) who discuss changes in the consequences of flooding due to development on flood plains.

The negotiation with and around water was not limited to flooding in either case site. In the Avalon Marshes the negotiation also involved water levels and drainage, and in Wild Ennerdale it included drinking water and freshwater pearl mussels. In both sites the common factor was that the status quo was being renegotiated as will be discussed in the next section.

#### **8.4.4 Negotiating the status quo**

As was discussed in Chapter 6, 'balance' was often brought up by stakeholders of the Avalon Marshes with respect to maintaining the status quo in the relationship between farming and peat production, and conservation. This idea of balance extended into the discussion of water levels on and around the Marshes (as regulated by mechanical drainage of the land) and the extent to which this was maintained at a level which favoured either farming and peat production, or conservation. Changes to these water levels, in accordance with the priorities of the Avalon Marshes, were seen as a change to the status quo, creating tensions between land users and 'reigniting conflicts' regarding the 'wetness' of the land (P40, CAM). Guštin and Potočnik Slavič identify such events as 'triggers', which can revive 'repeated or multi-year disagreement[s]' (such as in the Avalon Marshes where conflict over water levels is long standing (as discussed in Chapter 6, Section 6.2.3), and as capable of being 'catalysts for change' (2020, p. 211). It is this potential change to the status quo which created concern in the Avalon Marshes because, while the debate '[i]sn't really about conservation per se ... it's known that most of the conservation likes it wetter and so it really reignited conflicts between a modern used landscape and a more wetland landscape' (P40, CAM). That is, while conservation is acting as a trigger to reignite a multi-year disagreement it is not the root cause of the debate (Guštin and Potočnik Slavič, 2020). As a result, issues surrounding rewilding, and conservation more generally, are being conflated with broader debates about land use priorities and this is influencing the negotiation of rewilding's boundaries. It may be useful to acknowledge these wider sources of tension to enable more constructive negotiation of rewilding's boundaries.

Tensions in relation to water levels arise because of differences in preference for the height of these levels with conservation having a preference for higher water levels than farming and peat production (P14a, CAM, P15, CAM, P32, CAM, P40, CAM, P46, CAM, P48, AAM). Water levels are negotiated via 'very, very complex' policy with a 'whole lot' or even a 'morass'<sup>148</sup> of legislation (P40, CAM) with each party (conservationists, farmers and peat producers) feeling that other parties can or do exert more 'pressure' (P27, PAM, P30, LAM, P32, CAM) on the decision makers and therefore that their own needs are compromised. For example Participant 30 (LAM) felt that 'as farmers, we're getting fewer and fewer, they [the Internal Drainage Board] have less people to answer to, so I think they're [conservationists] having a bigger effect than what they actually realise', while Participant 32 (CAM) felt that there was 'a lot of pressure to continue to maintain the status quo ... to try and protect the livelihoods on the landscape'. From the conservation or rewilding point of view it was seen that water levels were 'managed at the lowest denominator' and that wildlife and environmental concerns were of secondary consideration compared to farming and peat production with 'nature conservation fit[ting] in and around it, tak[ing] its chances' (P46, CAM). How then does rewilding negotiate this situation of 'incompatible land uses within the same system' (P46, CAM) and with 'lots of different interests' (P32, CAM). This appeared to be an unreconciled issue in the Avalon Marshes with rewilding being 'constrained by ... neighbours on the sides of nature reserves' (P48, AAM) and even, in some cases, rewilding sites bringing water *in* while peat producers on adjacent land were pumping water *out*:

it's about trying to keep water in, to keep it as wet as possible ... whereas the peat diggers, right next door, are pumping it out again, trying to get it dry so they can dig the peat out ... you've got areas along here where you will see there are pumps going and pumping out right next to where we're bringing water in to keep the area wet (P15, CAM).

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<sup>148</sup> 'Morass' is an interesting word choice by this participant with its synonyms of 'mire' and 'quagmire' – all particularly apposite for the Avalon Marshes.

Indeed, reconciling this issue may not be possible, especially given the area's history of conflict in relation to water levels. Negotiations may be better aimed at finding a way to 'stay with the trouble' (Haraway, 2016) rather than attempting to resolve it. This idea tallies with those of Redpath *et al.* (2013) who, when discussing conservation conflict, make a distinction between conflict 'resolution' ('eliminating conflict') and conflict 'management' ('reducing the negative impact of conflict'), highlighting that resolution may be an unrealistic (even unnecessary) goal but that management is more achievable and can still provide mutually positive outcomes.

Intrinsically linked to water levels *in* the landscape is water drainage *from* the landscape, in order to maintain these levels. In the Avalon Marshes, drainage is conducted via an elaborate network of ditches, rhynes, drains and rivers which are overseen by the Environment Agency and the Axe Brue Internal Drainage Board (P40, CAM). When questioned about the negotiation between rewilding and water, participants often conflated changes in drainage policy with the changes in conservation approach linked with rewilding, in much the same way as they did in relation to changes to peat extraction regulations or as participants in Wild Ennerdale did regarding freshwater pearl mussels and changes to drinking water supply which will be discussed next, or indeed changes in sheep farming. Thus, when questioned about water level negotiation, participants had a tendency to focus exclusively on the 'doing out' (P28, PAM), i.e. dredging, of the rhynes, drains and rivers, sometimes to detriment of the rest of the interview since they returned to the subject repeatedly and at length.

These participants bemoaned changes in how the waterways have been managed since the role was taken on by the Environment Agency (P28, PAM, P47, PAM)<sup>149</sup>. Since that time participants claimed that waterways 'have not been

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<sup>149</sup> The Environment Agency was established in 1996 (Environment Agency, 2020), the year after the Ham Wall reserve was created and long after the establishment of Shapwick Heath (1967), the Catcott Complex (1968) and Westhay Moor (1971) but long before the establishment of Shapwick Moor (2007) i.e. all but one of the Avalon Marshes reserves pre-dated the changes to water management which these participants identified.

maintained properly' (P27, PAM), by which they meant that they have not been dredged on an annual or biennial basis, and that this has resulted in a significant silting up of the channels. All participants who criticised the lack of dredging did so on the grounds that the silting up of the waterways increased flood risk in the area (P27, PAM, P28, PAM, P47, PAM) which was summed up by Participant 47 (PAM):

they've let these water courses silt up to such an extent that they're 30% or 40% down on capacity, so if every running metre of a water course is 30% or 40% down that adds up to a hell of a lot of water, so there's both water storage and there's speed at which the water gets out.

Further to this, all these participants considered that 'wildlife' was the reason that the dredging was no longer occurring, hence the conflation of the changes in dredging with the rewilding of the Avalon Marshes, despite the changes pre-dating the establishment of all but one of the Avalon Marshes reserves. In some cases, the remit of the Environment Agency to protect wildlife was seen as creating a conflict of interest with its other obligations to provide drainage and flood protection for farmers. Environmental protection was also seen as the Environment Agency's way of whitewashing cost saving policies<sup>150</sup>. An illustration of the former came from participant 27 (PAM) who described the Environment Agency as 'wearing two hats now' where 'one hat is draining the Somerset Levels for the benefit of farmers and ... the other hat is conservation, and pressure from Natural England and RSPB to keep the water table high'. Meanwhile an illustration of the perceived disingenuity of the Environment Agency as to the real reason for changes in dredging policy came from Participant 47 (PAM) who said that 'they changed their practice ... for budget purposes but they hid behind conservation ... they hid[e] behind, oh, you can't do this, you can't do that, water

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<sup>150</sup> Similar criticism was made of Forestry England's motives for adopting rewilding as a land management policy because it 'meant they didn't have to do anything; (P36, LWE) (see Chapter 7, Section 7.4.2).

voles in the bank, invertebrates, all the rest of it, it was an excuse for not spending the money'. As with earlier discussions regarding the opposing interests of conservation and farming and peat production generally, and in relation to water levels specifically, this was construed as a 'lack of balance' between the needs of (human) residents and businesses, and the environment e.g.

Now, we've got so much environment, they restrict it [dredging], they don't want to do the rhynes out like they used to because they said it could upset the wildlife ... I think that it's gone too far ... you want nature and all that but you've got to understand that you've got to drain it, as well. You know I think they've gone too far' (P28, PAM).

According to Smith, Porter and Upham (2017) the suspicions of participants regarding Environment Agency policy may be well founded. They found that the Environment Agency had 'directed investment away from dredging, pushing it down, if not off, the policy agenda' in favour of 'soft' rather than 'hard' flood management strategies which were less disruptive to ecosystems and, in addition, they concluded that this change in policy had been compounded by 'budget tightening' (Smith, Porter and Upham, 2017, p. 355; see also Thorne, 2014). The 2014 flood mentioned by participants served as a 'catalyst for policy change' (Johnson, Tunstall and Penning-Rowell, 2005) however and saw dredging reintroduced in Somerset despite insistence from the Environment Agency that this would not prevent future flooding (CIWEM, 2014; Thorne, 2014). This makes an interesting comparison to other environmental knowledge controversies where governments have similarly taken action 'so as to be seen to be doing something', even if the efficacy of that action is uncertain (e.g. Cassidy, 2019).

A similar controversy exists in Wild Ennerdale in the negotiation between conserving freshwater peal mussels in the River Ehen and providing drinking water for west Cumbria. At time of writing Ennerdale Water is a United Utilities owned reservoir from which the company abstracts water to supply west



Cumbria. The abstraction licence has however been revoked due to concerns over the freshwater mussel population in the River Ehen – ‘England's only viable pearl mussel population’ (P35, CWE). While abstraction is currently continuing, until an ‘alternative solution’ is engineered (P35, CWE), once that solution is in place ‘the tap in effect will go off from Ennerdale’ (P42, CWE) and the reservoir will be decommissioned. The controversy related to this change in the status quo is manifold: residents are suspicious of the quality of water from Thirlmere (the reservoir which will replace Ennerdale as a water source) as opposed to Ennerdale (P35, CWE, P42, CWE), they are concerned over the cost of the engineering required (P16, RWE, P42, CWE), and they question the necessity and worth of conserving the freshwater pearl mussel (P16, RWE, P33, PCWE, P36, LWE, P42, CWE). These doubts were encapsulated by comments such as from Participant 16 (RWE), ‘people just see it as a waste of money because it is a huge expense and some local people see it as unnecessary and pointless’, and Participant 33 (PCWE):

Mussels have cost a fortune. Because they had to stop abstracting water from here [Ennerdale Water], they're building a pipeline from Thirlmere to west Cumbria, so we can take their water. God knows how much that's cost. All in the name of freshwater mussels.

Participant 33's (PCWE) comment ‘all in the name of freshwater mussels’ expresses his feeling that this is inadequate justification of such an expensive project.

Practitioners at Wild Ennerdale acknowledged both the expense of the project (£300 million (P35, CWE, P42, CWE)) and the reasons that its justification could be viewed as tenuous, saying that the scale of the project ‘is amazing when you think about it, on the back of a European protected species essentially’ (P35, CWE), especially since the freshwater pearl mussel is ‘a species that doesn't have a great selling point actually, it's not like we're doing this to protect the red squirrels in the western Lakes, it's to protect a little muddy species that looks like a pebble in a river, and it's costing lot of money’ (P42, CWE). Cognisant of this

latter point, conservationists have made significant efforts to 'raise the profile' and raise 'awareness' of the freshwater pearl mussel and to make 'people proud of their river, that they still have mussels here', although they acknowledged that while that had worked for 'a lot' of people, it had not worked for 'everybody' (P43, CWE). This situation highlights a significant weakness in rewilding's negotiating position. During the expert interviews, Participant 5 (EE) noted how dependent rewilding is on the presence of charismatic species, specifically mega-fauna, particularly in relation to nature-based tourism, potentially requiring their (re)introduction if they are absent. Perhaps even more critically, the environmental and conservation literature illustrates how much more consideration humans give to 'charismatic' species (Ducarme, Luque and Courchamp, 2013) and those which are 'big like us' (Hird, 2009). Thus, the alternative presence of non-charismatic, 'little, muddy species' makes negotiating rewilding's boundaries much harder. Wild Ennerdale could instead consider focussing on its 'charismatic mega-flora' (Hall, James and Baird, 2011 emphasis added) i.e. its trees and forests, especially Sidewood, the old birch-oak woodland, which is a part of the Lake District High Fells Special Area of Conservation (SAC) (JNCC, 2020a) and the Pillar and Ennerdale Fells SSSI (Natural England, 1991), and which is thought to have been a deer park until the 1600s (P42, CWE).

Similarly to the Avalon Marshes, Wild Ennerdale was not directly involved in decisions regarding the change of water management – in both sites the decision, ultimately, was made by the Environment Agency. The decision does however indubitably align with the principles of Wild Ennerdale's rewilding agenda and they have been almost inextricably 'linked' (P42, CWE) to it in the public imagination. This was captured in a comment from Participant 42 (CWE) who recognised that although Wild Ennerdale didn't 'orchestrate' the change and that it was 'happening anyway', it will 'bring fantastic opportunities in the future because we will potentially end up with a completely renaturalised lake and river system, which would be amazing'. It is perhaps little wonder therefore that stakeholders conflate the rewilding of Wild Ennerdale with changes to their water

supply and this is something that Wild Ennerdale will need to work to overcome in the negotiation of its boundaries.

A discrete though related point regarding water abstraction from the reservoir is that of the agency of the freshwater pearl mussels. While the decision to revoke the water abstraction licence was made by the Environment Agency, they made this decision due to the assertion by the pearl mussels of their collective agency. The behaviour of the pearl mussels (in declining) led the Environment Agency to take action but it was the pearl mussels themselves which initiated the change and this demonstrates their agency in contributing to the future (Rees, 2017). Care for the mussels can now be viewed as an example of rewilding's biopolitical approach of 'massifying' (Foucault, 1976) other-than-human agents and approaching them as populations, ideally as interconnected populations i.e. ecosystem assemblages. Conservation effort is extended at ecosystem level which, according to Linnartz and Meissner involves 'a radical transition from an ethical domain of individual care to a concern for the ecological whole' (2014, p. 6) and which perfectly encapsulates the approach taken to freshwater pearl mussels in the River Ehen.

A similar argument could be made regarding the rewilding of Low Moor End Farm which was discussed in Chapter 7. The catalyst for the chain of events which led to the 'productive land abandonment' (Jørgensen, 2014) of the farm can be traced back to the agency of the mussels. United Utilities committed to the 'removal of land from agricultural production in perpetuity' as part of compensatory measures imposed on them for damage to the River Ehen SAC (United Utilities, 2014). These measures were imposed by the Environment Agency which, in turn, was acted upon by the agency of the mussels. Here the mussels are clearly exercising their agency at species and also at ecosystem level since it is the SAC as a whole which is protected rather than the mussels specifically, although the mussels were the primary factor in the designation of the area as a SAC (JNCC, 2020b). It is the interaction between the mussels, the salmon (which are part of the mussels' life cycle) and the River Ehen generally which the SAC is seeking to protect, i.e. the integrity of the ecosystem. This

ecosystem is now undergoing a process of rewilding in that the River Ehen's flow is being re-naturalised (at the behest of the mussels) and, this natural process having been restored, the agency of the mussels, and the salmon, is being relied upon in order for these species to auto regenerate. This scenario again provides an example of the biopolitics of rewilding, with the mussels exerting agency at species and interspecies level and humans responding accordingly.

A similar case can be made regarding the Avalon Marshes, which are being co-created by humans and the domestic and wild companion species of rewilding. It is however the wild companion species, specifically birds, which unconsciously instigated this process (P40, CAM). The birds exerted their agency at species and interspecies level, with bittern being a species of particular interest to the RSPB and their habitat preference being a determining factor in the landscape creation at Ham Wall reserve where '[t]he objective was to re-create vital reed beds and help the struggling bittern population' (Avalon Marshes, 2020e). This illustrates how, like the freshwater pearl mussels at Wild Ennerdale, bittern at the Avalon Marshes exerted their agency by 'struggling' and the RPSB responded by creating a landscape according to their needs (P40, CAM). This is also illustrated in a quote from the Avalon Marshes website: '[t]he land was sculpted by machines, RSPB volunteers and staff grew reed from seed. Then came the hardest part, planting thousands of young reeds by hand' (Avalon Marshes, 2020e). This joint effort by reeds, humans and machines to create landscape, undertaken at the 'behest' of birds illustrates the mutually creative aspect of rewilding and that, in this case at least, it is the result of biological, cultural and technological systems.

## 8.5 Summary

This chapter has drawn together findings from the Avalon Marshes and Wild Ennerdale. Of particular note was the criticism surrounding communication and consultation in the negotiation of rewilding's boundaries with stakeholders. Suggestions were made as to how this criticism could be addressed including negotiation with and through 'pioneers'. The role of the companion species of rewilding was recognised and explored and biopolitical modes of negotiating with these species were identified. The importance, and influence of water at each site was also discussed, raising questions regarding the way in which humans negotiate with water given the markedly different approaches at each site. Questions were raised in the discussion of water regarding how nature is valued both financially (for example in relation to the expense involved in protecting a SAC for the benefit of freshwater pearl mussels in Wild Ennerdale) and intrinsically, given that it was sometimes seen as taking a secondary role to human concerns in negotiations. These, and other questions for further research, will be discussed in the conclusion which follows, as will the implications of this study for rewilding, and conservation more broadly, in its interface with other land use.

## Chapter 9: Domesticating rewilding

### 9.1 Outline

This chapter summarises the findings of this research being i. the way in which rewilding is interpreted, conducted and perceived in the Avalon Marshes and Wild Ennerdale, ii. the landscapes which rewilding encounters in these spaces and the boundaries which they present to it and, iii. how rewilding negotiates these boundaries. The implications of these findings are discussed, including the implications for rewilding more generally, particularly within England but also in the UK and beyond. I suggest that rewilding in England is being 'domesticated', i.e. some of its more radical potential is being adapted and moderated for the English context. These adaptations make it easier for rewilding to operate with and alongside other land uses and may also be applicable to rewilding in other parts of the world.

In the Avalon Marshes and Wild Ennerdale, as in other places, rewilding as a term is ill-defined (Prior and Brady, 2017; Hayward *et al.*, 2019), poorly understood (Townsend, 2016; Prior and Brady, 2017; Deary and Warren, 2018; Root-Bernstein, Gooden and Boyes, 2018; Sandom *et al.*, 2018; Hayward *et al.*, 2019), and often provokes consternation (Carver, 2016a; Sandom *et al.*, 2018). Meanwhile the praxis of rewilding displayed significant variations from the way the concept is applied in other part of the world, revealing forms of rewilding unique to the Avalon Marshes and Wild Ennerdale.

The human landscapes with which rewilding interfaced were predominantly agricultural, cultural and extractive (of peat). The other-than-human landscapes involved the companion species of rewilding and abiotic agents, especially water. All of these landscapes overlapped with political and economic landscapes, spatial landscapes and temporal landscapes, presenting multi-faceted boundaries for negotiation and requiring negotiation with human and other-than-human agents. Shortcomings were identified in these negotiations and in several instances negotiations could not be said to have reached a resolution. These negotiations, their shortcomings, and possible ways

to move forward (or indeed 'stay with the trouble' (*sensu* Haraway, 2016)) are significant findings of this research – it is from these findings that I draw my inferences and make suggestions for further work.

## 9.2 How rewilding is interpreted

Rewilding is no more clearly understood in the Avalon Marshes or Wild Ennerdale, than it is elsewhere (cf for example Prior and Brady, 2017), with it being defined in a multitude of different ways by participants. Of particular note were the differences of opinion regarding ongoing use of the term. Some participants called for it to be abandoned due to its unhelpful nature and negative connotations, describing it as toxic (P22, CAWE, P35, CWE), thereby directly echoing Sandom *et al.* (2018). Meanwhile others called for it to be rehabilitated, and reclaimed for continued use (e.g. P5, EE, P6, LE, P8, EE), again aligning with literature which predicts that this will indeed eventuate as rewilding 'creates a positive and hopeful environmental movement' and then becomes 'mainstream' (Jepson and Blythe, 2020, p. 149 and 152).

In instances where participants called for the rehabilitation of rewilding as a term there was evidence of 'boundary work' (Star and Griesemer, 1989). Actors (re)interpreted the term to suit their particular agenda and then set themselves up as 'gatekeepers' in order to defend the interpretation they had established. Interview material exposed evidence of these attempts to define rewilding in ways that fitted specific agendas and also of attempts to *set* the agenda as to what constituted rewilding both in principle and in practice e.g. P5, EE, P6, LE, and P8, EE. This indicated not only the boundary work which is being done in relation to rewilding but that the term itself is a 'boundary object', capable of demonstrating 'interpretive flexibility', residing between social worlds, and allowing actors to 'tack back-and-forth' between its various interpretations (Star, 2010). On one hand this enables collaboration so that while rewilding is specifically tailored in relation to its praxis at the Avalon Marshes and Wild Ennerdale for example practitioners from these site can use broader interpretations of rewilding to communicate and cooperate with practitioners from other sites. On the other

hand, the interpretive flexibility of rewilding as a boundary object can create misconceptions and apprehension among stakeholders. In these instances, rewilding as a term and concept can *hinder* rather than *enable* collaboration between practitioners and stakeholders, rendering it problematic.

This raises major questions regarding the continued use of the term rewilding which this research is not able to resolve. Within England, and indeed the UK, there is evidence both of the term being embraced<sup>151</sup> and, contrariwise, of it being abandoned. For example, the Cambrian Wildwood / Coetir Anian and Summit to Sea / O'r Mynydd i'r Môr projects have both reduced their association with rewilding – Cambrian Wildwood / Coetir Anian by abandoning its use of the term (Wynne-Jones, Strouts and Holmes, 2018; CoetirAnian / Cambrian Wildwood, 2020) and Summit to Sea / O'r Mynydd i'r Môr by dissolving their relationship with Rewilding Britain (Forgrave, 2019). Conversely, other projects are embracing such associations – for instance, while the criterion of 'self-identification as rewilding' transpired to be a significantly limiting factor when selecting case sites for this research it would now be much less so. At the time of case selection it was possible to identify only two sites in England which, *themselves*, offered any indication that they were rural rewilding projects:<sup>152</sup> Wild Ennerdale and Knepp Wildland, both of which were, and are, affiliated with Rewilding Britain and Rewilding Europe (via the European Rewilding Network). During the course of this study however three more English ecological restoration sites have joined the European Rewilding Network suggesting that the term rewilding is experiencing some kind of rehabilitation.

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<sup>151</sup> The term being 'embraced' is true only up to a point in that a modified form of the term rewilding is adopted and/or associations are made with rewilding more generally, rather than explicitly adopting the designation of rewilding.

<sup>152</sup> The emphasis here is on self-identification, with some sites, including the Avalon Marshes, being classified as rewilding by others but not *self*-identifying as such, and also on the rural since cases of urban rewilding were excluded from this research.



The three sites are the Wallasea Island Wild Coast Project, Wicken Fen Vision and Wild Ken Hill. The dates on which each of these projects was established is of course relevant. Wicken Fen Vision, being the earliest, was established in 1999, i.e. before rewilding had become a buzzword in the UK, which occurred circa 2009 (Jepson, 2016). Thus, while the Wicken Fen Vision has a long history of ecological restoration (see National Trust, 2016), it was two decades before it chose to associate itself with rewilding, becoming part of the European Rewilding Network in December 2019, which itself was created in 2011. This was well after the term rewilding had come to be considered ‘toxic’ by some protagonists within the rewilding debate in England and the UK and yet the project still chose to align itself with rewilding (Sandom *et al.*, 2018; Bonner, 2019). Similarly, the Wallasea Island Wild Coast Project was established in 2006 and yet joined the European Rewilding Network only in December 2018. By contrast, Wild Ken Hill was not established until 2019 but joined the European Rewilding Network almost immediately in April 2020.

Choice of terminology is also interesting with these three sites all identifying themselves according to place: *Wallasea Island Wild Coast Project*, *Wicken Fen Vision*, *Wild Ken Hill*. *Wicken Fen Vision* then draws on connotations of being forward looking, conceiving what might be possible, and imagining a different future, all of which could be said to be true of rewilding (e.g. Jørgensen, 2014; Tanasescu, 2017; Deary and Warren, 2018), but is conspicuous in its avoidance of the term rewilding in its title. Meanwhile, the Wallasea Island *Wild Coast Project* and *Wild Ken Hill* both use ‘wild’ but without the prefix ‘re’ which would overtly identify them as rewilding projects.<sup>153</sup> DEFRA adopts a similar approach in its agricultural transition plan for England which outlines the shift from agricultural support payments based on the Basic Payment Scheme of the

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<sup>153</sup> By not using the prefix ‘re’ these sites also disassociate themselves from one of the criticisms levelled at rewilding in that the term has implications of being regressive or backward looking (Sandom, Hughes and Macdonald, 2013; Jørgensen, 2014; Carver, 2016a; Deary and Warren, 2018). Abandoning the prefix ‘re’ avoids this implication with ‘wilding’ having connotations of making land wilder but without the implications of returning or restoring to a previous state.

Common Agricultural Policy to payments in accordance with the Environmental Land Management Scheme. The report talks of 'restoring wilder landscapes' but does not use the term rewilding (DEFRA, 2020). This would support a speculative conclusion that rewilding has been only *partially* rehabilitated as a term in England. It is not being used in the *naming* of projects but *is* being employed in describing and discussing them. I would argue that projects are not being labelled as rewilding to avoid 'putting people's backs up' (*sensu* P2, EE), something which is particularly relevant in relation to farmers and therefore DEFRA's agricultural transition plan. Instead the term is being used when more in-depth and nuanced conversations can be had, so that practitioners can explain what *they* mean by rewilding and what it means in the context of their particular project (e.g. P10, PAE), something which I found to be occurring at Wild Ennerdale and which of course takes a similar approach with the use of the epithet 'wild'.

The terms 'wild' or 'wilding', and their connotations, as opposed to 'rewild' or 'rewilding', may be more acceptable in the English context since wilding simply has connotations of being any degree wilder than the current state while still permitting management (Prior and Brady, 2017; van Horn, 2017). Rewilding by contrast has connotations of either returning to a previous, wild state (Sandom, Hughes and Macdonald, 2013; Jørgensen, 2014; Carver, 2016a; Deary and Warren, 2018) and/or allowing natural autonomy with little or no human intervention (Höchtel, Lehringer and Konold, 2005; Navarro and Pereira, 2012; Lorimer *et al.*, 2015; Tanasescu, 2017; Gammon, 2018; Pettorelli *et al.*, 2018), both of which are implausible in England. Wilding has also already been considerably popularised by the book of that name by Isabella Tree, published in 2018, which discussed (re)wilding at Knepp Wildland. Similarly, a project which has recently gained considerable media attention in the UK is 'Wilder Blean' – a 'wilding' project in Kent in the south east of England which plans to introduce European bison to an area of woodland to serve as ecosystem engineers. The Wilder Blean webpage describes wilding as occurring 'when nature is given the tools and space it needs to recover itself' (Kent Wildlife Trust, 2020) a definition which is very difficult to distinguish from that of rewilding. Indeed, in a newspaper

article, the leader of the project was quoted as situating Wilder Blean within the rewilding debate: '[s]ometimes in the rewilding debate people think that it's a look back to the past, but that's not what we're about. We're about trying to find the right natural solution for the modern world' (Stan Smith, Wilder Landscapes Manager at Kent Wildlife Trust and leader of the Wilder Blean Project quoted in Carrington (2020)). Evidently Wilder Blean has adopted a very similar philosophy to rewilding but has chosen wilding as a more 'acceptable' term.

I suggest that it is the criticism and consternation surrounding the term rewilding which is leading initiatives to distance themselves from it; given that the term rewilding has become problematic, projects are instead adopting the title 'wild'. The recent cases mentioned here give a very early indication that wild is becoming the preferred and therefore dominant term, at least as far as naming projects, while rewilding remains in use for discussing and describing them. In England then, rather than graduating from buzzword to *dispositif*, (Foucault, 1977), and becoming an apparatus which 'enables or allows something to happen' (Bensaude-Vincent, 2014), the term rewilding may have become the opposite i.e. something which thwarts, limits or constrains, hence the, at least partial, avoidance of it. It should be noted however that I relate this to *stakeholder* communication regarding rewilding. Among practitioners, I would argue that rewilding, as a boundary object, *does* function as a *dispositif*, facilitating cooperation by guiding conservation ideas and ideals (*sensu* Cairns and Krzywoszynska, 2016) and enabling conservation to happen in novel ways but without dictating how that should happen (*sensu* Bensaude-Vincent, 2014).

### **9.3 How rewilding is conducted**

According to my typology of rewilding (see Chapter 4, Section 4.2.2.1), the Avalon Marshes are a case of 'culture led, active nature' rewilding while Wild Ennerdale is a case of 'nature led, active culture'. Thus, Wild Ennerdale is classified as displaying a less culturally dominated landscape than the Avalon Marshes (i.e. fewer indications of human intervention) and also affords greater opportunity for the assertion of other-than-human agency (i.e. a greater degree

of wildness). That is not to say that the Avalon Marshes do not demonstrate rewilding, only that, on the oft mentioned 'spectrum' of rewilding (Sandom and Macdonald, 2015; Carver, 2016a; Townsend, 2016; Sandom *et al.*, 2018; Jepson and Blythe, 2020) they do not rate as highly on the wildness scale as Wild Ennerdale, with the Avalon Marshes employing a more interventionist approach to rewilding than is the case at Wild Ennerdale.

Nonetheless, despite displaying different approaches to rewilding, and despite being selected specifically to provide contrasting contexts (upland versus lowland, northern versus southern England, use versus avoidance of rewilding), the Avalon Marshes and Wild Ennerdale demonstrated many similarities in the way that rewilding was conducted. Both sites placed emphasis on the inclusion of people, focussing on ecotourism as a way for humans to interact with rewilding and as offering a means of economic sustainability to rewilding projects while not overly detracting from a sense of wildness. They also emphasised that rewilding and extensive farming could co-exist, thus allowing continued, *active* human participation in the landscape and also providing financial support for rural livelihoods, rural communities, and the rewilding projects themselves. Within the approach to extensive farming there was a drive to engage with, and through, 'pioneers' who could demonstrate the value of the approach by providing 'proof of concept' and sharing their acquired experience and expertise with other farmers via knowledge exchange networks (Wood *et al.*, 2014).

With regard to other-than-human factors, both sites faced challenges in relation to preserving culture in the area (whether that was the cultural landscape created by traditional farming or the archaeological history of the area) but both sought to at least acknowledge and if possible conserve these things, recognising the value of palimpsest 'naturalcultural' (Haraway, 2003) landscapes, rather than attempting to erase signs of human intervention in line with some interpretations of rewilding (Jørgensen, 2014; Deary and Warren, 2018). Meanwhile, with regard to the other-than-human animals, both sites employed grazing by large herbivores (predominantly cattle) as part of extensive farming systems and were thus required to engage in similar modes of biopolitical control of those cattle.

Other companion species were permitted more autonomy, indeed this was relied upon, even exploited, by both sites, both of which hoped that the exertion of other-than-human agency would work in their favour as species recolonised areas via self-reintroduction or 'auto-rewilding' (Tsing, 2017; Ward, 2020).

In addition to these common practices of rewilding, the Avalon Marshes and Wild Ennerdale also share another, more practical, characteristic which dictates the way that they conduct rewilding – that of spatial scale. The Avalon Marshes cover an area of 1500 hectares while Wild Ennerdale extends to 4300 hectares. Neither of these areas would be considered large by European, or even UK, standards: in other European countries for example rewilding projects can be over three million hectares in size (e.g. Swedish Lapland (Rewilding Europe, 2020b)). Meanwhile, in relation to rewilding in the UK, which Rewilding Britain (2020) describes as the 'large-scale restoration of ecosystems', the charity's director, Alastair Driver, defines 'large scale' as '10,000 ha plus in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and 100,000 ha plus in Scotland' (Catchments, 2018). The Avalon Marshes and Wild Ennerdale are clearly far smaller than this and, as a point of comparison, the sizes of the other English sites in the European Rewilding Network are also well below 10,000 hectares: Wild Ken Hill – 425 ha, Wallasea Island Wild Coast Project – 850 ha, Knepp Wildland – 1400 ha, and Wicken Fen Vision – 5300 ha (Rewilding Europe, 2020c).

I argue that 'large scale' is a relative measure and means something different in England than it does in continental Europe or even within the UK, especially since, in his definition, Driver makes a distinction between the scale of rewilding in England (and also Wales and Northern Ireland) and Scotland. In England then, I would argue that rewilding does operate at 'large-scale' but that scale is 'large' only within the English context and is small by comparison to the potential scope of rewilding projects in other countries. This becomes pertinent since it suggests that rewilding in England has developed in a way which is tailored to the English context i.e. on a much smaller scale than might be considered in countries with a larger land area and more areas which are sparsely populated.

## 9.4 How rewilding is perceived

The clearest finding from this research regarding the way rewilding is perceived in the Avalon Marshes and Wild Ennerdale was how divisive it is. Some stakeholders embraced the ethos and practice of rewilding while others were of the opposite view, to the point that they considered rewilding to be detrimental to ecological and human landscapes and that the concept was not a suitable approach to rural land management. This finding supports existing literature which reflects an equally divided picture in other situations e.g. beaver reintroductions in England (see Crowley, Hinchcliffe and McDonald, 2017a), the Cambrian Wildwood / Coetir Anian project in Wales (see Wynne-Jones, Strouts and Holmes, 2018), conducted or proposed reintroductions of species to Scotland, (see Warren, 2002) and the Oostvaardersplassen project in the Netherlands (see Lorimer and Driessen, 2014).

An important facet of the antipathy of rural communities to rewilding noted at the Avalon Marshes and Wild Ennerdale stemmed from the idea that rewilding is advocated by what I have called 'armchair rewilders'. I propose that armchair rewilders are (typically) urban dwellers (Wynne-Jones, Strouts and Holmes, 2018) who will be largely, or even wholly, unaffected by the reality of rewilding (cf Bauer, Wallner and Hunziker, 2009 and Arts, Fischer and van der Wal, 2016). This not only creates resentment in rural communities resulting from the feeling that rewilding is an 'external imposition' (*sensu* Ingold, 1993) but also from the sense that rewilding schemes are devised distant from the locations to which they are applied and therefore lack the necessary knowledge of local contexts (e.g. P11, LE and P36, LWE). In addition to creating resentment, this generates frustration that 'lay expertise' is disregarded in the planning phase of rewilding initiatives (Turnhout and Neves, 2019). In light of these perceptions, rural stakeholders sometimes rejected rewilding altogether with even its rebranding as 'wilding' being insufficiently distinct as a concept to make it acceptable, especially if stakeholders saw this rebranding as an attempt to obscure the truth i.e. that the term wilding was simply rewilding by another name (which in many ways it is, in the manner of Wittgenstein's language games (Bloor, 2006)).

Landowners and managers in particular, e.g. P36, LWE, called not only for a change of rewilding's *title* but also for a change in *approach*, calling for levels of human intervention that would be antithetical to rewilding. This places rewilding in a difficult position in that, when negotiating with stakeholders, in order to reach a solution which is acceptable to those stakeholders, rewilding may find itself compromising its core principles and therefore undermining its radical point of difference from conventional conservation. Allowing active human intervention (possibly in the form of farming of some description based on an extensive model as at the Avalon Marshes and Wild Ennerdale) would continue to maintain the rural communities and traditional practices which are so highly valued and, in turn, maintain the cultural landscapes which these traditional practices create, and which are equally valued, and yet involves levels of human intervention not theoretically compatible with rewilding ideas. It should be noted that such an approach contrasts starkly with rewilding in, for example, the USA which advocates the protection of 'core wild / wilderness areas' which, by definition, exclude humans (Rewilding Earth, 2020). An approach which allows some integration of human activity may however decrease resistance to rewilding in England, thereby increasing opportunities for it, albeit in a modified form.

## **9.5 Landscapes and boundaries of rewilding**

As a result of the preliminary round of interviews with rewilding experts, I identified four major landscapes with which rewilding in England interfaces: i. cultural, ii. political and economic, iii. temporal, and iii. spatial. In the expert interviews the most prominent political and economic landscape was that of farming, with its attendant agri-environment policies and the livelihoods associated with it. This interface with farming was indeed found to be highly significant in the Avalon Marshes and this was overlapped by temporal and spatial landscapes. These interjunctions occurred in time and/or space, with rewilding taking place on land which was once used for farming, on land adjacent to that which was currently used for farming, or being co-located with farming. The political and economic landscape of peat production was also highly important in the Avalon Marshes, with the peat industry, like farming, contributing

significantly to the rural economy within which the Marshes are situated. The policy landscape was deeply entangled with this since recent policy changes (i.e. the embargo on the granting of new or extended permissions to extract peat) have had a major impact on the industry, affecting its financial viability and long term sustainability, and creating a 'window of opportunity' (Kingdon, 2013) for rewilding. The negative implications of these changes for the peat industry and the corresponding positive implications for rewilding led to the conflation of the two issues in the minds of many participants, presenting a highly complex, and contentious, boundary for rewilding to negotiate. The exploration of these negotiations is one of the significant contributions of this research since there is a paucity of literature on the topic, with the majority of literature focussing on rewilding's interface with agriculture. In particular this research has revealed that rewilding's negotiation of its boundaries cannot take a 'one size fits all' approach to other land uses, with peat presenting a very different landscape to negotiate from that of farming.

The interface between rewilding and the farming landscape was possibly even more significant in the case of Wild Ennerdale, although the cultural landscape was also a major factor and it was very difficult to disentangle the two. This is because, as part of the Lake District, Wild Ennerdale has a long history of pastoral farming (specifically upland sheep farming) which has created a cultural landscape which is highly valued by its residents and visitors. Indeed, this landscape is so well recognised and highly regarded that the Lake District has had National Park status since 1951 and UNESCO World Heritage Site status since 2017. Again, this presents a complex boundary to rewilding with several overlapping factors: i. the affective connection which people feel to the Lake District generally and Wild Ennerdale specifically, ii. National Park and UNESCO policies which enshrine certain aspects of the physical landscape and, iii. the farming tradition which offers not only economic livelihoods but a way of life which is recognised as having heritage and cultural value (UNESCO, 2017).



Since the cultural landscape which farming has created is valued so highly, rewilding needs to negotiate its position as offering an alternative rural landscape which is valuable in a different sense. This raises an extremely interesting question as to whether a wild(er) landscape can ever be valued as highly by humans as one which they have had a hand in creating<sup>154</sup>. Indeed participants insisted that it was the *interaction* with nature which people valued, either interacting themselves (e.g. P11, LE) or seeing others interact (e.g. P36, LWE). Even if landscape is valued for its aesthetic qualities rather than for its human, or *lack* of human, input, a question still remains as to whether a wild(er) landscape can be considered beautiful given that the English notion of a beautiful landscape is based on Romantic landscape paintings which depict rural idylls and ‘chocolate box’ villages (Short, 2002; Wylie, 2007). According to this aesthetic, even post-industrial landscapes can be rehabilitated if they are sympathetically shaped by a harmonious combination of cultural and natural forces (see for example Matless (2014) regarding the Norfolk Broads). This was exemplified by comments from participants (e.g. P17, RWE) who emphasised the ‘need’ for ongoing management of landscape to maintain it in its current, aesthetically desirable, state. The inference from this is that an unmanaged (i.e. wild) landscape would be considered unattractive. This tallies with a view, long held in the literature, that ‘[i]f we were to leave the Lake District entirely to nature it would soon become disorderly – unpleasantly disorderly by civilized standards’ (Thompson, 1946, p. 15). The endurance of this view provides insight regarding attitudes towards nature and ‘civilization’ in England. Much of the aesthetic value of the English landscape (i.e. its pastoral, Arcadian charm) is predicated on a sense of order,

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<sup>154</sup> A certain irony should be noted here in that landscapes which are subject to rewilding often, or in the English context *always*, retain certain levels of human intervention irrespective of intentions to reduce this. Landscapes in which rewilding is occurring are therefore still *created* landscapes in much the same way as cultural landscapes are, although the process is less visible, indeed is deliberately obscured (what Hall (2014) would call the paradox of using the human touch to erase the human touch). Perhaps an important, though very general, distinction is that in a cultural landscape, human processes are made overt and *valued* whereas in a landscape which is undergoing rewilding, human processes are *devalued* and, where possible, erased or obscured.

regulation and neatness (Short, 2002; Wylie, 2007); the English countryside is one in which '[t]he slopes are green and gentle ... trees are companionably grouped at intervals which show them to advantage ... [and with] meadows on which the right amount of sheep are tastefully arranged' (Stoppard, 1993, p. 16). Rewilding conflicts with this, with even rewilding advocates acknowledging that it can be a messy procedure, creating disorder and chaos where once were neat hedges and green fields (e.g. P33, PCWE, P35, CWE, P43, CWE, P43, CWE) (Prior and Brady, 2017; Tree, 2018b). Further to this, since the notion of the rural idyll is enrolled in English nationalism and contributes to the English national identity (Garrard, 2020), rewilding has the potential to threaten far more than purely aesthetic ideals. Rewilding may find itself domesticated by such concerns and may need to adapt itself to this context particularly, for example, with respect to its companion species (e.g. enrolling traditional English rather than 'wilder' non-native analogues).

## 9.6 Negotiation of the boundaries of rewilding

Rewilding's negotiation of the boundaries which landscapes present to it occurs on three main fronts: with people (both those resident in or near rewilding sites, and visitors to those sites), with the other-than-human species which co-create rewilding sites, and with the abiotic agents which also contribute to the constitution of rewilding sites. Since all of these actors are part of the landscape of rewilding, negotiation with them is not only critical to rewilding but is unavoidable. In addition to this, given human anthropocentrism, rewilding's negotiation with other-than-human agents, both biotic and abiotic, cannot be conducted purely with those agents but needs to be undertaken with reference to people, as was seen in comments from participants. Some participants called for greater reference to humans in rewilding's negotiations with other-than-human agents, since the outcome of these negotiations has an impact on the way in which the humans experience the landscape. Meanwhile other participants argued for greater weight to be attributed to *other-than*-human agents in these negotiations and for a more eco-centric perspective to be adopted since this perspective has been subordinate to anthropocentric concerns in the past. This

reflects calls within the rewilding discourse for rewilding to reassess and redesign human negotiation with nature after decades in which human concerns have been privileged over those of the environment (Gammon, 2018).

With regard to negotiations at the field sites, rewilding was liable to encounter, or even create, concern, misunderstanding, resistance, suspicion and worry if it was not able to negotiate effectively with people, perhaps most particularly with those resident in its immediate locale (e.g. P15 CAM and P31, CAM). This finding reflects other research which discusses rewilding as causing people to feel 'threatened' and 'concerned' (Bauer, Wallner and Hunziker, 2009), as generating 'controversy' (Arts, Fischer and van der Wal, 2012) and as having the potential to create 'backlash' if 'decisions are made in the absence of citizen support' (Serfass *et al.*, 2014, p. 539). Irrespective of any shortcomings however, both the Avalon Marshes and Wild Ennerdale have escaped the wholesale controversy identified by Arts, Fischer and van der Wal (2012) and which has been associated with other rewilding sites (e.g. Summit to Sea / O'r Mynydd i'r Môr). This is perhaps particularly commendable in the Avalon Marshes where residents have historically made vehemently clear their opposition to unpopular changes in landscape management (e.g. changes to drainage in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, creation of sites of special scientific interest in the 1980s and, more recently, changes in river management which were widely perceived to be the cause of major flooding in 2014).

One of the most interesting findings was the way rewilding negotiates through 'pioneers', a concept which is not unique to rewilding (it is for example evident in peer-to-peer communication and knowledge exchange programmes e.g. farmer knowledge exchange programmes as discussed by Wood *et al.* (2014)) but which has been deployed to good effect in rewilding negotiations, particularly in Wild Ennerdale. As a minor caveat however, it appeared that the effect of this 'pioneer negotiation' at Wild Ennerdale was occurring distant from rather than local to the rewilding site – i.e. there was no evidence that other farmers in the Ennerdale Valley were being recruited to rewilding initiatives but participants suggested that landowners and managers further afield were being

influenced by what they were seeing and hearing. I would therefore suggest that this technique can be effective in relation to rewilding but is not being used to its full potential and is something which could be employed more effectively, particularly with respect to those local to rewilding sites. Harnessing this potential on a wider scale is discussed by Tree (2018b) who describes Knepp Wildland as being a flagship rewilding project in England which can inspire other landowners and could even serve as a model for ‘pop-up Knepps’ wherein landowners turn their land over to rewilding for a set period of time and then revert to more conventional land management.

With regard to rewilding’s negotiation with other-than-human species, I have followed Lorimer and Driessen (2013, 2016) who suggest that rewilding requires new modes of biopolitics for its interactions with its companion species and I have identified new biopolitical modes in operation in the Avalon Marshes and Wild Ennerdale, these are: species as proxies for humans, species as analogues, species as expendable objects, and species as self-determining agents (refer back to Table 8.1, p. 282). Given the way rewilding in England is conducted however (i.e. in the low to mid-range of the rewilding spectrum), while the biopolitical modes evident in the Avalon Marshes and Wild Ennerdale were *ideologically* different from those which operate in farming or conventional conservation, in practice they operate in very similar ways and, as a result, did not generate new forms of controversy<sup>155</sup>. This is not necessarily the case in other rewilding initiatives, with the Oostvaardersplassen providing a good example. There, cattle, horses and deer are treated as self-determining agents and therefore ‘let’ (in the sense of ‘let die’ (Foucault, 1976; van Dooren, 2014)) starve to death, causing outrage in animal welfare<sup>156</sup> communities. While the freshwater

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<sup>155</sup> The term ‘new’ is used here to acknowledge that controversy already exists in some quarters in relation to certain conservation and farming practices. This controversy is however beyond the scope of this research since it is not specific to rewilding.

<sup>156</sup> I follow the distinction between animal *rights* and animal *welfare* made by Laslo, Baram-Tsabari, and Lewenstein (2011) in that animal rights ‘focus on the moral status of animals’ while animal welfare ‘focuses on care ethics’.

pearl mussels of Wild Ennerdale act as self-determining agents their status as 'non-charismatic' (Ducarme, Luque and Courchamp, 2013) means that they are not afforded the same level of sympathy by the public as 'charismatic' species, and rewilding's negotiation with them is therefore not subject to considerations of public sentiment<sup>157</sup>. Lambert (2002) has called such situations, where conservation decisions are affected by public sentiment, as 'the trial of wildlife management by public opinion' and suggests that this 'is here to stay' – something which is clearly highly relevant to rewilding with its novel, radical and often controversial decisions in its negotiations with other-than-human species and the new modes of biopolitics that this presents. The boundary of what is publicly acceptable is therefore something which rewilding must negotiate, something which holds true for all the biopolitical modes identified.

In the other biopolitical modes identified ('species as analogues', 'species as proxies for humans' and 'species as expendable objects') the negotiation with rewilding's companion species is much more controlling than it is in the mode of 'species as self-determining agents' and much more aligned to the classic Foucauldian 'make live and let die' logic (Foucault, 1976), potentially making these modes open to criticism for their coercive, exploitative approach to other-than-human species. The interesting difference with regard to species as self-determining agents, is that in this mode species are let *live* as well as let *die* – something which displays rewilding's ambitions for an increase in natural autonomy (Höchtel, Lehringer and Konold, 2005; Navarro and Pereira, 2012; Lorimer *et al.*, 2015; Tanasescu, 2017; Gammon, 2018; Pettoelli *et al.*, 2018) and opportunities for other than human flourishing (Haraway, 2003; Tsing, 2012).

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<sup>157</sup> Charisma is a poorly defined concept in conservation biology although the traits of being 'large' (cf Hird's (2009) 'big like us'), 'exotic', 'terrestrial' and 'mammalian' have all been identified as contributing to it (Albert, Luque and Courchamp, 2018). While the cattle, horses and deer of the Oostvaardersplassen may not be regarded, certainly by western standards, as 'exotic' they do possess the other traits and horses also often fall into the category of companion animal (certainly in the UK where they are not considered a food animal), thereby adding another layer of complexity to the way they are viewed by humans and therefore regarded in relation to rewilding projects and the level of care that should be extended to them.

Water was the primary abiotic agent with which rewilding in the Avalon Marshes and Wild Ennerdale needed to negotiate, with the sites being in very different situations and therefore having to take very different approaches. Wild Ennerdale's principal consideration is of water as a drinking supply while the Avalon Marshes main concern is of water as a flood risk. Another, even greater, consideration is that Wild Ennerdale operates at catchment scale and so has independent control of its catchment. The Avalon Marshes, in stark contrast, is located in a flood plain which it shares with many other stakeholders. Wild Ennerdale could, and did, make decisions regarding its negotiation with water autonomously and was thus at liberty to take what might be considered an experimental approach to those negotiations, affording water considerable agency, both in the process and as an outcome of the negotiations. Water in the Avalon Marshes by contrast has its agency constrained and rewilding's ability to negotiate with it is limited by the necessity to consider, and compromise with, other land use (similar compromises, particularly with respect to flooding are evident in other research e.g. Smith, Porter and Upham (2017)). Much of this compromise arises from the fact that, similarly, to its negotiation with other-than-human species, rewilding's negotiation with water very much has to take into account the human impact of the outcome of those negotiations. This was clearly evident in the Avalon Marshes where stakeholders were frustrated by the impact that changes in water management, which they perceived to be occurring as a result of rewilding, were having on their land and consequently on their livelihoods and property. While in many instances it may be to rewilding's benefit to disentangle itself from debates which become conflated with it but are actually separate issues (e.g. the embargo on the issuing of peat extraction licences), discussing its role as part of wider debates around natural flood management may prove beneficial, although it is likely that any such discussion would need to be detailed and may prove complex and protracted.

The negotiation of rewilding's boundaries is very much an ongoing process and the praxis of rewilding is as much a part of this process as the theoretical debate itself. While the theoretical debate can assist, particularly since rewilding's

status as a boundary object facilitates negotiation and cooperation at a general level and also enables rewilding to operate in a tailored form at local levels, the *practice* of rewilding helps to progress the *theoretical* discussion. For example, ongoing rewilding projects such as the Avalon Marshes and Wild Ennerdale can embody what rewilding means in the English context and illustrate for stakeholders that rewilding in England is quite different from the concept as applied in other countries. Rewilding's local tailoring to accommodate and adjust to the English context is, to some extent, 'domesticating' it (i.e. making it more compatible with existing land use) and, by engaging with stakeholders, can exemplify that, in many ways, rewilding in England is a sheep in wolf's clothing; while the *word* rewilding may create concern due to its negative associations, the *practice* of rewilding can show that concern is being created 'where there's no need for it' since rewilding in England is 'pretty benign' (P10, PE) thereby helping to reconcile some of the more polarised aspects of the debate.

## 9.7 Implications of research

The primary implication of this research relates to the communication of rewilding and, by extension, the communication of conservation and broader environmental issues more generally. I found shortcomings in the communication of rewilding which were linked to misconceptions about it and, in turn mistrust towards it and reluctance to engage with it – something which is acting as a boundary (in the sense that it limits, constrains and impedes) to current advocacy for and practice of rewilding. Given this finding, I would recommend that rewilding alters its approach to negotiating with stakeholders, specifically by adopting the participatory mode of communication proposed by science and environmental communication models (Burgess, Harrison and Filius, 1998; Cox, 2003; Bucchi, 2008; Trench, 2008; Jones-Walters and Çil, 2011; Wyborn, 2015; Turnhout *et al.*, 2020). This could activate the utilization of lay expertise, thereby facilitating rewilding's local tailoring to local contexts, and improve public opinion with respect to it, particularly the opinion of rural publics. Failure to utilise lay expertise not only means that potentially useful information is missed but can create barriers to future negotiations by alienating local stakeholders and reinforcing

perceptions of armchair rewilding. I suggest that armchair rewilding, in which rewilding is seen as an external imposition and therefore resisted by those local to it, evidence of which was present at the Avalon Marshes and Wild Ennerdale, is likely to be applicable to other rewilding sites in England, the UK and beyond. Genuine and effective participatory communication with those resident in or near rewilding sites may offer a remedy to this and also benefit rewilding if suggestions from participatory communication are implemented. Moreover if rewilding is able to engage in such participatory communication effectively it could offer lessons for the participatory communication of conservation and environmental matters more generally, particularly in areas where there is the potential for conflict between human and wildlife interests.

Findings from this research would however suggest that even exemplary communication is unlikely to be sufficient to render rewilding, in its current form, acceptable to many rural stakeholders. Rewilding may therefore need to adapt some of its tenets to be suitable for, and applicable to, the English context. This inference is based on the distinct similarities between the ways rewilding is conducted and perceived at the Avalon Marshes and Wild Ennerdale, and the boundaries which their landscapes present to rewilding, despite the significant differences between the sites. These commonalities, *despite* the contrasting contexts of the field sites, allow scope to extrapolate from the Avalon Marshes and Wild Ennerdale and draw conclusions which could apply to rewilding in England as a whole, and is one of the major implications of this research.

The first of these commonalities is the relationship with the term rewilding – both sites were established prior to rewilding becoming a buzzword in the UK and both sites have elected not to alter their names to adopt the term subsequent to its increase in popularity. The Avalon Marshes avoid the term altogether while Wild Ennerdale holds it at arm's length, associating with it indirectly through the European Rewilding Network and through the use of 'wild' in its appellation. Judging by parallels with other projects and the discourse on rewilding, as discussed above, 'wild', or 'wilding', appear to be preferred in England over the term rewilding. The finding that the term rewilding is 'unacceptable' in England is



reinforced by the fact that the term was rejected by several stakeholders interviewed for this research.

The communication and the relationship with stakeholders was also a point of similarity between the sites. Both the Avalon Marshes and Wild Ennerdale consulted with stakeholders, emphasising the benefits of doing so and the need for rewilding projects to be inclusive of people. This contrasts strongly with rewilding narratives in other places (e.g. North America and continental Europe) where the emphasis is very much on rewilding's separation from humans (Höchtl, Lehringer and Konold, 2005; Navarro and Pereira, 2012; Gammon, 2018). The consultation process was revealed to lead to rewilding making concessions to the needs of stakeholders and compromising on some of its ideals (e.g. its levels of intervention). Major elements of this were rewilding's relationship with extensive farming and its relationship with visitors with both the Avalon Marshes and Wild Ennerdale recognising the need for, and value of, accommodating each of these elements. This was closely related to England's landscapes being intensely cultural and these cultural landscapes being strongly ingrained in the public consciousness as being what constitutes 'proper' English countryside. Both the Avalon Marshes and Wild Ennerdale incorporate cultural landscapes which participants saw a need to maintain. Extrapolating from the Avalon Marshes and Wild Ennerdale to England as a whole I would suggest that rewilding in England may need to develop in a way which is tailored to the English context, offering much more opportunity for human interaction with the land than may be typical of rewilding in other countries. In particular, rewilding in England will need to consider (and possibly make concessions to) the need for sustainable rural communities and the protection of England's cultural landscapes. As this research has shown, the goals of rewilding and (extensive) farming are by no means incompatible and through mutual compromise it may be possible to achieve mutual benefits. For example changes in farming approaches can have significant benefits to conservation and, rather than the assumed decrease, can also result in increased productivity for farming (Jackson, Maginnis and

Sengupta, 2007; Neely and Hatfield, 2007; Thompson *et al.*, 2007).<sup>158</sup> Equally, changes in rewilding policy such as the use of traditional livestock breeds rather than non-native, non-domestic species to serve as analogues and proxies in rewilding projects can have the same (or extremely similar) impact ecologically while still allowing productive agriculture to continue. While such approaches contribute somewhat to rewilding's domestication, their adoption can allow farming and rewilding to cooperate to their mutual benefit and foster collaboration towards compatible rather than competing interests. Taking such an approach to rewilding can also make it less divisive than approaches which admit little or no human intervention and may help to resolve the chronic contention surrounding rewilding which exists in England (and the UK more broadly). It could also avoid controversy (re)igniting as and when future rewilding decisions are made, particularly with respect for example to species (re)introductions, changes to valued heritage landscapes, or changes to the food production system.

Related to the status of England's landscapes as *cultural* landscapes is the fact that it is a small island with a long history of human habitation and is now densely populated. This means that there is distinctly limited scope for rewilding on the scale which is often called for in the literature, even as compared to Scotland. Both the Avalon Marshes and Wild Ennerdale (at 1500 hectares and 4300 hectares respectively) are very small by European standards and even as compared to what is called for in England and the UK by director of Rewilding Britain, Alastair Driver (Catchments, 2018). While ambitions of scale have already been moderated in the English context (see comments from Driver cited above re scale of rewilding in England as compared to Scotland (Catchments, 2018)) I would suggest that they are being scaled down even further in practice (c.f. the Avalon Marshes, Wild Ennerdale and the other English rewilding sites listed on the European Rewilding Network, none of which are close to the 10,000 hectares

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<sup>158</sup> The changes to agricultural support payments introduced by the ELMS now make this a realistic prospect, with rewilding now much more politically and economically viable than is was under the CAP.

suggested by Driver) especially when ‘backyard rewilding’ initiatives such as the Blue Campaign are considered, which suggests that rewilding is operating at the microscale in England (Blue Campaign, 2020; Jepson, 2020).<sup>159</sup> It may be beneficial to rewilding’s negotiations to recognise such initiatives as being on the spectrum of rewilding. Doing so may empower rewilding proponents who have hitherto been discouraged by the feeling that their microscale efforts would be insignificant, thereby encouraging more people to take part and thus allowing rewilding to benefit from the combined gains of many small efforts. Equally, it may allay the fears of opponents by allowing them to see that rewilding need not necessarily (or at all) involve large scale ‘land grabs’ by ‘wealthy philanthropists’ (Wynne-Jones, Strouts and Holmes, 2018) and that it can occur at small scale, fitting alongside other land use.

A final point, in relation to both spatial scale and levels of human intervention, is the question of large carnivore reintroduction. Large carnivores were conspicuous by their absence from both the Avalon Marshes and Wild Ennerdale and neither site has plans to reintroduce any. The reintroduction of large carnivores is highly contentious in the UK (see for example Neilson, 2019) and this was clear in the interview data. The reasons for this are multifarious but are linked to the scale at which rewilding operates and to the populated nature of England’s countryside, with opponents suggesting that there is insufficient room for such species to be reintroduced and that their reintroduction would have significant impacts on those resident in the reintroduction area (Neilson, 2019). This is a marked contrast to rewilding agendas in other locations which focus heavily on reintroductions of large carnivores (e.g. Soule and Noss, 1998; Deary and Warren, 2018). Indeed, participants in this research were at pains to deemphasise the role of large carnivore reintroduction in rewilding projects in

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<sup>159</sup> Back yard rewilding is something I became aware of during the course of this research with the ‘Blue Campaign’ purporting to be ‘rewilding Britain garden by garden’ (Blue Campaign, 2020). Such initiatives however fell outside the scope of this research when selecting case sites and so are not discussed herein.

England (e.g. P5, EE, P6, LE, P35, CWE) illustrating another instance of boundary work where rewilding proponents in England are shaping the rewilding agenda to fit the English context. Interestingly, the narrative in Scotland is subtly different with a greater focus on the (re)introduction of large carnivores, possibly related to the lower population density<sup>160</sup> and the larger scale at which rewilding can and does, operate at there (e.g. Warren, 2002, Hetherington, 2005; Arts, Fischer and van der Wal, 2012). This absence of large carnivores allowed for a relatively permissive mode of biopolitics in relation to species as self-determining agents in the Avalon Marshes and Wild Ennerdale and I would suggest that the modes identified in this research as present at, and common to, the Avalon Marshes and Wild Ennerdale could be applied to other English rewilding sites. This permissive approach may however change if large carnivores are reintroduced, in which case I predict that the biopolitics in relation to large carnivores as self-determining agents would be revised considerably.

This 'domestication' of rewilding, especially when combined with the fact that the most 'classic' form of rewilding (natural dominance, passive culture) identified in this research's rewilding typology is not present in England, suggests that rewilding in the English context is much more closely aligned to conventional conservation than it is in other places. Nonetheless, I would suggest that rewilding is introducing a new element to the conservation discourse and that rewilding and conventional conservation are engaged in a process of mutual (re)shaping; this reshaping of conservation practice offers possibilities for new and more sustainable ways of human and other-than-human coexistence. What emerges is a uniquely English form of rewilding praxis which incorporates a range of practices which seek to restore ecological functioning and increase biodiversity but which do so with either greater or lesser levels of human intervention and, by extension, greater or lesser opportunity for expression of natural autonomy. Natural processes are either encouraged or compelled depending on the situation, while other-than-human agency is either permitted or controlled. This

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<sup>160</sup> England has a population density of 432 people / square kilometre while Scotland has a population density of 70 people / square kilometre (ONS, 2020).

uniquely English expression of rewilding illustrates how the concept of rewilding has ‘travelled’ (Collier and Mahon, 1993) to England from North America, where it originated, and been ‘stretched’ (Collier and Mahon, 1993) from its original meaning given its ‘plasticity’ (Star and Griesemer, 1989; Poerksen, 1995; Bensaude-Vincent, 2014; Jørgensen, 2014). In light of all the ‘local tailoring’ (Star and Griesemer, 1989) evident in relation to rewilding in the English context and the concessions which it has already made and/or may have to make in the future, I have qualified the factors which I proposed early in this thesis as being able to confer family resemblance to rewilding. These factors now have caveats which, in light of my findings, I suggest apply to the unique expression of rewilding in the English context – these provisos are set out in Table 9.1.

## **9.8 Contribution of research**

In this research I have advanced thinking on the nature of rewilding and its different forms – in particular my typology of rewilding offers a way of categorising the plethora of different definitions and classifications of rewilding along axes of landscape type (from cultural to natural) and location of agency (from human to other-than-human). The typology is useful in acknowledging the ‘spectrum of rewilding’ which encompasses a wide range of approaches, all of which can be grouped under the broad term rewilding but which can adopt quite disparate approaches. More specifically, I have contributed to understandings of the unique nature of rewilding in England which is distinct from rewilding in other locations, largely due to the way that rewilding’s negotiation of its boundaries is determining its form and seeing rewilding as a practice reshaping itself to fit the context of the English landscape. I have helped to illuminate these human and physical landscapes from the perspective of rewilding, particularly in terms of understanding which landscapes are most significant to rewilding and how it negotiates its intersections with them.

Table 9.1: Adaptations to the factors deemed capable of conferring family resemblance to rewilding as they apply to rewilding in the English context.

Factor	Adaptation
Self-identification as rewilding	In England, rewilding is increasingly self-identifying as 'wilding' rather than using the term 'rewilding' in project titles, although rewilding will often appear in project descriptions and its concepts are often applied in practice.
Large scale	Rewilding operates at a smaller scale in England (and to a certain extent the UK, at least in England, Northern Ireland and Wales) than it does in continental Europe and the continents of North and South America.
Increase in biodiversity	Rewilding in England aims to increase biodiversity but does so within certain limits, most notably without (re)introducing some mega-fauna species, particularly the large carnivores but also large herbivores and omnivores.
Restoration of ecological functioning	Restoration of ecological functioning is a goal of rewilding in England but is restricted to a certain extent by the inability to (re)introduce certain species, the result of this being that not all trophic niches are filled which in turn affects trophic cascades and other ecosystem functions.
Reduction of human intervention	The reduction of human intervention is an ambition of rewilding in England but only up to a point, it being neither practicable nor acceptable to completely withdraw human management of landscapes (due in part to the way in which other rewilding factors, namely increase in biodiversity and restoration of ecological functioning are compromised in the English context).
Increase in natural autonomy	While the increase of natural autonomy is an aspiration of rewilding in England this is somewhat limited by the requirement for some level of human intervention which, by definition, indeed by design, impinges on natural autonomy.

In addition to this, my exploration of the biopolitics of rewilding helps to illuminate the new modes of biopolitics which rewilding is creating and the way in which ethical decisions (and related decisions with respect to care) are made in rewilding projects. As rewilding progresses these biopolitics modes are likely to evolve as we develop new ways of living with companion species and dwelling in (wilder) landscapes with them, potentially even developing a greater tolerance for other-than-human species, finding new ways of valuing species, and discovering new way of managing human-wildlife conflict. The proposed biopolitics of rewilding offers a foundation for these new modes of relating which could inform human-animal relations in existing or future rewilding projects.

Since rewilding affects human and physical systems its study often falls into the domain of geography. This research therefore contributes to studies of human and animal geographies and also to environmental geography exploring, as it does, the political ecology of rewilding. More specifically, since I take a broadly sociological approach, my research contributes to the fields of rural and environmental sociology. Lastly, since my work is interdisciplinary and interested in the relationship between humans and the environment, and in the conflicts and coexistence of humans and other-than-human animals, my research contributes to the interdisciplinary fields of animal studies, landscapes studies and conservation / environmental science.

## **9.9 Limitations of research**

The research period for this thesis ran from January 2018 to December 2020 inclusive. The fieldwork was conducted principally in the English spring and summer of 2019 and therefore completed before the global coronavirus pandemic which commenced, with respect to England and the UK, circa March 2020. This was with the exception of two interviews with stakeholders in the Avalon Marshes. Attempts were made to schedule them for autumn 2019 or winter 2019/20 but that was not possible. This research then became overtaken by national and international events, and the University of Exeter, like other UK universities, suspended all field work. Repeated attempts were made to reach

one of the intended participants, by telephone and email since his input was considered likely to be highly illuminating, but attempts were unsuccessful. It is not known what his situation is and it is possible that he has been furloughed or made redundant as part of his organisation's response to the coronavirus pandemic and that remaining members of staff have too many priorities to be able to assist with research at this time. No attempts were made to contact the other intended participant as it was felt that a significant proportion of the value of his contribution would be derived from meeting face-to-face and, if possible, conducting a walking interview. This element would have been lost had the interview been conducted by telephone or email and it was therefore felt that such an interview would not contribute any additional value to the research.

Obtaining interviews with these intended participants would however have increased the range of stakeholders at the Avalon Marshes, something which was sufficient but which could have been improved, certainly compared to Wild Ennerdale where there was a better spread of participants. Part of the reason for the concentration on peat and compost producers in the Avalon Marshes was the significance of peat in the area but also, perhaps even more importantly, the relative lack of attention in the literature to activities other than farming as economic rural land uses with which rewilding interfaces. It was therefore necessary to explore this aspect of the Avalon Marshes landscape in detail in order to offer a meaningful contribution on the subject. As an auxiliary point it should be noted that of the participants identified as a 'peat / compost producers', one is exclusively a *compost* producer (i.e. all the products his business produces are peat free) and one has now diversified into another, though closely related, industry. Were this research to have identified them separately however their anonymity would have been compromised due to the qualitative nature of data sampling for this research and the small rural community within which they operate. All other participants identified as 'peat / compost producers' produce compost products which contain at least some proportion of peat.



Walking interviews provided extremely rich data and this research would have been richer had it been possible to conduct more of the interviews in this way. While some sedentary interviews were conducted because participants were injured or infirm, some were conducted due to participant reluctance, hesitation or simply misunderstanding regarding a walking interview, something which greater efforts could have been made to overcome. This could perhaps have been achieved by expressing clearly that the interview provided an opportunity for participants to show me their favourite part of the landscape within which they lived or worked and that I was genuinely interested in seeing this. I could also have emphasised that the interview need not take much time and that, if necessary or possible, participants could incorporate it into their regular daily activities. Walking interviews worked well for example for participants who considered them part of, or were able to incorporate them into, their daily routine e.g. one participant checked a hillside, one checked a dam, others exercised their dogs. One reservation to adopting such a technique however is that interviews could have become 'go along' interviews meaning that the research would have assumed a more participatory and less symmetrical approach (Crowley, Hinchliffe and McDonald, 2017b). As an additional point, taking maps of the case sites, whether conducting sedentary or walking interviews, would have aided conversation and even assisted understanding, for example when discussing the geographical landscapes of and boundaries to the rewilding sites, thereby producing richer data, similar to the way in which 'photo-elicitation interviews function (Lapenta, 2011).

With further reference to data collection, conducting visitor questionnaires at Wild Ennerdale proved difficult since there were no facilities in either of the carpark entrances to the site as compared to the Avalon Marshes where the carpark chosen to conduct visitor questionnaires had a café and picnic tables, thus rendering it very easy to engage with visitors. As a result, visitor questionnaires for Wild Ennerdale were conducted online, meaning that responses lacked the immediacy of those received at the Avalon Marshes. It was also more difficult to elicit responses with only 74 questionnaires obtained in Wild

Ennerdale as compared to the target of 100 which was achieved at the Avalon Marshes. In addition to this, at both field sites, not all respondents completed all questionnaire questions, reducing the usefulness of the data. This is however difficult to avoid since, in line with the ethical approval for this research, participants were at liberty to not answer any questions they did not wish to.

Also in reference to data collection, the choice of field sites was naturally, particularly important, but also somewhat problematic. Given that this research specifically set out to explore the concept of rewilding and given that, in-line with deployment of the case study as a method, it was important to choose field sites which presented 'better' (Gerring, 2007) opportunities for study, considerable time and thought went into case selection. This inevitably meant however that I engaged in boundary work of my own with respect to what does or does not constitute rewilding. This was essentially unavoidable since, to explore rewilding as a concept it was deemed necessary to study sites which could defensibly be classified as rewilding. In order to do so I adopted a working definition of rewilding for the purposes of this research (that of Prior and Brady (2017)) and developed a system of categorising conservation / rewilding projects. In order to avoid a normative stance as far as possible, the definition adopted and the categorisation developed were as broad and as inclusive as possible, with the categorisation system using the notion of 'family resemblance' (Wittgenstein, 1968) rather than the more prescriptive concept of 'necessary and sufficient' factors (Goertz and Mahoney, 2005). Nonetheless, certain sites, including urban rewilding sites, were excluded as potential subjects for study and this, unavoidably, compromised the symmetry of my positionality. While I mitigated this as far as possible it was not possible to eliminate it entirely and it was important to remain reflexive throughout the research and to be alert to weaknesses in my stance on the research topic.

With respect to outputs from this research, the discussion of companion *species* displays a tendency to refer to companion *animals*, a criticism which other attempts at discussions of companion species have been subject to e.g. Cassidy (2003) or Haraway (2003). I found it difficult to avoid leaving myself open to such criticism – in our anthropocentric world we tend to be interested in

charismatic species and those which are 'big like us' (Hird, 2009). Animals are thus front and centre of our minds and were, consequently, at the front and centre of the interviews, certainly as compared to other companion species e.g. reeds and trees. As a result, the examples of companion *species* tend to be drawn from discussions of *animals* although it is intended that the arguments made are no less applicable to plants (or even bacteria, fungi or protozoa) and indeed this is evident to a certain extent with respect to discussions of trees, which have been described as charismatic mega-flora (Hall, James and Baird, 2011).

## **9.10 Scope for further research**

Given the 'domestication' of rewilding which I have identified in the Avalon Marshes and Wild Ennerdale, and from which I extrapolate to England more broadly, further research regarding the extent to which this postulated unique expression of rewilding is evident in other English rewilding sites would be highly illuminating. Sites which offer potential scope for such research are those which have recently joined the European Rewilding Network i.e. Wallasea Island Wild Coast Project, Wicken Fen Vision and Wild Ken Hill. Given the speculation that backyard rewilding may be important in the UK, and given the exclusion of urban rewilding from this research, further research could also extend to include these initiatives and would provide valuable insights into rewilding in the English context. In addition, further research to apply the typologies developed in this research to other rewilding sites would be highly illuminating, and could also be extended to rewilding sites beyond England and the UK. This is particularly true of the typology of biopolitical modes of companion species of rewilding. Lorimer and Driessen (2013) have identified that new biopolitical modes associated with rewilding offer new ways of negotiating with the companion species of rewilding and may offer new modes of living with other-than-human life, as opposed to simply controlling it. Further research to assess the extent to which the typology developed here might apply to other rewilding sites would therefore be extremely illuminating.

Something else which was very much unresolved by this research was the way rewilding negotiates the political and economic landscape. If rewilding is to progress in England (and other parts of the UK), it raises serious questions as to how (or if) it can replace the rural economies it supplants, that is, how can it be economically sustainable in itself *and* furnish rural livelihoods. The two main solutions to this which rewilding currently proposes are ecotourism and ‘wild’ meat – these are as yet relatively untested and unproven and, crucially, it is not immediately apparent that they are scalable. Ecotourism, by definition, needs to be low density in order to preserve the value of that which is attracting its clients, thus limiting its scope. Further to this, in some sites proposed for rewilding, e.g. the Lake District, ‘mass’ tourism is already a significant industry which it would be very difficult for ecotourism to replace. In addition, and perhaps even more importantly, ecotourism relies on a scarcity model to function successfully i.e. what draws people to engage in ecotourism activities is that the experiences and encounters it offers are rare and therefore valued – the more prolific rewilding becomes the more commonplace such opportunities are, thereby diminishing their value. Moreover, tourism as a sector is notorious for creating low paying jobs and for being vulnerable to economic downturns. It is therefore an open question as to whether it can create flourishing, sustainable communities and be resilient to economic recessions<sup>161</sup> (Lacher and Oh, 2011; Eurofound, 2012; Mullis, 2017; Dogru *et al.*, 2019).

The second proposition, of ‘wild’ meat, encounters issues with food production and supply systems, and food self-sufficiency. Rewilding produces very low volumes of very high cost meat. It is therefore not a model suited to current food systems which demand high volumes of meat at low cost. This becomes problematic in an era when concerns over food security are becoming increasingly relevant, for example with the UK’s withdrawal from the EU and in the wake of a global pandemic. While Brexit may offer something of a resolution to this with the UK’s departure from the Common Agricultural Policy and its replacement with a British Agricultural Policy that has an emphasis on ‘public

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<sup>161</sup> At time of writing the coronavirus pandemic is providing a very stark example of this.

money for public goods' (DEFRA, 2018b), this is also as yet unproven and is not without critics who see reducing nature to natural capital and valuing it in financial terms as overlooking, and even incompatible with, the intrinsic value of nature. While participants highlighted the difficulties of applying natural capital as a concept (e.g. P7, AJE) it does offer an, at least partial, solution to the floccinaucinihilipilification of nature<sup>162</sup>. More research into the political economy of rewilding would therefore be highly beneficial, particularly in light of England's new agricultural and environmental legislation.

## 9.11 Summary

This thesis has sought to expose the 'dense and energetic infrastructure of wild[...]ness management' (Whatmore, 2002) – the landscapes, boundaries and negotiations of rewilding. It has revealed that rewilding operates on the margins in England, on marginal lands and in the margins of acceptability. And it has revealed that rewilding is being domesticated for the English context, taming some of its more radical ambitions, scaling it down in terms of size, limiting the species which can be (re)introduced, constraining the autonomy of the other-than-human agents involved (whether those agents be biotic or abiotic), requiring at least some level of human intervention, and even limiting its scope for self-expression – inducing the epithet 'rewilding' to be replaced with the less provocative 'wilding'. Yet rewilding has negotiated this, by adapting itself for the English context and, where problems are insoluble, by 'staying with the trouble' (Haraway, 2016).

Thus, the greatest impediment to rewilding may not be, as Soule and Noss (1998) suggested, an *unwillingness to imagine it*, but the *inability to adapt and to communicate it*. It seems that publics are all too willing to imagine rewilding, and the rewilding of their vivid collective imaginings is populated by lynx and wolves and bears (oh my). Adapting rewilding and then communicating it effectively, so that publics understand what is meant by rewilding in the English context, may make it much more acceptable than the rewilding of their imaginings. Rewilding's

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<sup>162</sup> i.e. estimating nature as worthless.

'plasticity' may then be a strength rather than a weakness. Rewilding's status as a buzzword, a plastic word and a boundary object enable it, as a concept and a praxis, to be malleable, reflexive and (potentially) to foster collaboration across communities of interest (e.g. stakeholders) and communities of practice (e.g. practitioners). As a boundary object, rewilding is flexible, can restructure processes, and can shift between being an umbrella term to unite disparate conservation practices and a term which is precise and tailored to local contexts allowing 'different groups to work together without consensus' (Star, 2010, p. 602). Despite also being a toxic word, despite altering some of its more radical ideals in the English context, and even despite not daring to speak its name in some situations, rewilding as a concept is still sufficiently novel and inspiring to be able to offer something new and innovative to conservation in England. But rewilding can realise its potential only if it is accepted by the communities which it affects most directly, which in turn can be achieved only if it is communicated effectively and adapted to local contexts. In the case of England this means that rewilding cannot be not pursued at any cost i.e. to the detriment of rural communities and via the outsourcing of environmental degradation. I sincerely hope that this research can contribute to moving the debate surrounding rewilding in England forwards in a constructive way. I see it as transdisciplinary in nature and while I hope it will be of interest to ecologists its real value lies in bringing considerations of our ecology and our societies together and in adding to the debate about how we value ecology, society and land.

## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Terms related to rewilding

Term	Definition	Source
Introduction	The intentional or accidental dispersal by human agency of a living organism outside its historically known native range <sup>163</sup> .	IUCN, 2008
Conservation introduction	The intentional movement and release of an organism outside its indigenous range.	IUCN, 2013
Reintroduction	The deliberate or accidental release of a living organism(s) into the wild to areas where the species or race was native but has become extinct.	JNCC, 1996
Reinforcement (also called supplementation)	The intentional movement and release of an organism into an existing population of conspecifics.	IUCN, 2013
Restocking	A distinct form of supplementation that is undertaken for amenity purposes e.g. restocking of fish by angling groups or of wildfowl for shooting.	JNCC, 1996
Translocation	The human-mediated movement of living organisms from one area, with release in another.	IUCN, 2013
Relocation (also called rescue translocation)	A type of translocation where an organism(s) is transferred away from the donor site because that site is under threat.	JNCC, 1996

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<sup>163</sup> The JNCC (1996) base their current definitions on that of the now defunct Nature Conservancy Council which offered a definition of introduction which was notable for its designation of the point at which a reintroduction becomes a new introduction; 'the deliberate or accidental release of living organisms into the wild in areas where that kind of organism does not occur naturally, and *has not occurred since the last glaciation (or during historic time)*' (JNCC, 1996, p. 9 emphasis added).

## Appendix 2: Definitions of rewilding

Definition (all emphasis added)	Author(s)
<i>Ecological functioning, wilderness experience, and natural autonomy.</i>	Arts, Fischer and van der Wal, 2016
A conservation approach aimed at restoring and protecting <i>natural processes</i> in core wild areas, providing connectivity between such areas, and protecting or <i>reintroducing keystone species</i> (which may or may not include large herbivores and/or predators). Rewilding projects may require active <i>intervention</i> through ecological restoration, particularly to restore connectivity between fragmented protected areas, and the reintroduction of species of plants or animals where these are no longer present.	Carver, 2016a
Returning a managed area back to the wild.	Corlett, 2016
Rewilding is a multi-faceted conservation approach that attempts to <i>restore historical ecosystems and species</i> ... especially those believed to be lost 'keystone' species, the restoration of which is expected / hoped to affect change at multiple trophic and systemic levels.	Crowley, Hinchliffe and McDonald, 2017a
A diverse range of different activities intended to <i>restore ecosystem function</i> to formerly cultivated or managed landscapes.	DeSilvey and Bartolini, 2018
An audacious conservation approach aiming at <i>restoring wild species</i> interactions and their regulation of <i>ecosystem processes</i> by focusing on the key role of species that have been extensively extirpated by humans.	Fernández, Navarro and Pereira, 2017
Aims to undo harms wrought to ecosystems and, in so doing, <i>restore them to a state of health and functionality. Decreases the degree of human intervention and management of ecology.</i> Is focused on a <i>process</i> , rather than a specific result or endpoint.	Gammon, 2018
A process in which a formerly cultivated landscape develops <i>without human control.</i>	Höchtel, Lehringer and Konold, 2005
The restoration of <i>ecosystem function</i> through reassembly of trophic levels involving the <i>reintroduction of large mammals.</i>	Jepson, 2016



To make wild again.	Jørgensen, 2014
Aim is to maintain, or <i>increase, biodiversity</i> , while <i>reducing the impact of present and past human interventions</i> through the <i>restoration of species and ecological processes</i>	Lorimer <i>et al.</i> , 2015
The <i>passive</i> management of ecological succession with the goal of restoring natural <i>ecosystem processes</i> and <i>reducing human control</i> of landscapes	Navarro and Pereira, 2012
<i>Species introductions or reintroductions</i> as a way to restore <i>ecosystem functioning</i> through the <i>facilitation</i> of assumed natural processes that existed before the ecosystems were profoundly altered by <i>human impacts</i> .	Nogués-Bravo <i>et al.</i> , 2016
The <i>reorganisation</i> of biota and <i>ecosystem processes</i> to set an identified social-ecological system on a preferred trajectory, leading to the self-sustaining provision of ecosystem services with <i>minimal ongoing management</i> .	Pettorelli <i>et al.</i> , 2018
A process of <i>(re)introducing or restoring wild organisms and/or ecological processes</i> to ecosystems where such organisms and processes are either missing or are 'dysfunctional'.	Prior and Brady, 2017
Seeks to restore missing or dysfunctional <i>ecological processes and ecosystem function</i> via a process of <i>species reintroduction</i> .	Sandom <i>et al.</i> , 2013
Community (re)assembly to restore <i>ecosystem function</i> . Restoring all natural processes is perhaps rewilding in its purest sense, but we see rewilding as a <i>continuum</i> where almost any landscape could be rewilded to some extent.	Sandom and Macdonald, 2015
The scientific argument for restoring <i>big</i> wilderness based on the <i>regulatory roles of large predators</i> .	Soule and Noss, 1998
'The practice of <i>restoring functional habitats</i> through the use of <i>keystone species</i> in order to (re)create <i>self-sustaining nature</i> ', as well as 'the <i>future-oriented</i> vision of spectacular, <i>zero-management</i> , nature side-by-side with advanced civilization'.	Tanasescu, 2017

## **Appendix 3: Consent form and interview schedule for expert interviews**

**Title of Research Project:** Navigating the landscapes of 'rewilding'

### **Details of Project**

I am a doctoral researcher with the University of Exeter. I am researching the limits that 'landscapes' put on 'rewilding' and how those limits are negotiated. Examples of landscapes include cultural, environmental, ethical, financial historical political, physical and social scapes. The data collected will be used as part of my doctoral thesis and any subsequent presentations and / or publications. I have no commercial interests in rewilding and no conflicts of interests associated with this research.

### **Consent**

As a preliminary phase of my research I am seeking subject matter experts on rewilding for face to face interviews the information from which will help inform the direction of the project as a whole. The face to face interviews are expected to take approximately one hour and will be recorded for subsequent transcription. Direct quotes from these transcriptions may be used during the course of the research project in an anonymised form. During interviews participants will be asked to discuss understandings and interpretations of rewilding, challenges to rewilding in practice, controversies within the wider rewilding debate, and current rewilding projects in England.

### **Contact Details**

For further information about the research /interview data, please contact:

Name: Virginia Thomas

Address: Centre for Rural Policy Research, Lazenby House, Prince of Wales Road, Exeter, Devon, EX4 4PJ

Email: v.thomas3@exeter.ac.uk

If you have concerns or questions about the research that you would like to discuss with someone else at the University, please contact:

Dr Angela Cassidy [a.cassidy@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:a.cassidy@exeter.ac.uk)

Professor Matt Lobley [m.lobley@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:m.lobley@exeter.ac.uk)

Professor Michael Winter [d.m.winter@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:d.m.winter@exeter.ac.uk)

### **Confidentiality**

Interview tapes and transcripts will be held in confidence. They will not be used other than for the purposes described above and third parties will not be allowed access to them (except as may be required by the law). However, if you request it, you will be supplied with a copy of your interview transcript so that you can comment on and edit it as you see fit (please give your email below so that I am able to contact you at a later date). Your data will be held in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulations.

### **Data Protection Notice**

The information you provide will be used for research purposes detailed above and your personal data will be processed in accordance with current data protection legislation and the University's notification lodged at the Information Commissioner's Office. This research is funded by the University of Exeter's School of Social Sciences and International Studies and it is anticipated that results will be available after January 2021. Data will be securely processed and stored securely by the University of Exeter: your personal data will be treated in the strictest confidence and will not be transferred to a non-EEA country or disclosed to any unauthorised third parties (except as may be required by law). Interview data will be published as part of the results of this research in anonymised form unless you give permission for your name to be used. Following completion of the project, information will be retained by the University of Exeter for 5 years after which time it will be securely destroyed.

### **Anonymity**

Interview data will be held and used on an anonymous basis, with no mention of your name. Please indicate how you would like to be referred to in the research:

- By role / organisation e.g. researcher with University of Exeter
- By wider profession / sector e.g. academic
- As anonymous

## **Consent**

If you consent to being interviewed as part of this research please read the following information and sign below to indicate your acceptance.

I have been fully informed about the aims and purposes of the project and understand that:

- there is no compulsion for me to participate in this research project and, if I do choose to participate, I may withdraw at any stage;
- I have the right to refuse permission for the publication of any information about me;
- any information which I give will be used solely for the purposes of this research project, which may include publications or academic conference or seminar presentations;
- if applicable, the information which I give may be shared between any of the other researcher(s) participating in this project in an anonymised form;
- all information I give will be treated as confidential;
- the researcher(s) will make every effort to preserve my anonymity;
- I have the right to prevent the use of my data if I feel that its use would be disadvantageous to me.

Signature of participant

Printed name of participant

Date

Email address of participant if a copy of the interview transcript is requested.

One copy of this form will be kept by the participant; a second copy will be kept by the researcher(s).

Your contact details are kept separately from your interview data

1. Can you tell me how / why you're involved / interested in rewilding?
2. Can you tell me about the landscapes that the rewilding project you're involved with / interested in operates within?
3. Can you tell me what boundaries do these landscapes present to the rewilding project?
4. Can you tell me what boundaries landscapes present to rewilding more generally?
5. Can you tell me about points of contention or controversy surrounding rewilding?
6. Can you tell me how you define rewilding?
7. Can you tell me if you think rewilding is a useful term or not?
8. Can you suggest suitable field sites for my research?
9. Can you suggest other participants for my expert interviews?

## **Appendix 4: Consent form and interview schedule for stakeholder interviews**

**Title of Research Project:** Navigating the landscapes of 'rewilding'

### **Details of Project**

I am a doctoral researcher with the University of Exeter. I am researching the limits that 'landscapes' put on 'rewilding' and how those limits are negotiated. Examples of landscapes include cultural, environmental, ethical, financial, historical, linguistic, political, physical and social scapes. The data collected will be used as part of my doctoral thesis and any subsequent presentations and / or publications. I have no commercial interests in rewilding and no conflicts of interests associated with this research.

### **Consent**

As part of my research I am seeking rewilding stakeholders for face to face interviews in order to gather information regarding understandings of rewilding, rewilding landscapes and the limits that landscapes impose on rewilding. Ideally interviews will be 'walking interviews' (an interview conducted while walking in an area relevant to the interview topic) although if you are unable to take part in a walking interview a static interview is possible. Interviews are expected to take approximately one hour, however since you are welcome to choose the direction and duration of the walk there is some flexibility in this. Interviews will be recorded for subsequent transcription and direct quotes from these transcriptions may be used during the course of the research project in an anonymised form.

### **Contact Details**

For further information about the research / interview data, please contact me:

Virginia Thomas, Centre for Rural Policy Research, Lazenby House, Prince of Wales Road, Exeter, Devon, EX4 4PJ, v.thomas3@exeter.ac.uk

If you have concerns or questions about the research that you would like to discuss with someone else at the University, please contact: ssi-ethics@exeter.ac.uk

## **Confidentiality**

Interview tapes and transcripts will be held in confidence. They will not be used other than for the purposes described above and third parties will not be allowed access to them (except as may be required by the law). However, if you request it, you will be supplied with a copy of your interview transcript so that you can comment on and edit it as you see fit (please give your email below so that I am able to contact you at a later date). Your data will be held in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulations.

## **Data Protection Notice**

The information you provide will be used for research purposes detailed above and your personal data will be processed in accordance with current data protection legislation and the University's notification lodged at the Information Commissioner's Office. This research is funded by the University of Exeter's School of Social Sciences and International Studies and it is anticipated that results will be available after January 2021. Data will be securely processed and stored securely by the University of Exeter: your personal data will be treated in the strictest confidence and will not be transferred to a non-EEA country or disclosed to any unauthorised third parties (except as may be required by law). Interview data will be published as part of the results of this research in anonymised form. Following completion of the project, information will be retained by the University of Exeter until the award of the PhD with which this research is associated or for a total of 5 years if the researcher remains associated with the University of Exeter, after which time it will be securely destroyed.

## **Anonymity**

Interview data will be held and used on an anonymous basis, with no mention of your name. Please indicate how you would like to be referred to in the research:

- By role / organisation e.g. researcher with University of Exeter
- By wider profession / sector e.g. academic
- As anonymous

## Consent

If you consent to being interviewed as part of this research please read the following information and sign below to indicate your acceptance.

I have been fully informed about the aims and purposes of the project and understand that:

- there is no compulsion for me to participate in this research project and, if I do choose to participate, I may withdraw at any stage;
- I have the right to refuse permission for the publication of any information about me;
- any information which I give will be used solely for the purposes of this research project, which may include publications or academic conference or seminar presentations;
- if applicable, the information which I give may be shared between any of the other researcher(s) participating in this project in an anonymised form;
- all information I give will be treated as confidential;
- the researcher(s) will make every effort to preserve my anonymity;
- I have the right to prevent the use of my data if I feel that its use would be disadvantageous to me.

Signature of participant

Printed name of participant

Date

Email address of participant if a copy of the interview transcript is requested.

One copy of this form will be kept by the participant; a second copy will be kept by the researcher(s).

Your contact details are kept separately from your interview data.



1. Can you tell me who are you, what do you do and how long have you been doing it?
2. Can you tell me about where we are and why you have chosen to show me this area?
3. Can you tell me about the boundaries of this area / the project as a whole?
4. Have you heard the term 'rewilding' and how do you define it / what does it mean to you?
5. Do you think rewilding is a useful term?
6. (Do you know) how (is) rewilding (is) interpreted and practised in this area?
7. How has this changed over time? If so, how?
8. Is, or has there been, any controversy around rewilding in this area?
9. Can you tell me / do you know how the controversy has been negotiated (including any public consultations) and progressed / changed over time?
10. What limits / (practical) challenges are there to rewilding in this area and how do they affect it?
11. How are those limits negotiated?
12. Can you tell me about the landscapes / contexts of this area / project?
13. Have they changed over time? If so, how?
14. How do you interpret, perceive and engage with these landscapes / contexts, including the meanings and value you attribute to them.
15. Can you tell me about flooding in the area?
16. What advice / recommendations would you give to other rewilding projects based on your experience?

## **Appendix 5: Consent form and visitor questionnaire for field sites**

**Title of Research Project:** Navigating the landscapes of 'rewilding'

### **Details of Project**

I am a doctoral researcher with the University of Exeter investigating how 'rewilding' is perceived. This questionnaire aims to find out people's opinions of rewilding, how rewilding affects the landscape, and how the landscape affects rewilding. The questionnaire should take approximately 10 minutes to complete. The data collected will be used as part of my thesis and any subsequent presentations and/or publications. I have no commercial interests in rewilding and no conflicts of interests associated with this research.

### **Contact Details**

For further information about the research/questionnaire data please contact me.

Name: Virginia Thomas

Address: Centre for Rural Policy Research, Lazenby House, Prince of Wales Road, Exeter, Devon, EX4 4PJ

Email: [v.thomas3@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:v.thomas3@exeter.ac.uk)

If you have concerns or questions about the research that you would like to discuss with someone else at the University please contact [ssis-ethics@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:ssis-ethics@exeter.ac.uk)

### **Confidentiality and Data Protection Notice**

Completed questionnaires and questionnaire results will be held in confidence. They will not be used other than for the purposes described above and third parties will not be allowed access to them (except as may be required by the law). Your data will be held in accordance with current General Data Protection Regulations and the University's notification lodged at the Information Commissioner's Office. This research is funded by the University of Exeter's School of Social Sciences and International Studies and it is anticipated that results will be available after January 2021. Data will be securely processed and

stored securely by the University of Exeter, your personal data will be treated in the strictest confidence and will not be transferred to a non-EEA country or disclosed to any unauthorised third parties (except as may be required by law). Questionnaire data will be published as part of the results of this research in an anonymised form. Following completion of the project, information will be retained by the University of Exeter until the award of the PhD with which this research is associated or for a total of 5 years if the researcher remains associated with the University of Exeter, after which time it will be securely destroyed.

### **Consent**

Results from this questionnaire and direct quotes, if any additional comments are made, may be used during the course of the research project in an anonymised form. In completing this questionnaire you are giving consent for your responses to be used and indicating that you accept the following:

I have been fully informed about the aims and purposes of the project and understand that:

- there is no compulsion for me to participate in this research project and, if I do choose to participate, I may withdraw at any stage;
- I have the right to refuse permission for the publication of any information about me;
- any information which I give will be used solely for the purposes of this research project, which may include publications or academic conference or seminar presentations;
- if applicable, the information I give may be shared between any of the researchers participating in this project in an anonymised form;
- all information I give will be treated as confidential;
- the researchers will make every effort to preserve my anonymity;
- I have the right to prevent the use of my data if I feel that its use would be disadvantageous to me.

Signature of participant

Printed name of participant

Date

## Section 1: About your visit

1. What is your postcode (if you live outside the UK please give the name of the country you're from)?

2. Are you

Resident in this area

Here on a day trip

Staying in the area overnight

3. How far did you travel to get to [field site] today?  
(If you're staying in the area overnight please count your travel from where you're staying.)

4. How did you get to [field site] today?

Car / motorbike

Bicycle

On foot

Public transport

Other (please state)

5. How many people have you come to [field site] with today?  
(please include yourself in the total number)

6. How often do you come to [field site]?

First visit

More than once a week

Weekly

Monthly

Yearly

Less than once a year

7. How long did you spend at [field site] today?

Under 1 hour

1-3 hours

3-5 hours

Over 5 hours

8. How long have you been coming to [field site]?

Less than 1 year

1-5 years

5-10 years

10-20 years

More than 20 years

9. What was your main reason for coming to [field site] today? (please tick only one)

Bird / wildlife watching

Biking / cycling

Canoeing

Climbing

Dog walking

Family outing

Fishing

Hiking

Horse riding

Running

Walking

Other (please state)

10. Why did you choose to visit [field site] today? (please tick all that apply)

Activity options

Facilities

Location

Wilderness experience

Other (please state)

11. How did you hear about [field site]?

Brochure / leaflet

Media (newspaper, radio, television)

Online ([field site] website)

Online (other website)

Tourist information

Word of mouth

Other (please state)

**Section 2: About [field site]**

12. What landscapes do you associate with [field site]?  
(Please tick all that apply.)

- Ancient monuments / heritage
- 'Classic' English countryside
- Nature and biodiversity
- Place that belongs to nature (not people)
- Place that belongs to people (not nature)
- Place that should be shared by people and nature
- Place that belongs to the people who live and work here
- Place that belongs to everyone
- Place that is argued about
- Place where people make a living
- Rural community
- Wilderness
- Other (please state)

13. This question is about what [field site] means to you and how valuable it is to you. Please give each of the following a score from 1-7 (1 = not at all meaningful / valuable to you and 7 = highly meaningful / valuable to you).

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
A chance for people and nature to be together	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A chance to experience 'wildness'	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Being able to come and connect with nature	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Being able to come and get away from it all	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Being able to come and do outdoor activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Being able to live and work here	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Everyone being able to visit if they want to	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Nature being left to itself (i.e. people not coming here)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Part of your heritage	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Part of your national identity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Somewhere you like to know is here even if you can't always visit	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Section 3: About 'rewilding'**

14. Had you heard of rewilding before starting this questionnaire?

Yes

No

15. What does the term rewilding mean to you?



Please answer the following questions based on rewilding being a process of reintroducing or restoring wild animals, plants or processes to ecosystems where they are scarce or missing.

16. Do you think rewilding is better or worse than traditional conservation (which protects specific species or habitats)?

Much worse    1    2    3    4    5    6    7    Much better

17. Do you think rewilding would pose a danger to humans (e.g. because of dangerous animals) or would not present a threat to safety?

Very dangerous    1    2    3    4    5    6    7    Completely safe

18. Do you think rewilding could result in damage to traditional landscapes and heritage (e.g. traditional farms, bronze-age monuments) or restore some of the damage of human impact?

Highly damaging    1    2    3    4    5    6    7    Highly restorative

19. Do you think rewilding could cause problems for farmers and rural livelihoods or provide benefits by working alongside farming and other activities?

Major problems    1    2    3    4    5    6    7    Major benefits

20. Do you think rewilding could restrict people's access to and enjoyment of the countryside or increase people's access to and enjoyment of the countryside?

Major restriction    1    2    3    4    5    6    7    Major increase

21. Overall do you think rewilding is a bad idea or a good idea?

Very bad    1    2    3    4    5    6    7    Very good

2. Do you consider what is being done at [field site] rewilding?

Yes

No

23. Why do you think that?

24. Do you like the way the landscape is being managed at [field site]?

Yes

No

25. Do you think what is happening at [field site] is making the landscape better or worse?

Much worse    1    2    3    4    5    6    7    Much better

26. What do you think should happen in relation to rewilding at [field site]?

The landscape should go back to how it was before

The landscape should stay as it is now

The landscape should get a little bit wilder

The landscape should get a lot wilder

27. How important to you is it that there are 'wild' places in England?

Not at all important    1    2    3    4    5    6    7    Very important

#### Section 4: Engagement with rewilding

28. Have you heard about any meetings or discussions (including online discussions) about how the landscape is being managed at [field site]?

Yes (go to question 29)

No (go to question 32)

29. Did you get involved?

Yes (go to question 30)

No (go to question 31)

30. Why did you get involved? (Please tick all that apply)

Interested in what's happening / want to learn more

Worried about what's happening

Want to support what's happening

Think it's important that the community is involved

Other (please state)

31. Why didn't you get involved? (Please tick all that apply)

Too busy

Too hard to get to

Not interested

No concerns over what's happening

Don't know enough about it

Didn't think views would be listened to

Didn't hear in time

Too angry / frustrated

Other (please state)

32. If there were meetings or discussions (including online discussions) now would you get involved?

Yes (go to question 33)

No (go to question 34)

33. Why would you get involved? (Please tick all that apply)

Interested in what's happening / want to learn more

Worried about what's happening

Want to support what's happening

Think it's important that the community is involved

Other (please state)

34. Why wouldn't you get involved? (Please tick all that apply)

Too busy

Still not interested

No concerns over what's happening

Don't know enough about it

Don't think views would be listened to

Too angry / frustrated

Other (please state)

## Section 5: About you

35. How old are you?

36. Are you

Male

Female

37. What is your household income?

Under £10 000

£10 000 - 20 000

£20 000 - 30 000

£30 000 - 40 000

£40 000 - 50 000

Over £50 000

38. Please list any conservation organisations that you're a member of e.g. National Trust, RSPB, Wildlife Trusts.

## Appendix 6: Certificate of ethical approval for preliminary interviews<sup>164</sup>



College of Social Science and International Studies

Ethics Committee

ssis-ethics@exeter.ac.uk

### Certificate of Ethical Approval

<u>Academic unit:</u>	Politics
<u>Title of projects:</u>	Negotiating the landscapes and limits of 'rewilding'
<u>Research team member(s):</u>	Virginia Thomas
<u>Project contact point:</u>	v.thomas3@exeter.ac.uk
<u>Supervisor(s):</u>	Matt Lobley, Angela Cassidy, Michael Winter
<u>This project has been</u>	From: 01.09.18
<u>approved for the period:</u>	To: 01.08.21

Signature:

Date: 16.08.18

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Stephen Skinner'. The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a blue horizontal line.

Stephen Skinner, Chair, SSIS Ethics Committee

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<sup>164</sup> Ethical approval for this research was sought and approved while I was registered in the politics department. Thus, this Certificate of Ethical Approval were granted under the auspices of that academic unit despite this thesis being submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology.

## Appendix 7: Certificate of ethical approval for full research project<sup>165</sup>



College of Social Science and International Studies

Ethics Committee

ssis-ethics@exeter.ac.uk

### Certificate of Ethical Approval

Academic unit: Politics

Title of projects: Negotiating the landscapes and limits of  
'rewilding'

Research team member(s): Virginia Thomas

Project contact point: v.thomas3@exeter.ac.uk

Supervisor(s): Matt Lobley, Angela Cassidy, Michael Winter

This project has been From: 18.02.19  
approved for the period: To: 01.08.21

Ethics Committee approval 201819-058

reference:

Signature:

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Stephen Skinner'. The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a blue horizontal line.

Date: 19.02.19

Stephen Skinner, Chair, SSIS Ethics Committee

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<sup>165</sup> Ethical approval for this research was sought and approved while I was registered in the politics department. Thus, this Certificate of Ethical Approval were granted under the auspices of that academic unit despite this thesis being submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology.

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