

Rewilding in the English landscape: an appraisal of the benefits

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Increasing consumption of natural resources, climate change and population growth have led to significant degradation of global ecosystems and changes in the Earth's natural processes.

A return to more natural processes-led land management could be the solution, however there are challenges and uncertainties surrounding the practical implementation of rewilding, which can be a barrier to more widespread implementation.

This research project appraises the benefits of rewilding as a landscape-scale land management approach for upland and lowland areas in England.

Primary research was carried out at five case studies, investigating the ecosystem service changes that take place.

Aims

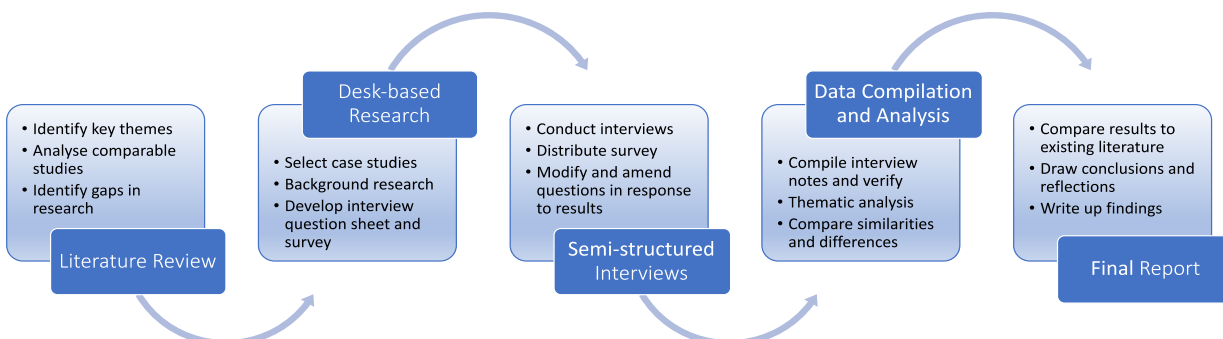
To identify and analyse the changes in ecosystem services that have taken place at five case studies in England: Haweswater; Wild Ennerdale; Geltsdale Farm; Barningham Estate; Wild Ken Hill.

To explore the implications of those changes for each case study and more broadly.

Objectives

1. Identify the scope and nature of rewilding that has been implemented at each site
2. Explore the challenges and barriers to implementation of rewilding projects
3. Identify the measurable or noticeable changes in ecosystem services that have taken place
4. Explore the potential and realised socio-economic benefits of rewilding

Research process: methods and techniques used



Wild Ennerdale, 2020. Credit: @wildennerdale



Restored hay-meadow, Swindale, Haweswater. Credit: Morris/RSPB

Key results

Rewilding or other similar land management approaches can aid the restoration and enhancement of ecosystems and the provision of ecosystem services. The socio-economic benefits are less noticeable and are harder to identify and quantify.



Brown Fell, Geltsdale Farm, 2018. Credit: Garnett/RSPB

Findings

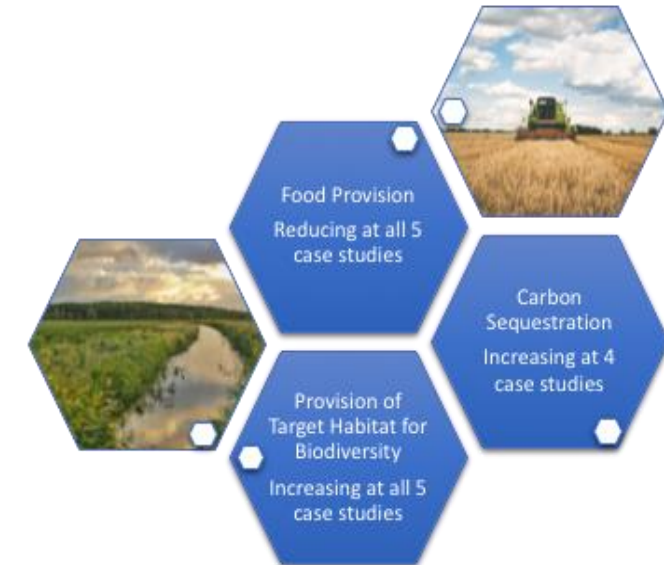
This research has found that 'rewilding' can be a divisive term, and this can create challenges and barriers to the practical implementation of rewilding projects.

The provision of ecosystem services is complex and is dependent upon the local context.

Organisational context is an important factor to consider when exploring ecosystem service changes and appraising the benefits of rewilding projects.



Barningham Estate. Credit: ITap Group Ltd



Recommendations

Rewilding upland and lowland areas in England should be considered as a sustainable, landscape-scale land management approach and encouraged through knowledge sharing and consultation.

Socio-economic benefits may arise from rewilding projects, in the form of improved health and wellbeing of landowners or land managers.

Further monitoring and reporting should be carried out to gain a better understanding of this relatively new area of research.

Further monitoring and reporting is essential to properly understand the changes in ecosystem services that take place.