

Abandoned lynx, roaming wild boar, 'beaver bombing' – has rewilding got out of hand?

By Gary Hartley, *The Guardian*, Sat 12 Apr 2025

Visions of habitats teeming with nature are powerful, particularly so in an age of extinction. Rewilding, which offers the promise of such transformations, was once something most would have imagined happening far away, carried out by people unlike them, but times are changing. The wilderness is getting closer to home and more personal.

5 In the past few months, there have been two suspected lynx releases and one of feral pigs in a small area of the Cairngorms, along with reports of a rise in “beaver bombing” on England’s rivers, and wild boar roaming Dartmoor.

These acts may have Robin Hood appeal, but the rearing and release of large mammals goes some way beyond the well-established phenomenon of “guerrilla gardening”, where people sow
10 native plants on land without express permission.

“I think some people who have taken matters into their own hands potentially have a quite romantic view of what it’s like to be a wild animal out there. It’s not just about opening the crate and letting them go,” says Roisin Campbell-Palmer, head of restoration for the Beaver Trust.

“We should always put the animals first. We can celebrate the enthusiasm and the attitude of
15 some people to shove two fingers to the system, but if those animals aren’t accepted and if they face prolonged or ongoing persecution, then I struggle ethically when asking: ‘Is this right, have we all done a good job here, and can we truly call this species restoration?’”

She acknowledges that without rogue releases, beavers would not be back in Britain on a more formal basis – but fears that some bridges have been permanently burned because of the
20 experiment. “Fingers can always be pointed. In retrospect, it’s very hard to encourage people to then accept the animals and coexist with them when they feel it wasn’t their choice and they weren’t involved.”

A group of scientists working to restore predator communities have come out strongly against the Scottish lynx releases. It’s a view Campbell-Palmer shares. “What was the long-term outlook
25 likely to be for those animals? They weren’t behaviourally ready for the wild. And to me, that’s just thrown up a big potential case of straight-out cruelty,” she says.

“I hope that’s been a bit of a wake-up call for people who think you can just put large mammals back and it’ll all be fine. I’m very empathetic with people who get frustrated with the speed of change, but this rationale of ‘just get them out there and they’ll be accepted in the
30 end’, I do struggle with that.”

While charismatic species wandering free grab many of the headlines, a less bombastic phenomenon is growing: community groups are buying smaller patches of the landscape to interpret rewilding as they see fit.

Not only did it save Calderstones Park, the Liverpool campaign group went on to develop 1.5
35 hectares of semi-derelict land into a nature reserve, using some novel techniques that have won the admiration of urban planting experts. They have sown a wildflower meadow over concrete using a soil made from Mersey grit and crushed stone, introduced rescued hedgehogs, seen a big uptick in bats and are working on specialist butterfly habitat.

“The council talked about rewilding and making it butterfly-friendly, but all that meant is they
40 didn’t cut the grass,” says Caroline Williams from the group. “Without greater effort, a lot of it became just a sheer mess, with Himalayan balsam and Japanese knotweed [invasive plant species] coming in. There was definitely a feeling that if we don’t do it, nobody else will.”