

Rewilded land remains green amid drought-stricken English countryside, images show

National Trust's Holnicote estate says restored wetlands and rivers offer proof of resilience to drought, wildfires and flooding

Sandra Laville, *The Guardian*, 21 August 2026

Aerial footage of an estate in Somerset has revealed the benefits of rewilding land in the face of extreme weather brought about by the climate crisis.

The area of the National Trust's Holnicote estate where rivers have been returned to their natural courses and wetlands have been restored have remained green and lush during the five heatwaves across the summer. In contrast, the surrounding countryside has become parched and brown.

The two interventions are significant rewilding projects and provide strong evidence that nature-based solutions can protect against wildfires. This contradicts claims by some rightwing commentators, who have blamed rewilding for causing wildfires.

"Nature is providing solutions to some of the biggest challenges facing society today," said Ben Eardley, the project manager at the Holnicote estate. "For generations as a nation we've drained wetlands, straightened rivers and moved water off the land as quickly as possible. Here, we've reversed that approach and the results are remarkable."

"By reconnecting river systems with the surrounding area and creating natural sponges in the landscape, we've created a system that stores water during drought, keeping wetlands and the surrounding habitats healthy, and slows water during storms and periods of extreme rainfall, helping to protect villages from the risk of flooding downstream."

Eardley said the same natural processes that helped wildlife recover were also helping communities adapt to climate breakdown.

More than 90% of the UK's wetlands have been lost over the last century and restoring the habitats to make them wet again is becoming increasingly important for climate adaptation, water security and nature recovery.

Harry Howell, the National Trust's director of land and nature, called on the government to boost its efforts to invest in nature-based solutions to help the country become more resilient.

"This year's summer has been a stark warning of how our weather systems are changing," he said. "Climate change is no longer something of the future—it's happening here and now. With another El Niño predicted for next year it's likely many more of us will be subject to more frequent floods, droughts, heatwaves and wildfires, and we are not immune."

The lowland heath at Dunwich, another National Trust estate, was destroyed after a wildfire ripped through the land this summer.

Howell said: "It's places like Holnicote where nature is showing us the way—demonstrating how, by treating and investing in nature as essential infrastructure, we can create landscapes that are more resilient to benefit communities and nature alike."