

Rewilding in Europe:

Genealogies, Imaginarities and Practices of Conservation in the Anthropocene

Interdisciplinary Workshop

Museum Koenig Bonn (LIB)

19–21 March 2025

Call for Abstracts and Posters:

until December 1st 2024

In the past several decades, rewilding has emerged as *the* new paradigm in conservation, poised to address the twin crises of climate collapse and the extinction emergency. Its advocates market it as “radical new science” and a “transformational paradigm shift in conservation thinking”; others speak of a “conservation revolution” and a “pioneering approach to nature recovery”. Based upon a “trust to let nature manage itself”, rewilding promises to bring about a widespread comeback of wildlife in Europe, the restoration of vital ecosystems, a boost to local economies and, in some of its imaginaries, nothing less than “a new world”.

The interdisciplinary workshop, taking place from 19 to 21 March 2025 at the Museum Koenig in Bonn (Germany), will bring together scholars from the humanities and the natural sciences with practitioners of conservation to discuss and reflect on the historical development, the current practice, and the future of rewilding in Europe. Speakers are encouraged to address the following problems and questions, drawing upon the expertise gathered in their academic work as well as through participation in rewilding projects that seek to transform human-occupied landscapes into new wildernesses.

- **Genealogies of rewilding:** In its controversial claim to “re-wild” degraded ecosystems, rewilding can be regarded as a specific and dynamic spatio-temporal figuration that creatively thinks together the natural and cultural pasts of landscape with potential and imagined futures. What are the pasts that *re-wilding* seeks to recreate, what are the temporal benchmarks of species and ecosystem diversity that rewilding takes as its yardstick and what value and function do they have for current practices of rewilding? Is the wild that is to emerge a past landscape or a future imaginary? And how did rewilding actually become one of the favoured concepts of conservation in Europe? What socio-political and what socio-natural developments have enabled this revaluation and what role did the Anthropocene diagnosis play in this?
- **Geographies of rewilding:** The workshop will ask about the geographical proliferation of rewilding across Europe and tease out the ways in which – and according to which criteria – certain spaces have been slated for rewilding, as well as its connections to phenomena such as intensive agriculture or the European agricultural policy. Also, rewilding covers various and sometimes quite disparate conservation practices, inviting reflection

upon the changing meanings and practices of the concept as applied in spaces as diverse as national parks, private estates, or urban areas.

- **Ideas and imaginaries of rewilding:** In recent years in the northern hemisphere, popular literature on “our dream of unspoiled nature” is en vogue again. Organizations that promote rewilding translate the concept into mediatized images and imaginaries used for popularization and fundraising via the internet and social media. Papers are invited that query the relationship between virtual rewilding imaginaries and practices of ecological management, respectively human-wildlife cohabitation on the ground.
- **Actors and institutions of rewilding:** Rewilding is nowadays usually understood to mean recreating or creating future “natural” landscapes by restoring or reintroducing so-called keystone species. A key part of rewilding is the return of large species of herbivores and carnivores: the workshop will discuss the actors and institutions involved in their reintroductions, such as zoological gardens, as well as the practices and problems accompanying the reintroductions. It will also pay attention to the role of the animals themselves as actors of rewilding projects.
- **The rules and laws of rewilding:** Rewilding is promoted by a variety of actors on different administrative and legal scales and in landscapes situated in countries with quite different legal and administrative frameworks for enabling and governing the new wild. Therefore, we invite papers that address the enabling and restricting capacities of international, European and national frameworks and programmes. To what extent are the geographies and practices of rewilding conditioned by differing legal frameworks across European countries, how do rewilding NGOs cope with bewildering legal landscapes and are there discernible links between rewilding and the recent debate over attributing rights to natural entities?
- **Technologies and the business of rewilding:** While typically presented as a nature-saving measure, rewilding is equally often marketed in economic terms as an “ecosystem services” scheme and as a kind of land management that can generate economic return for landowners and boost the finances of local communities. The workshop will address the ways in which this “economization” of rewilding takes place in both public and private rewilding projects as well as public policies. At the same time, the future wild is created and monitored through the latest scientific and technological developments, including GPS and radiotracking, smart

technologies of fencing and border control or the monitoring of the involved species' genetic variety. There exists, thus, an odd tension between received notions of the "wild" and its technological production that begs discussion and reflection.

By addressing these questions and problems, the workshop seeks to intervene in a complex contemporary environmental debate and provide an historically-informed input to promote biodiversity. The language of the workshop will be English, and participants are expected to make their papers available for publication afterwards, either in form of an edited volume or special issues in theme-related and peer-reviewed journals. The organizers will compensate costs for travel and accommodation.

*We welcome applications for oral presentations (ca. 20 min) or posters (DIN A 0, portrait format). **Please send proposals with an abstract of max. 300 words and a short CV to Bernhard Gißibl and Katharina Schmidt-Loske by December 01st 2024.** Please don't hesitate to get in contact with any of the organizers for further information.*

Contact:

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