

# Rewilding and its Relevance for Animal Protection in Africa

A Kudu antelope stands in a savanna landscape with dry grass and small trees. In the background, a city skyline is visible under a hazy sky. The antelope is facing left, and its long, spiraling horns are prominent. The city skyline includes several tall buildings, with one particularly prominent skyscraper in the center.

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# What is Rewilding?

- An approach to conservation focused on restoration of self-sustaining ecosystems
  - Differs from traditional conservation focused on preserving species or land areas (though may include both)
- Half-Earth
  - Half of Earth's surface must be rewilded to avert biodiversity crisis (E.O. Wilson)
  - 22% currently wild (Ellis & Ramankutty 2018)
- *Global Charter for Rewilding the Earth* (WILD11 conference, 2020)



# Types of Rewilding

- Two factors (Holmes et al 2020)
  - Transformative wildness
  - Pragmatic, cosmopolitan rewilding
- Six approaches (Serrano-Montes 2017)
  - Passive rewilding
  - Plant rewilding
  - Pleistocene rewilding
  - Carnivore reintroduction
  - Herbivore reintroduction
  - Island rewilding



# Rewilding in Africa

- Samara Private Game Reserve (South Africa)
  - 70,000 acres of former farmland privately purchased for rewilding
  - Passive rewilding allowed native flora to recover, followed by deliberate reintroductions of many animal species (rhinos, elephants, cheetahs) and natural return of others (leopards, lions, Cape vultures)
  - Supported partly by ecotourism revenue
  - Long-term goal of connecting with national parks and other private reserves to create larger wildlife corridor





Elephants reintroduced to Samara game reserve  
(source: <https://www.samara.co.za/blog/elephants-return-samara/>)



# Rewilding in Africa

- Karura Forest, Kenya
  - Urban forest of 2,570 acres in Nairobi, Kenya
  - Planned development cancelled in 2003 following community protests led by Wangari Maathai (Green Belt Movement)
  - Currently co-managed by Kenya Forest Service and Friends of Karura Forest Community Forest Association
  - Ongoing removal of invasive plant species, reintroduction of native flora (plant rewilding)
  - Animal rewilding mostly passive in nature, with bushbucks, side-striped jackals, and clawless otters returning organically





Tree planting in Karura forest in 2014 to commemorate Wangari Maathai  
(source: <https://www.greenbeltmovement.org/node/652>)



# Preemptive Rewilding

- Some rewilding concepts can also be applied preemptively to healthy ecosystems
- Ensure large-scale recreation of lost ecosystems doesn't become necessary in Africa as in Europe and Americas



# Preemptive Rewilding

- Wildlife corridors
  - Linking already protected areas
    - A well-established practice in Africa (e.g. Masai Mara conservancies)
  - Designing new infrastructure so as to minimize habitat fragmentation
    - Bypass wilderness areas, include underpasses and overpasses for wildlife to cross
- Community development
  - Creating alternatives to consumptive use (e.g. ecotourism)
  - Promoting sustainable food systems, industries that minimize damage or even benefit ecosystems





Buck using a wildlife underpass to cross a road in Colorado, United States  
(courtesy Colorado Department of Transportation)





Visitors to rewilding project Oana Namibia  
(source: <https://www.facebook.com/oananamibia/>)



# Rewilding and Animal Welfare

- Need for conservation advocates to engage more seriously with animal welfare issues (Sekar & Shiller 2020)
- Rewilding acknowledges agency and intrinsic value of non-human entities (Wynn-Jones et al 2020)
- In practice, rewilders vary in attitudes toward animal welfare
  - Rewilding advocates favoring radical transformation more likely to be concerned by animal suffering than those with more pragmatic outlooks (Holmes et al 2020)
  - Some rewilding organizations accept hunting or are supported by hunters



# Rewilding and Animal Welfare

- Non-native species
  - Treatment of non-native animals a major point of conflict between conservation and animal welfare advocates
  - From rewilding perspective, non-native species not necessarily harmful
    - Introduced large herbivore species (e.g. hippopotami in Colombia) may replace functions of extinct megafauna (Lundgren et al 2020)
    - Some rewilding projects deliberately introduce non-native species as ecological replacements for related extinct ones (Griffiths et al 2011)



# Rewilding and Animal Welfare

- “Sustainable use”
  - Goal of rewilding to create ecosystems that can self-sustain with little or no human management
    - Little justification for hunting as a long-term method for controlling populations
  - Trophy hunting places unnatural selective pressures on populations
    - Prevents largest and strongest individuals from reproducing
  - Captive breeding of wildlife (e.g. wildlife farming) of no ecological benefit unless animals successfully released into wild



# Conclusion

- Rewilding a new approach to conservation which may inform new approaches to wildlife protection across Africa
- African conservation and animal welfare advocates can help contribute to the future of rewilding theory and practice
- For more information, contact Wolf Gordon Clifton at [wolf@animalpeopleforum.org](mailto:wolf@animalpeopleforum.org)



# Bibliography

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