



Perspective

Wild pathways of inclusive conservation

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ABSTRACT

Despite growing popularity rewilding has yet to make significant inroads within the conservation mainstream which currently embraces the biodiversity and economic narratives; some ecologists dismiss it as being little more than a rebranding of ecosystem rehabilitation. If it is to gain greater influence over policy and planning, rewilding will need to showcase the unique contribution of wild values to society and demonstrate how they may be integrated with other conservation narratives. In this perspective, I frame a wild revival strategy in four interrelated questions: What do we mean by the wild? Why should humans pursue wild-life conservation? If they do, what pathways to the wild may be pursued? What kinds of outcomes result from different conservation strategies? In answering these questions, eight strategic pathways are presented which elucidate both the wild values of nature and different ways in which the wild can be enhanced, ranging from rehabilitation of vermin to ecosystem restoration. Wild ecosystems are more dynamic with greater biological expression; dewilded ones are either degraded or, paradoxically, more highly managed. The pathways provide a framework for resolving conflicts between multiple conservation narratives by facilitating agreement at the level of specific conservation actions.

1. Division in conservation

A rift in the conservation movement between those who favour protection of nature for its own sake (intrinsic values) and those who advocate conservation of nature for its usefulness (instrumental values) arose publicly for the first time in an acrimonious debate between the naturalist John Muir and forester Gifford Pinchot. Both championed nature but whereas Muir looked on Yosemite Valley as “by far the grandest of all of the special temples of Nature ... the *sanctum sanctorum* of the Sierras”, Pinchot was concerned with “the art of producing from the forest whatever it can yield for the service of man” (Pinchot, 1914; Muir, 1915). Several attempts have been made subsequently to find a way of unifying the voice of conservation. Aldo Leopold foresaw the need for a relationship to the land that was based not just on economic interests but on ‘love, respect and admiration’ (Leopold, 1949). Then in 1964 Sir Peter Scott took a lead role in creating the Red Data books, IUCN’s systematic approach to protecting endangered species of the world, which is essentially impartial regarding debates over the ethical values of nature (Huxley, 1993). In the late 1970s this scientific approach to conservation began to share centre stage with a strategy for sustainable development (IUCN, 1980). In time the new strategy developed into economic conservation which, assisted by publication of a review on the economics of ecosystems and biodiversity (TEEB), came to dominate mainstream conservation policy (Oates, 1999; TEEB, 2010; Soulé, 2013). No doubt Pinchot would have approved yet evidence for

the effectiveness of economic conservation is sketchy at best, despite its prevalence in development planning. Few of the case studies cited in TEEB have demonstrated benefits and most show deficits to the ecosystem (Doak et al., 2014; Silvertown, 2015).

Almost unnoticed, another change was taking place. In the early years of international conservation, the concept of ‘wild’ took centre stage. It appeared in the title of the Morges Manifesto of April 1961 ‘We Must Save the World’s Wild Life’ which was the blueprint for founding the World Wildlife Fund, and it was enshrined within the titles of various conventions and directives: Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) agreed in Washington, D.C. in March 1973, the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) agreed in Bonn in June 1979, the European Union’s Council Directive (79/409/EEC) of 2 April 1979 on the Conservation of Wild Birds, and the EU Council Directive (92/43/EEC) of 21 May 1992 on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora. In recent years the wild has been quietly removed from its position at the high table of policymaking. Some now ask whether the time has come to drop the quaint and noble ideal of wild altogether (Mallon and Stanley-Price, 2013).

A feeling for wild-life and wild-places might seem irrelevant when set against today’s global market economy and the new conservation tools, like ecosystem services, natural capital, carbon trading and sustainable development, nevertheless it has been undergoing a popular resurgence. Beginning in the 1980s and 90s, a movement arose from

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grassroots activism in North America with an agenda for restoring large-scale wilderness areas (Soulé and Noss, 1998). Rewilding has since grown in popularity around the world by invoking the public's passion for wild life and wildernesses but it has made limited inroads within the conservation mainstream.

Doubts over the efficacy of economic conservation, alongside concerns with the hardening of divisions within the conservation community between adherents of intrinsic and instrumental values, have prompted renewed calls for more inclusive conservation policies (Tallis et al., 2014). In seeking a new narrative by which to conceptualize wild values and facilitate inclusive conservation, I propose here a strategy of wild revival that can be applied in any landscape from city to near wilderness and which offers the prospect of integrating rewilding with other conservation narratives. The strategy of wild revival is framed by asking four interrelated questions: What do we mean by the wild? Why should humans pursue wild-life conservation? If they do, what pathways (or routes) to the wild may be pursued? What kinds of outcomes result from different conservation strategies?

2. Strategy for wild revival

2.1. What do we mean by the wild?

Despite its prominence in popular culture, the wild is not unequivocally defined. Alternative shades of meaning can be traced back to various roots of the word in the ancient languages of northern Europe. One etymological root has the meaning of 'will', as in self-willed or wilful, and from 'willed' came 'wild'. By extension the linguistic meaning of 'wilderness' is either 'the place of wild beasts' (Nash, 2001) or 'self-willed-land' (Vest, 1985) and a 'wild animal' has the meaning 'self-willed-animal' which may be contrasted with a domesticated or zoo one. Picking up on this theme, Monbiot (2013) has suggested that undisturbed ecosystems can be styled 'self-willed ecosystems' because they sustain 'self-organizing biological communities' through 'self-functioning ecological processes'. It follows that the health of wild ecosystems is only reliant on people refraining from excessively disrupting or controlling the underlying ecology.

A second strand of meaning is found in the association of wild beasts with primeval forests of northern Europe and derives from the Old German 'wald' meaning forest. The English medieval deer parks are Norman hunting forests that have persisted as wild or semi-wild areas from the time of William the Conqueror to this day (Nash, 2001). In the USA, large areas of undeveloped land were designated for recreational hunting and fishing from the 17th century. And here also is found the wilderness or place of the wild deer. So within the ancient origins of wild lie several potent meanings — a place of self-willed beasts, a place for exercising dominion over them through hunting and fishing, and a place far from human influence.

2.2. Why should humans pursue wild-life conservation?

It is easy to see why a conservationist struggling to bring biodiversity into the mainstream of land-use planning in a poor region of the world will tend to prioritize marketplace values in the hopes of satisfying the economic demands of local people, and why it may be tempting to dismiss the aims and sentiments of wild revival as utopian. Such a decision might be further justified by pointing out that some New World wildernesses are in any case human constructs arising from the spread of Old World diseases and subsequent collapse of pre-existing societies, and that the wild's hallmark 'absence of human control', far from being a desirable goal, is atypical and the cause of many conservation problems (Callicott and Nelson 1998). Many ecologists would concur, perceiving rewilding as little more than a popular re-branding of their long-established work in ecosystem rehabilitation. Are such sweeping dismissals justified? To answer that question it becomes necessary to answer another. Would it matter if the last wild ecosystems

came under a tight system of rational management which controlled species dynamics and interactions in order to deliver required combinations of ecosystem goods and services?

As with any subjective discipline, it takes time to explore and understand the underlying values of the wild. Thoreau (1862) revelled in his wilderness experiences and the sense of absolute freedom he found there. John Muir wrote volumes along similar lines. Many other nature writers, field biologists, artists and documentary filmmakers have added personal accounts of their connections with wild creatures and wild places. Every nature club is attended by those who enjoy untrammelled nature, whilst advocates of rewilding find particular value in the free migration of self-willed animals crossing large landscapes and the experience of hiking and camping in remote wildernesses. One aspect of nature which is rarely remarked upon however concerns a connection between wild-life and human aspirations for liberty and freedom. Arne Naess used the term 'free Nature' to describe areas of natural wealth where people are present in the landscape but adopting harmonious forms of wildlife management (Naess, 1988). The term hints at a connection between wild and the sense of personal freedom.

Freedom of thought, freedom of expression and the right to privacy are enshrined within the United Nation's Universal Declaration of Human Rights as essential conditions for humans to flourish. Moreover freedom is identified as one of the nine fundamental human needs of grassroots communities (Max-Neef, 1991). Whether at home, at work, or in wider society, freedom from excessive or unjust human control is seen as a primary requirement of individual wellbeing. People chain themselves to iron bars and lie down in front of rolling tanks to demand it. They go to war to defend it. It could be said that the desire to be free brings out the wild side of humanity. At any rate it may explain why free Nature has particular resonance for humanity. The wild ecosystems and unmanaged wildernesses not only protect biodiversity, they are the guarantors of human freedom. We need only enter them to be ourselves more free. A significant experiential value of the wild may be the opportunity to experience personal freedom in nature's realm along with the passions thereby elicited. As social systems for monitoring, influencing and controlling people advance in society, so may the benefits conferred by free Nature and wild places become ever greater.

2.3. What pathways to the wild may be pursued?

If it does matter, if there is value in the wild, then how do we set about conserving it? As we begin our systematic exploration of this question, the first thing to realize is that there is more than one way to 'rewild' and correspondingly more than one way to 'dewild'. Note that my use of the term 'rewild' is not restricted to its origin in re-introductions of native species and restorations of large wildernesses (Caro, 2007): it applies to incremental gains in wildness within any landscape or wildlife population. Similarly, the term 'dewild' applies to incremental losses in wildness. The following strategic pathways lead towards wild revival if travelled in one direction and towards more dewilded states if travelled in the other. They are categorised within four systems for managing nature: wild harvest management, area management, domestication and pest control (Table 1).

2.3.1. Category I: wild harvest management

The first category of pathway is about the way wildlife populations are hunted and harvested. In the dewilding direction they traverse increasingly degraded states of overuse before reaching entirely wasted stocks such as empty forests and collapsed fisheries; in the rewilding direction they lead to healthy wildlife populations under the influence of sustainable-use policies. Two pathways are recognised: (i) over-harvest \rightleftharpoons sustainable harvest and (ii) overkill \rightleftharpoons reintroduction (Table 1).

A. Sustainable harvest. Even light harvesting can affect the behaviour of a species and impact on its ecological community whereas severe

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