

Losing control

'Don't be pushy' is the message from Rob Yorke in these pages. He reports views on rewilding from a Cambridge conference hall, from Hay Festival goers, and from a community hall in deepest Monmouthshire. Ecologists at the Cambridge event liked the idea, each with their own conditions. But wanting rewilding on your own terms is a category mistake. Natural processes are just that: natural, unadulterated, uncontrolled. Setting your conditions or tight parameters cannot be rewilding. It was the Monmouthshire locals who sprang the greatest surprise to Rob Yorke. These farmers called a bluff, suggesting they might be open to variants of rewilding, if was brokered, not imposed. We need to take note.

Cue the BBC documentary, *Predators in Your backyard*. Available on the web at Top Documentary Films, it highlights a prime case of conservationists getting it wrong. It shows examples of bringing back predators in different parts of the globe. Included is a north Italian village where brown bears have been re-established. Numbers have risen from 3 to 60 in recent years, but there's a snag. Nobody considered the apiarists. Brown bears ravage local people's honey collections. Livelihoods are affected and the apiarists have to lump it. No support, advice or compensation was offered to these bee keepers and honey producers. This is a black mark for the brown bear advocates. People will shun wildlife projects, especially with the radical edge of rewilding, if the consequences are unreasonable, or support measures for adapting to a new situation are lacking. Yes, people exaggerate impacts of change, or of wildlife they don't welcome, but rewilding will need collaboration to happen. Vincent Wildlife Trust's re-establishment of mid-Wales pine martens, shown in these pages, is a smart case of engaging people to feel ownership of a project.

After years of slow emergence, and much scrutiny in *ECOS*, rewilding has set roots in the UK and Europe. In fact it may be transforming the fabric of its host organism - nature conservation. Rewilding questions the accountability of long-held views on the states of nature and the ecological succession that we value. Is it an existential debate for our subject? In this *ECOS* package we hear from rewilding's friends and its challengers, and we look at rewilding's gradations and definitions. There is agreement that rewilding brings excitement – but how far we dare upset the cultural landscape is a main sticking point. Some authors see rewilding as a spectrum of approaches, regardless of whether one feels 'wildness' is the ultimate state of nature and human experience.

'Losing control' is a metaphor for these turbulent political times. And as with Brexit, some people are scared, some excited, and others confused by rewilding. Perhaps the only risk is not to embrace the opportunities, but let's do so with humility.