

An ecocentric framework for decision-making in rewilding

The Future of Wild Europe | 12–14 September 2016, Leeds

Joe Gray | PhD Candidate, School of Biological Sciences,
Royal Holloway, University of London, Egham, Surrey

Contact: joe@ecoforestry.uk

Abstract

The dominant theme for conservation in the UK at present is how non-human nature benefits humans, both directly and indirectly, as evaluated through devices such as natural capital. The restrictedness of this focus on just the instrumental value of non-human nature is evident when rewilding is being considered. Here, a broader, ecocentric framework is presented to capture both the instrumental and intrinsic value of non-human nature. “Ecodemocracy” is offered as a means of fair decision-making within the framework.

Introduction

- At present, conservation discussions in the UK – including those on rewilding – are dominated by natural capital and other anthropocentric devices (Gray and Curry, 2016).
- Furthermore, the ethical aspects of rewilding seem to be under-represented in the UK literature. For instance, while the journal *ECOS* publishes articles with a commendable breadth of themes and stances, only two of twelve authors in the recent themed issue on rewilding (vol 31 no 2) touched upon ethics.
- As such, there is a need to ensure that the discipline of ecological ethics is better included within the scope of rewilding discourse.

Definitions

- Ecocentrism:** A worldview in which living systems – including their biological and physical constituent parts, as well as the ecological processes that connect the elements in space and time – are considered to have intrinsic value (Mosquin and Rowe, 2002). This worldview has received a rigorous philosophical defence (Curry, 2011).
- Ecodemocracy (ecocentric democracy):** Groups and communities using decision-making systems that respect the principles of human democracy while explicitly

extending valuation to include the intrinsic value of non-human nature.

The framework

- Figure 1 presents an ecocentric framework for decision-making in rewilding.

Making fair decisions

- In at least some cases, there will be conflict between what is considered the right action based on the overarching factors and what is considered optimal with regard to human-specific factors.
- The non-commensurability of the values rules out simple cost–benefit techniques. Instead, to make fair decisions within this framework, the practice of ecodemocracy is recommended.
- This could be achieved with deliberative ecodemocracy, ecodemocracy by human proxies with voting rights, ecodemocracy by juries of citizens, and ecodemocracy by statute. These have been described elsewhere (Gray and Curry, 2016).

Examples in the UK literature

- The application of such a framework to species reintroductions is exemplified

by an upcoming article considering the prospects for the Eurasian lynx in the UK (Gray et al, 2016).

- The relevance to minimal-intervention areas has been discussed in an article on conservation “exit strategies” (Gray and Curry, 2015).

Conclusion

- It is possible to make decisions about rewilding in a way that accounts for non-human nature’s intrinsic value. Doing so would represent a shift from the currently dominant paradigm of anthropocentrism.

References

- Curry P (2011) *Ecological Ethics: An Introduction*. Malden, MA, USA: Polity Press, 280 pages.
- Gray J and Curry P (2015) Does conservation need an “exit strategy”? The case for considering minimal management as a long-term goal. *ECOS* 36: 28–32.
- Gray J, Brockington J, Hayward MW and Walmsley JD (2016) How the proposed reintroduction of Eurasian lynx to Britain illustrates competing values and contrasting views associated with humans and the natural world. *Country-Side* 34: in press.
- Gray J and Curry P (2016) Ecodemocracy: helping wildlife’s right to survive. *ECOS* 37: 18–27.
- Mosquin T and Rowe S (2002) A Manifesto for Earth. *Biodiversity* 5: 3–9.

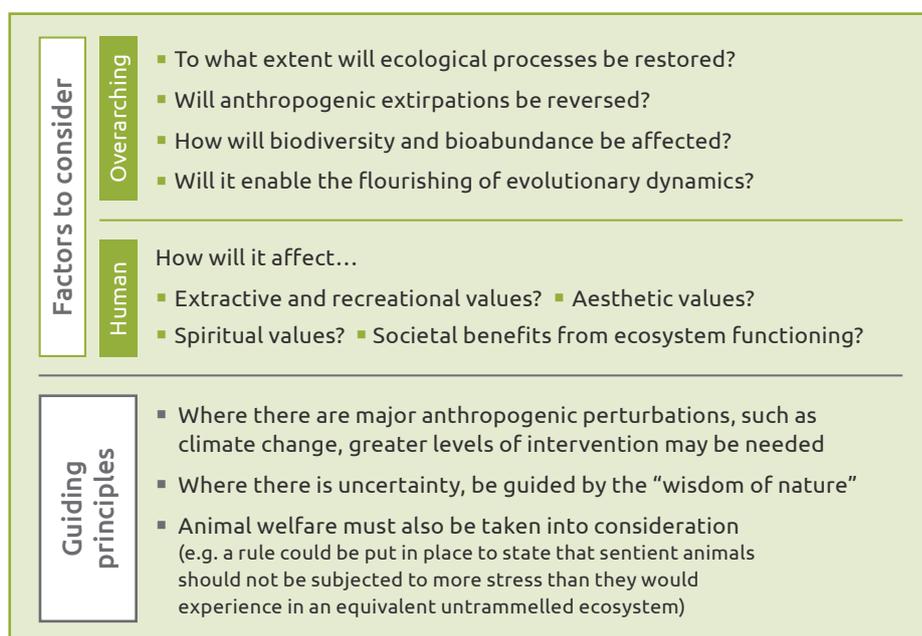


Figure 1: An ecocentric framework for decision-making in rewilding.