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# Rethinking Wild Europe

European Perspectives  
on Wilderness, Rewilding  
and Biodiversity  
Conservation



# ABSTRACTS

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 2025

## Keynote 1

Monica Vasile

Rewilding's past: Three stories

In this talk, I share three short stories. The first, *The Ibex and the Swiss Park*, explores the world's first national park to enforce strict non-intervention in the first decades of the twentieth century, striving for untouched wilderness—except, of course, for the deliberate and patriotic reintroduction of the ibex after 300 years of local extinction. The second story, *The Quasi-Virgin Forest and the Socialist Bureaucrat*, tracks the efforts (and the failure) of the socialist regime in the Carpathian Mountains of Romania to tame the 'abnormal' and unproductive old-growth forests, now hailed as uniquely wild and valuable. The third, *The European Bison, a Grazier in the Forest?*, traces a scientific controversy. The European Bison, once on the brink of extinction, is now a symbol of rewilding—long thought to be a quintessential Pleistocene steppe-tundra animal and celebrated for its grazing prowess. However, it was largely reintroduced to forests, not grasslands, and seems to have survived in forests throughout much of the Holocene. So, where does the bison truly belong today, and how can rewilding be grounded in science? Each of these three stories hold up mirrors to the present, revealing legacies and plot twists in Europe's rewilding history. Above all, they show how the past is embodied in our present 'wild' landscapes and creatures. Bison, ibex, forests—their bodies and behaviours carry the material traces of past human actions, shaped by both the impulse to intervene and the urge to retreat.

Monica Vasile is a historian of science and the environment, with a background in anthropology and sociology, based at Maastricht University. Her research examines the history of conservation projects that have prevented species extinction, with earlier work focusing on the political ecology of Carpathian forests in Romania. Monica also works with Rewilding Europe and WWF on species reintroduction projects in Romania, leading research on community attitudes toward the return of griffon vultures and European bison. She has been a Biodiverse Anthropocene fellow at Oulu University, held fellowships at the Rachel Carson Center in Munich and Humboldt University in Berlin, and conducted research at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle and the Romanian Academy of Sciences in Bucharest.

# Panel 1      Biocultural Conservation

Lauri Lahikainen and Suvielise Nurmi

Capitalism versus plenitude: Naturecultural landscapes in Northern Europe

In this paper we will discuss the question of European wilderness from a Northern European, specifically Finnish, perspective. The nationalist cultural imaginary of Finnish nature has been one of lakes and wild forests and occasional pastoral idylls. Yet much of Finland is dominated by managed forests and Finnish environmental politics is heavily influenced by the forest industry. Northern parts of Finland are also home to indigenous people, the Sámi. Finnish naturecultural landscapes cannot then be understood without reference to the interconnections between nationalism, capitalism and colonialism.

We will map these interconnections by discussing how naturecultural landscapes are formed and how they are subjects of negotiation and struggle. We will offer the concept of plenitude as an analytic, critical and normative term. Our understanding of plenitude is indebted to the Sámi understanding of seemingly wild landscape as being full of cultural meanings and meaningful others, animals, plants, rivers, fells, trees, rocks together with ancestors and other spirits. The plenitude of cultural landscapes implies that cultivating culture does not mean manipulation but adaptation, negotiation, and communication. From this perspective capitalism and colonialism are not only oppressive and exploitative but also poor since they subject landscapes to monoculture, extractivism and violent pruning. Finally, the concept of plenitude also implies the necessity of going beyond nationalistic framing of naturecultural landscapes. Neither the flows of capital nor migratory birds, for example, stay within the frames of landscape paintings or state borders. Both capital and migratory birds also connect the 'Finnish' landscape with the larger European one.

Lauri Lahikainen (Tampere University): Lauri Lahikainen's research focuses on the intersections between political philosophy, environmental philosophy, critical theory and environmental social science. He currently works in ORSI: Towards Ecowelfare State and INBIPOL: The Role of an Individual in the Transformation of Biodiversity Politics -research group.

Suvielise Nurmi (University of Antwerp/ University of Helsinki): Suvielise's research focuses on the concept of relationality within the context of ethical theory, biodiversity conservation and sustainability transformation. Her current project develops a theoretical framework for Relational Sustainability Ethics (2024-27). She is a part of [Compost Collective](#), [Centre for Ethics](#), and INBIPOL The Role of an Individual in the Transformation of Biodiversity Politics -research groups. She is the author of [Relational Agency and Environmental Ethics. A Journey beyond Humanism as We Know It.](#)

David Hořák

## Třeboňsko biosphere reserve: A historical landscape shaping the future

The Třeboňsko Biosphere Reserve, located near the Czech-Austrian border, is a unique landscape shaped by centuries of human interaction with nature. Around 800 years ago, this region was a vast wilderness, featuring dense forests, marshlands, and peat bogs. It remained largely untouched, with human presence limited to a single trade route that crossed its wild heart. The landscape began to change dramatically with the introduction of artificial fishponds, which transformed the area into a mosaic of natural and cultural elements, a harmonious blend of nature and human influence. While pockets of wilderness were preserved, the land became increasingly utilized for traditional practices like wood harvesting and fish farming, resulting in a heterogeneous environment that is both visually striking and functionally diverse. From a biodiversity perspective, the region's wetlands hold the greatest value. Here, one can still experience a sense of wilderness, despite the fact that human intervention played a significant role in shaping them. This blend of humans and nature serves as a model for sustainable landscape management. However, in recent decades, societal shifts, economic pressures, and the decline of traditional agricultural practices have weakened the age-old connections between people and nature. As a result, the very qualities that make Třeboňsko special are at risk of disappearing. The once carefully maintained wetland areas are now being overtaken by encroaching forests, potentially returning the landscape to its pre-human state. However, this reversion is not straightforward; the landscape's hydrology is still governed by human-made structures, which are not easily restored to their original 'peat bog condition'. The region now faces a critical dilemma: Should efforts focus on maintaining the centuries-old human-nature balance, allow nature to gradually reclaim the landscape with its human influences still evident, or embark on a new approach to land management? This decision will shape the future of the Třeboňsko and its legacy as a living example of the evolving relationship between humans and nature.

David Hořák: I am an ecologist focused on how environmental heterogeneity and ecological space structure shape spatial diversity patterns. My MSc and PhD research centred on temperate wetland birds, and I later shifted to studying elevation and aridity gradients in sub-Saharan Africa (Cameroon, Southern Africa, Tanzania), where I established a long-term project on Mt. Cameroon. Recently, I have explored the intersection of ecology and humanistic disciplines (philosophy, sociology, architecture) to apply 'humanistic perspectives' to ecological studies and promote sustainable human-nature relationships. I am currently an Associate Professor and Head of the Department of Ecology at Charles University in Prague.

Arnaud Gane

## Chronopolitics of rewilding: A study from three francophones organizations

Should we speak of European wilding instead of (re)wilding? Many authors believe that the European rewilding movement is more future-oriented, a form of 'anticipatory ecologies' producing the future, whereas its North American counterpart is past-oriented (Prior & Brady,

2017; Wynne-Jones et al., 2020). Indeed, rewilding has a strong relationship to time, encompassing both nostalgia and idealized futures (De Vroey, 2023).

During my fieldwork in Vercors, France, I frequently encountered a recurring argument from opponents of a local rewilding project: 'We are like the Aborigines, chased from our own lands.' I decided to take this seriously and believe that, for these people, rewilding means losing their rights as moderns to use and exploit the land, rendering them 'without-a-world' in the decolonial sense (Danowski et al., 2016; Latour, 2006). For Jameson, post-modernity is characterized by the domination of space over time. Due to the disappearance of nature and ancient ways of living, moderns become unrooted and transition into post-moderns (Jameson, 1984; Malm, 2018). In this perspective, rewilding can resonate as a theology of liberation from this historical trajectory, realizing the Heideggerian ideal of 'letting-be' in coexistence with a letting-go of nature, as suggested by Robert Noss (Noss, 1991).

One of the main factors explaining why European rewilding is future-oriented is the absence of remnants of a wild Europe and the pervasive presence of significant human populations and activities. For all these reasons, European rewilding is part of a struggle to make these time-oriented political imaginations exist and become possible (Castoriadis, 2021). Thus, rewilding in Europe can be understood as a form of 'chronopolitics' (Esposito & Becker, 2023; Osborne, 1999). Based on the ethnography I conducted and the data collected from three rewilding organizations in France and Belgium, I will explore how they relate to time and politics in their interpretation and practice of rewilding.

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Arnaud Gane has been a doctoral student at UCLouvain since 2023. His work focuses on the European movement to rewild nature, in particular its epistemic, political and ontological implications. He holds two master's degrees specialising in ecology, the first in philosophy from the Université Lyon-III and the second from Sciences Po Toulouse.

Emma Cary and Flurina Wartmann

## Understanding decision-making in British restoration and rewilding initiatives: A science-driven or selective approach?

With UK governments committing to 30 by 30 targets, alongside calls by lobbying groups for Scotland to become the world's first 'rewilding nation' (The Scottish Rewilding Alliance 2024), there is significant potential for upscaling rewilding in Britain. Framed as a 'triple-win' solution which combats global biodiversity loss, climate change, and improves livelihoods, rewilding becomes purportedly self-evident, as a normative science-derived solution. However, this risks removing decision-making power from local actors as certain interventions become fixed as all-win solutions, with little room for alternative knowledge systems and little discussion of trade-offs. This has implications for social-ecological justice.

Despite extensive research attention focused on restoration and rewilding (Carver et al. 2021; Hart et al. 2023; Mutillod et al. 2024), the decision-making processes themselves behind these initiatives are yet to be thoroughly investigated and understood. Is it purely a science-based exercise, or are other factors considered? Understanding decision-making in this context is important as decisions which use nature-based interventions as a response to environmental change often conceal epistemic (knowledge-related) and power dimensions (Woroniecki et al. 2020). Furthermore, critical analysis of decision-making is a tenet of social justice (Turnhout 2024).

This research studies empirically how stakeholder decision-making is linked to the implementation of restoration and rewilding initiatives in Britain and their ability to deliver a range of social and environmental outcomes. By uncovering how different types of knowledge are included, excluded or legitimised in rewilding and restoration decisions, it aims to determine the basis on which decisions are made.

To do this, we employ a hybrid social science approach. We combine document analysis, field walk interviews and place-based fieldwork with a quantitative survey to ascertain the different factors considered, the knowledge(s) used, the people involved, and the extent to which decision-makers' own values influence rewilding decision-making. Through the study of such local rewilding conditions, this work aims to understand whether rewilding knowledge- and decision-making is remote and detached from local geographies, to determine if and how rewilding can deliver its transformative potential, without reinforcing existing injustices.

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Emma Cary is a social scientist and doctoral researcher at the University of Aberdeen. Her PhD investigates knowledge integration and decision-making in British rewilding initiatives, with an emphasis on how values influence decision-making. She has recently published a review of rewilding policy in the Britain and is engaged in rewilding debates in Europe, including developing a methodology for Rewilding Europe to measure the wider benefits/disbenefits of rewilding (with F. Wartmann). She is also a Parliamentary Fellow working at Westminster Parliament contributing to effective communication between science and policy.

Dr. Flurina Wartmann is Senior Lecturer in Social Environmental Geography at the University of Aberdeen. Most recently her research assesses how aesthetic values foster or hinder engagement with wilder nature, such as perceived aesthetics of 'messy nature' and 'untidiness' of more nature-rich landscapes. She has extensive experience of working in a European context (Switzerland, Spain, Netherlands, and Alpine areas), measuring people's attitudes and perceptions of intangible values on nature and landscapes, including assessing tranquillity, place attachment, landscape aesthetics and sense of place. She is an expert in developing social science indicators and is leading the development of a methodology for Rewilding Europe to measure the wider benefits/disbenefits of rewilding.

## Panel 2      Philosophies of Wilderness

Antony Fredriksson

Landscape of language: Our wilderness is somebody's home

The main idea for Norwegian philosopher Jakob Meløe is that our concepts originate in what we do: The fisherman's concepts come from the practice of fishing and the reindeer herder's concepts come from the action of herding. In this way words are related to a certain practice, but also to a certain place. The landscape that we call our home reverberates with our concepts, through our engagement with that environment. This way of thinking about concepts goes against the grain of mainstream cognitivist theories about how human language comes about. Meløe's enactive approach, which he largely got from Wittgenstein, provides us with an understanding in which man and environment are not separated, but entwined in an inevitable relationality. By elaborating on this view and contrasting it with current anthropocentric theories of language acquisition, I want to articulate a holistic account in which human language is not separated, transcendent or external to the nonhuman realm, but rather an expression of our relationality. Tim Ingold emphasizes this when he notes that the word 'text' contains the original etymology from the Latin *texere*, meaning 'to weave'. Through concepts we create our relations not only *to*, but also *with* the world. This shift in perspective reveals a discrepancy between romantic conceptions of wilderness as pristine nature, and indigenous conceptions of natural environments as inevitably connected to action, engagement and livelihood. For Meløe, to understand a certain place—he writes about coastal municipalities in Northern Norway—requires that we understand the practices and livelihoods of the cultures (fishermen and Sámi reindeer herders) that have established their form of life in that specific environment. To understand the concepts of these cultures, requires a deep understanding of the practices that they are embedded in.

Antony Fredriksson (PhD) is an Assistant Professor in Environmental Ethics and Aesthetics at the Centre for Ethics as Study in Human Value, University of Pardubice. His areas of interest include aesthetics, attention, ethics, film and philosophy, intersubjectivity, Merleau-Ponty, phenomenology, philosophy of perception, and Wittgenstein. He has taught philosophy at Åbo Akademi University, University of Helsinki and the Academy of Fine Arts Helsinki. His most recent work focuses on existential questions concerning the faculty of attention, including the book *A Phenomenology of Attention and the Unfamiliar: Encounters with the Unknown* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan 2022).



## Arthur Obst

### Revisiting the wilderness debate

In this presentation, I will revisit a classic debate regarding the concept of wilderness between the eminent environmental philosophers Baird Callicott and Holmes Rolston. Over the course of my talk, I summarize Callicott's three possibly fatal accusations against what he calls 'the received wilderness idea' as well as Rolston's rejoinders and offer a novel and substantive interpretation of their disagreement: namely, their philosophical clash reduces to a break between *interventionist* and *wild* ethics. Despite evident markers of passionate disagreement, I point out that there also appears to be significant overlap between Callicott's and Rolston's positions. Where they fundamentally part is underemphasized in their written exchanges and so easily missed. Ultimately, I argue, Rolston is fundamentally opposed to Callicott's *sustainable development alternative* to wilderness. Hence, this vision is fundamentally an *interventionist* ethic, and at heart Rolston embraces a *wild* ethic. In this way, their debate continues a historical dialectic in environmentalism going back at least one hundred years. I will offer a sketch of 'wild ethics,' demonstrating that conceptualizing wilderness value as lying in its 'wildness' offers promising grounds for moral theorizing and renders the wilderness idea resilient to the myriad criticisms it has received. Finally, I will linger on the important place wilderness areas have alongside the 'wildness' that exists all around us and reflect on implications for the European context.

Arthur Obst is a postdoctoral researcher in the Climate Futures Initiative for Science, Values and Policy at the High Meadows Environmental Institute and University Center for Human Values, Princeton University. He works at the intersection of traditional environmental philosophy and the ongoing climate crisis, with research interests including climate justice, the philosophy of wilderness and rewilding, the notion of the 'Anthropocene,' and the ethics and governance of geoengineering. He is the co-author of *Dialogues on Climate Justice* (2023).

## Heather Urquhart

### A decolonial ecofeminist perspective on mastery rewilding in the Scottish Highlands

The violent histories that shaped sites now targeted for rewilding are often obscured in rewilding discourses, which tend to portray these areas as lost but recoverable wildernesses. Yet in locations like the Highlands of Scotland, where I situate my research, these histories are crucial for understanding the power dynamics underlying rewilding efforts and the historic extractive economies that have degraded these landscapes. Through a decolonial ecofeminist lens, this paper situates contemporary rewilding within these histories, examining the persistence of logics of domination.

Drawing on participant observation, media analysis, and interview data, I work with Plumwood's concept of 'mastery' to examine and differentiate three keyways that dualistic thinking shapes rewilding. Firstly, I consider how mastery rewilding privileges impressive wilderness landscapes and charismatic species, such as megafauna and apex predators, over more mundane or 'humble' natures such as barren brown field or the ecological importance of the alpine blue thistle. Second, I demonstrate how the undervaluation of everyday socio-ecological work, such as the consistent

nurturing of landscapes, in favour of more visible interventions like species reintroductions, culling, or large-scale tree planting. Third, I identify how technoscientific knowledge is deemed superior to inherited or tacit knowledge, excluding local and feminised expertise from decision making.

I argue that these logics produce a framework of assumptions to reinforce and reproduce the superiority of colonial masculinities through rewilding; a relationship with natures underpinned by separation and domination; and an ongoing highly unequal organisation of concentrated of land and power and power in the Highlands. This research contributes to decolonial ecofeminist scholarship on nature-society relations and proposes that land redistribution and the re-peopling of cleared landscapes, is a critical step towards dismantling colonial frameworks of separation, commodification, and instrumentalization that underlie the current ecological crisis.

Heather Urquhart, a PhD researcher in the Politics Department at the University of Manchester, and an affiliate of the Sustainable Consumption Institute. Originally from the Highlands of Scotland and with a strong background in environmental activism, I bring a personal-political perspective to my academic work, which focuses on the intersection of rural land justice and environmental action. My PhD research critically examines rewilding initiatives in the Scottish Highlands through a decolonial ecofeminist lens, particularly investigating how colonial masculinist logics and narratives embedded in rewilding practices produce and reinforce unequal power dynamics.

## Panel 3      The Urban Wild

Yulia Kisora

Urban interspecies heterotopology: What nesting geese and zoo orangutans can teach us about wild(er) cities

Species extinction, habitat shifts and planetary urbanization force us to look for ways of co-existence with wild non-human animals. Are cities an antithesis to wild(er)ness? An overwhelming abundance of non-human animals not only surviving but thriving in the urban environment, biophilia of human urbanites and a tidal wave of greening policies compel us to think otherwise. Urban wild(er)ness challenges city managers, inspires architects, gives hope to conservationists and puzzles ethicists by transcending narratives separating wild and urban.

This paper explores discourses of wildness and their performative effects in two case-studies: a population of wild geese seasonally nesting in a zoo and two viral YouTube videos featuring zoo orangutans interacting with visitors. I argue that they serve as an example of other places, heterotopias, experimental real-world labs where human and non-human agencies transform the idea of wildness.

As a discourse wildness figures as a right to self-determination. The wildness of nesting geese justifies their right to be in place of their choosing, even if that place is a zoo, which aligns it with urban nature. The wildness of captive orangutans means they do not belong in a zoo, which provides an ethical critique of the institution. As a practice of relating, the wildness requires an effort of mutual understanding and respect to territorial and personal boundaries. It recalibrates roles of expert knowledge in framing and enacting the wild. The geese prompt zoo staff and visitors to negotiate with them. The orangutans challenge the idea of a wild animal as being an open book to experts, but a mystery to a wider public.

Studying interspecies heterotopias means uncovering fractures in anthropocentric narratives, practices, and institutions—and within those fractures, sighting wild(er) urban futures.

Yulia Kisora, MSc, PhD Candidate at Wageningen University (Philosophy/Cultural Geography). Yulia is a cultural geographer studying urban natures. She is particularly fascinated by cases where non-human and human urbanites collaborate to reshape narratives and practices of the urban, wild, and domestic. Through ethnographic approaches, she has studied wild geese nesting in a zoo and street dogs making homes in a city. Her PhD thesis combines Foucault's concept of heterotopia with ecofeminism and animal politics to develop a framework for exploring multispecies present and envisioning multispecies futures.

Ian Florin

## (Re-)Thinking wilderness in the city: Debates on urban rewilding in London

Among the numerous approaches to create space for people and nature in the cities, urban rewilding has gained traction in recent years to preserve certain facets of biodiversity that find refuge in the marginal spaces of the cities and establish space for new human-nature relations. It entails a deliberate process aimed at diminishing human influence on the urban ecosystem with the goal of bolstering biodiversity for a low financial burden in marginal spaces – such as overgrown roadside verges or abandoned railway yards – with spontaneous vegetation growth.

This presentation explores how urban rewilding engages with diverse narratives on wilderness and how these perspectives lead to varied approaches of biodiversity conservation in the city. Based on interviews with conservationists and local stakeholders in London, as well as documentary research, it aims to identify whether urban rewilding genuinely challenges mainstream conservation by fostering a new understanding of nature in cities through the concept of wilderness.

The results indicate that the debate around urban rewilding occurs between actors who see the boldness of the concept as a way to revitalize urban nature conservation and advocates of traditional rewilding, who argue that the approach cannot be applied to confined urban spaces. Local stakeholders tend to avoid the concept, fearing it may deter urban residents from engaging with green spaces, as the idea of wildness evokes an ambivalent perception – both attraction and fear – that clashes with mainstream sanitized representations of urban nature.

Ian Florin, postdoctoral researcher at the École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL), currently focusing on urban rewilding projects in London from a human geography perspective. Previously, I was a Senior Lecturer at the University of Geneva's Department of Geography (2021-2024) and a research assistant at the Institute of Environmental Sciences (2014-2020). During my PhD, I explored how narratives of spontaneous wilderness return along the former Iron Curtain intersected with geopolitical narratives about the relation between Northern Europe and Russia.

Agata Kowalewska

## Feralizing as an alternative to rewilding

In Europe, the promises of rewilding as a model for multispecies cohabitation are often unattainable, especially in many urban, peri-urban, and agricultural landscapes. In line with research on feral rewilding (O'Mahony 2020), I argue that we look to feralization as a complementary strategy, but propose a broader understanding of ferality as its basis. In ecology and evolutionary biology, feralization is not simply de-domestication, but a complex process that can be viewed from the perspective of an individual or a population. It is neither binary nor linear, but a multidimensional, dynamic spectrum. As animals and plants feralize, their physiologies, relations, and behaviours change, but do not fully return to a former state (Gering et al. 2019; Scossa and Fernie 2021). It is also useful to draw from the *Feral Atlas* (Tsing et al. 2020), where feral is the

nonhuman that became entangled in human systems and infrastructures but is now mostly outside of human control. In this broader sense, a wild being can be pulled into the feral state.

The process of becoming feral can happen through escaping domination, abandonment, or violent rejection. Ferality can be perilous and precarious. But sometimes feral beings thrive, carving for themselves new, vivacious ecosystems somewhere on the fringes of the wild and the domesticated. This can come at the expense of other beings, and that is precisely why feralizing can be such a useful concept: because the negative connotations embedded in it do not allow us to forget the messiness of a multispecies world. In feralizing, the feral finds its agentic power, both as a practice and a theoretical proposal. Distinguishing between rewilding and feralizing introduces the necessary nuance to rethinking wild Europe, but without the promise of a return to some pristine state of freedom.

Agata Kowalewska is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Performativity Studies, Jagiellonian University and holds a PhD in philosophy and a BA in fine arts. She uses transdisciplinary research, art, and storytelling to understand spaces of human-nonhuman conflict and nonhuman cultures. Often working in collaboration, Agata has written on ferality and feralizing as an alternative to rewilding, ecological aesthetics of (counter)catastrophe, sea fire (toxic glowing dinoflagellates thriving in the dying Baltic), urban wild boars, porcine sex and the politics of purity, hybrid beaver cultures, and bark beetles and why we should let some trees die.

## Panel 4 Policies of Rewilding

George Iordachescu

Europe's green frontiers: Rethinking wilderness protection from the margins of Europe

The expansion of wilderness protection is embedded into green growth agendas such as the European Green Deal and it constitutes a central feature of recent international agreements like the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. Conservation advocates suggest that a growing interest in conserving untouched nature marks a new era in intergovernmental cooperation, and the integration of wilderness values in sectors such as agriculture, energy and infrastructural developments is imminent. Already permeating legal and policy developments, the EU's wilderness momentum appears to create a new resource in the European peripheries aimed at fixing the joint climate-biodiversity poly-crisis. This vision promotes a shift from extractive uses towards strict protection by creating people-free areas set aside for natural processes to develop independently of human management. But as these strictly protected spaces become frontiers of conservation intervention, historical underdevelopment and recent rural decline spur unprecedented unequal ecological exchange between marginal but biodiverse areas and regions that benefit from the green growth. There is an urgent need to understand the dynamics and genealogies of these conservation frontiers within their European socio-political and historical contexts. Following from this imperative, this paper critically examines the uneven geographies of this conservation agenda and shows how yet-to-be-issued prioritization mechanisms could end up targeting only certain areas which are considered biodiversity hotspots while ignoring the complex socio-environmental relations existing on the ground and thus raising issues of social and environmental injustice. Building on political ecology approaches, and grounded in over ten years of ethnographic engagements in various mountain areas of Southern and Eastern Europe, this intervention will examine the spatial contours of wilderness protection initiatives across the European peripheries to contextualize how green growth by conservation could deepen existing environmental and social injustices.

George Iordachescu, Senior Researcher in the Forest and Nature Conservation Policy department at Wageningen University in the Netherlands. I lead the recently awarded European Research Council project *GreenFrontier: Politics of Conservation and Unequal Ecological Exchange in the European Peripheries* that looks at how wilderness becomes a resource aimed at fixing the joint climate and biodiversity crisis in the European Union by bringing together case studies from Romania, Poland, Spain and Italy. Previously I researched rewilding conflicts in eight European countries as part of the *wildE: Climate Smart Rewilding* project at Wageningen University, wildlife trafficking in European species as part of the *Beastly Business* project (2021-2023) and forest crime as part of the *Biosec* project (2019-2020) – both positions hosted at the University of Sheffield. I obtained my PhD from the IMT School of Advanced Studies in Lucca (Italy) with a thesis titled *Wilderness production in the Southern Carpathian Mountains. Towards a political ecology of 'untouched nature'* (2019).

Brenda Maria Zoderer

## From landscape-scale restoration to species conservation: Unravelling the diversity of rewilding practices across Europe from a social-ecological perspective

'Rewilding' is increasingly recognised as a holistic, nature-based approach to restore ecological processes and biodiversity at a landscape scale, providing socio-economic benefits to local communities and facilitating (novel) human-nature relations. Although numerous rewilding initiatives have been launched in Europe over the last decade, the specific practices associated with these initiatives and the desired human-nature interactions remain unclear. To acquire an understanding of the diversity of rewilding practices across Europe and their potential for (re)shaping human-nature relationships, we systematically characterised and categorised 89 rewilding projects assigned to the European Rewilding Network from a social-ecological perspective. To this end, we considered the project descriptions provided from Rewilding Europe, coupled with information from the projects' respective websites, and discerned their stated ecological and societal objectives, implemented rewilding activities, and the varied roles assigned to people. Our results reveal a broad spectrum of approaches, practices, and objectives within the rewilding initiatives, ranging from endeavours distinctly concentrated on restoring ecological processes and fostering landscapes conducive to autonomous natural development, to those with more conventional conservation paradigms, involving the safeguarding and restoration of specific species under strict human supervision. These seemingly opposing approaches frequently overlap. While the majority of projects aim to achieve socio-economic benefits and raise public awareness of the importance of non-human nature, the roles assigned to people (e.g., land users, visitors, learners) vary depending on the ecological objectives and rewilding practices pursued. Based on these results, the presentation will provide input for further discussion and reflections on the potential synergies and trade-offs of transforming human-nature relationships through rewilding and other rewilding objectives.

Brenda Maria Zoderer, PhD, Institute of Landscape Development, Recreation and Conservation Planning, Vienna, Austria. I am researcher and lecturer in conservation science. My research interests focus on the multifaceted relationships between people and nature, with particular attention to issues of environmental and social justice in nature conservation, human-nature interactions, and the socio-cultural valuation of landscapes. Recently, I completed projects involving the mapping of wilderness in the European Alps, the analysis of public representations of wilderness, and the study of people's attitudes towards rewilding. Ongoing research focuses on the role of people in rewilding across different European rewilding projects as well as the potential and challenges of 'urban rewilding'.

## Alexandra Locquet, Erwan Cherel and Stéphane Héritier

### Rewilding through the prism of the IUCN French Committee

In 2012, the French IUCN Committee (CF UICN) set up a working group to deal with wilderness issues in Europe, and more specifically in France. The group is examining the way in which the untranslatable notion of wilderness can be transposed to the French context. It is working on the concepts of naturalness, feral nature and free evolution. The aim of the CF UICN is to contribute to the identification of initiatives developed in France, to their recognition and to lead reflections on their articulation with nature conservation strategies and policies.

IUCN is a non-profit organization made up of a variety of members (associations, institutions, etc.), which plays a major role in nature conservation and in strategic decision-making processes at national and international level. IUCN relies on international organisation, national committees and expert commissions. The organisation, although following common general guidelines, can take on subjects deemed to be priorities depending on the scale of action considered, especially in national committees.

The aim of this presentation is to examine the ways in which such an organisation, at both international and French level, can address issues relating to wilderness and rewilding in the European context. This work, based on bibliographical research and strategic analyses, will show how the IUCN is involved in the recognition of various initiatives, as well as in the structuring and dissemination of conceptual models and practices at different scales around the issues of rewilding

Alexandra Locquet is protected areas and naturalness officer at the IUCN French Committee. She coordinates the Wilderness and Feral Nature working group at the CF UICN. She has a PhD in geography and is an associated researcher with the Ladyss laboratory (CNRS, France). She studies the ways in which wilderness is protected in France and Europe.

Erwan Cherel is protected areas manager at the IUCN French Committee (CF UICN). He coordinates work on protected areas within the French committee and also leads the UNESCO World Heritage working group at the CF UICN.



SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 2025

## Keynote 2

Martin Drenthen

Dealing with unruly wildlife in cultural landscapes

Living with wildlife requires more than managing conflicts—it demands rethinking how we share landscapes with non-human species. Wolves, in particular, don't simply return to anthropogenic landscapes; they challenge the cultural ideas we use to make sense of the world and our place in it. The return of wolves to the Netherlands highlights these challenges. Wolves are ambivalent beings, blurring the lines between what does and does not belong, prompting different responses. Drawing on Mary Douglas's (1966) ideas on symbolic boundaries and environmental hermeneutics (Clingerman et al., 2013), I outline four coping strategies for making sense of the resurgence of wolves.

First, some see wolves as symbols of wilderness threatening the order of cultural landscapes that should therefore be kept out. Yet wolves disregard the divide between wilderness and culture, disrupting this view. Second, others welcome wolves as messengers from 'pristine nature', inspiring us to move beyond anthropocentrism. However, their tendency to kill livestock complicates this ideal. Third, rationalists favour fact-based wolf management but struggle with the emotions wolves evoke—fascination and fear—both of which resist control. Their focus on control may even undermine people's ability to deal with unpredictability. Finally, those who see wolves as reminders of nature's unpredictability must confront the discomfort of relinquishing control over the environment. Ultimately, all these perspectives share a challenge: wolves don't fit neatly into human categories, pushing us to rethink our understanding of the world and our place within it.

Martin Drenthen is Associate Professor of Environmental Philosophy at the Institute for Science in Society (ISIS) at Radboud University in Nijmegen (Netherlands). His research topics include environmental hermeneutics, ethics of place, philosophy of landscape, the ethics of environmental restoration and rewilding, and human-wildlife coexistence. Currently, his research focuses on ethical issues related to cohabitation with wildlife, notably wolf resurgence in Western Europe. He published extensively on environmental philosophy in both Dutch and English. His latest book 'Hek' [Fence in Dutch] examines the ethics of the border between agricultural land and nature areas. Martin is currently one of the co-PI's of WildlifeNL ([wildlifennl.nl](http://wildlifennl.nl)), a large transdisciplinary research project aimed at improving human-wildlife coexistence in the Netherlands. More info: <http://staff.science.ru.nl/drenthen/>

## Panel 5 Large Predators in Europe

Ion Copoeru, Tibor Hartel and Nicolae Morar

From wilderness to co-habitation: Encounters with bears in Romania

In the US debate on wilderness, there is a common distinction between *physical* and *experiential* wilderness (Vucetich & Nelson, 2008). Physical wilderness is supposed to capture the old romantic idea of a large landscape where an ecosystem, and its inherent processes, functions largely in the absence of human influence. Experiential wilderness, on the other hand, focuses on the constellation of psychological phenomena that does not seem to extract the human from the natural but to pay attention as to *how* certain natural systems are *perceived*, and thereby valued, by humans. In this presentation, we intend to explore further this sense of connectedness, by looking at wilderness as practical possibilities of an embodied subject. From this standpoint, wilderness would be understood more *as* a practical subjective ability (Husserl, 1913), where an embodied subject responds to a direct situation of uncertainty and unpredictability.

This conceptual toolbox will be deployed to understand the shift from wilderness to co-habitation, as it pertains to the case of bear encounters in Romania. We will introduce a topology of landscapes where we distinguish between: 1. *Spaces of co-habitation*, where locals had more frequent encounters with bears (the local villages near the Carpathians); 2. *Spaces of novelty*, where bears have not been seen before (e.g. Ocna-Mures); 3. *Spaces of hiking*, where encounters have intensified recently without being provoked by humans; 4. *Spaces of tourism*, where city inhabitants directly look for bear encounters (e.g. feeding practices on the Transfagarasan), and 5. *Spaces for hunting*, where such practices are used for bear population control. Each space designates a form of connectedness between humans and bears. Our goal is to analyse the nature of those encounters in order to understand how the concept of wilderness in Romania is transformed by a constellation of modes of co-habitation with the natural world.

Ion Copoeru is a Professor of Philosophy at Universitatea Babeș-Bolyai in Cluj Napoca, Romania.

Tibor Hartel is an Associate Professor of Ecology at Universitatea Babeș-Bolyai in Cluj Napoca, Romania.

Nicolae Morar, Associate Professor of Environmental Studies and Philosophy, University of Oregon, USA.

Sara Aref Zahed

## Large predators as political symbols: Right-wing populism and the debate over rewilding in Central and Western Europe

While people in some regions in Europe coexist with large predators in shared habitats, in other areas of Central and Western Europe, humans have hunted species like wolves and bears to extinction. Despite these historical challenges, these once-extinct species are now recolonizing due to natural migration and conservation projects. This forces people to question the relationship between humans and nature embodied in the form of wild animals, which pose a possible threat. Right-wing parties in Germany, Switzerland, Austria and France capitalize on these concerns for their populist narrative. By constituting a 'them' posing nothing but a threat to 'us' right-wing parties use large carnivores as a symbol to strengthen the division between the 'elite urban' and the 'common rural people' who have to deal with the consequences. Furthermore, right-wing parties refuse to acknowledge the ecological benefits of large predators' presence and disregard considerations of wildlife ethics. Following this populist paradigm, the right-wing parties inherently hinder the possibility of coexistence rather than seeking solutions. This thesis aims to identify and analyse the populist narratives within right-wing parties' arguments against the recolonization of large carnivores.

As a methodological approach discourse analysis has been chosen and is examined by case studies and media analysis. Theories of populism and political ecology are used as a theoretical framework by theorists like Cas Mudde or Bruno Latour. This research shows not only how the right-wing parties are using those creatures within their populist discourse, but also how it influences public reception and policy making. By understanding these socio-political barriers, the study aims to contribute to more effective and inclusive conservation strategies that account for the diverse perspectives and interests in predator rewilding Europe.

Sara Aref Zahed, BSc BA, research assistant at the Austrian Institute of Economic Research, with a focus on the intersection of environmental and socio-political issues. I am currently pursuing two master's degrees at the University of Vienna—in Political Science, with a focus on political theory and political ecology, and in Conservation Biology, where I am completing my master's thesis on the recolonization of anurans in tropical regions. My interest in conservation and rewilding began with my school diploma thesis, where I studied the recolonization of wolves in Alpine areas.

Seth Peabody

## Rewilding, Alpine agriculture, and environmental values in the Austrian Alps

In discourses of rewilding and Alpine agriculture, these two fields frequently seem incompatible. In some cases, the relationship appears to be one of opposition and ongoing conflict, as when the reintroduction of large carnivores is seen as a threat to livestock on Alpine pastures. Further, the two activities sometimes seem to be operating at fully incommensurate scales: rewilding efforts driven by EU policies and international environmental organizations appear at odds with the local knowledge and lived experience of Alpine farmers. In other examples, the relationship between

agricultural and rewilding is sequential, marked by replacement: the abandonment of Alpine farms due to economic pressures presents a perceived opportunity for rewilding.

My project arises from a suspicion that these paradigms of opposition, disjunction, and replacement distract our attention from productive overlap between the goals of rewilding and those of Alpine agriculture. Based on analysis of interviews with mountain farmers in Austria's Salzburg province as well as research on the history and policy of Alpine pastures and related rewilding efforts, I explore overlapping goals, values systems, and outcomes of mountain farming and rewilding. These include an emphasis on maintaining or enhancing biodiversity, containing invasive species, as well as an underlying goal of overcoming a perceived distance between humans and the natural world. Moreover, statements from both fields reveal an environmental understanding that is simultaneously utilitarian, symbolic, and aesthetic, as well as a shared sociological underpinning in their conviction that something must be done to provide more autonomy for nonhuman nature in a moment when technological advancement is accelerating dramatically.

While tensions remain between Alpine agriculture and rewilding, my project broadens the understanding of commonality between them, yielding a more nuanced understanding of environmental values and conservation practice in the Austrian Alps.

Seth Peabody (PhD, Harvard University) is Assistant Professor of German at Carleton College. His research focuses on the intersections between environmental humanities, film and media, and the language and culture of German-speaking countries. His monograph, *Film History for the Anthropocene: The Ecological Archive of German Cinema*, appeared in December 2023. He is spending the 2024-25 academic year as a Visiting Scholar at the Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society in Munich, where he is working on a new project titled *Beyond Green Germany: Conflict and Change in German and Austrian Environmental Culture*.

Giovanni Frigo and Damien Delorme

Rewilding beyond dualism: Exploring relational values and care ethics within contested co-inhabitation with large predators in Alpine environments

There is no wilderness in Europe yet there is still some wildness. Its value should be neither sanctified nor demonized, but understood in context. We explore relational values and Care Ethics approaches within contested co-inhabitation with large predators in Alpine environments. In addition, we connect these topics to the issue of agency and selfhood, focusing particularly on the notion of ecological self. Although relational values aim to challenge the traditional dualistic view about values in environmental ethics and conservation biology, they have also been criticized. In this paper, we support the distinctiveness of relational values and suggest that they might provide alternative framings for thinking about wildness and rewilding. We suggest that relational values are better understood as an independent category that is closely interwoven with caring relationships and practices. But approaching rewilding in this way is both challenging and promising. We argue for a specific Care Ethics approach to conservation informed by relational values as a way to rethink long-standing challenges such as human-wildlife conflicts, land use,

access, and sovereignty in different ways. Building on previous work done in environmental virtue ethics, we propose the adoption of relational values implies an ontological shift from an atomistic notion of agency to that of ecological self. The most relevant consequence of this broader notion of self is that human beings are not the only ecological selves who are capable of exercising relational values and caring practices. Applying this in the European context might suggest new ways of looking at issues that are characteristic of the continent's bio-eco-cultural history. We discuss two cases – wolves in Jura Vaudois, Switzerland and bears in Trentino, Italy – to show the practical implications of our proposal. This contribution to the theoretical refinement of relational values can help the practical implementation of conservation and policy initiatives.

Giovanni Frigo is an environmental and energy ethicist currently working as researcher in the Philosophy of Engineering, Technology Assessment & Science (PhiletAS) Research Group at the Institute for Technology Assessment and Systems Analysis (ITAS) at the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT). Born and raised in the Italian Alps, he studied at the University of Verona, Italy, and at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris, France. In 2018 he received his PhD in environmental ethics from the University of North Texas (UNT) in Denton, TX, USA. His interdisciplinary research focuses on the fundamental links between ethics and energy.

Damien Delorme holds a PhD in philosophy and theology. He teaches philosophy and environmental ethics at the Universities of Geneva and Lausanne. His research focuses on values in nature conservation, the ecological self, virtue ethics, and the ecophenomenology of listening. His practice in field philosophy explores themes such as ecotopias, ecospirituality, environmental arts, and agrarian alternatives. He is also the co-editor of the *Manifesto for a Field Philosophy* (EUD, 2023).

## Panel 6 Politics and Ethics of Animals

Friderike Spang

Engaged trustees: A new model for wildlife representation

As Europe confronts the crises of climate change and biodiversity loss, rewilding has become an important strategy to restore ecosystems. However, rewilding often generates conflicts between human and wildlife interests. For example, creating wildlife corridors for species like deer or lynx can clash with urban and transportation planning when these corridors intersect with infrastructure projects. Such tensions raise the question of how we can fairly balance wildlife interests with human concerns in rewilding initiatives.

I propose an *engaged trustee model* to address these conflicts. This model relies on deliberative settings, such as mini-publics, where selected groups of citizens deliberate on specific rewilding issues. Drawing on Cochrane's (2018) concept of 'animal trustees', engaged trustees serve as informed representatives of wildlife interests in these forums.

Importantly, rather than simply assuming knowledge of animal needs, engaged trustees develop their expertise through direct interactions with the species affected by specific rewilding measures. Engagement can take different forms; for instance, trustees may observe animal behaviours, like habitat use or movement patterns, and interpret these behaviours as a form of political expression (Donaldson & Kymlicka, 2023; Meijer, 2019). Other forms of interaction can include presenting animals with different options and observing their choices, thus gaining insight into their preferences in specific contexts (Donaldson & Kymlicka, 2023).

Through such engagement with wildlife, engaged trustees gain a more direct understanding of animal needs, which they then bring into deliberative forums. This approach can improve wildlife representation by basing it on real engagement rather than mere assumptions. By incorporating these well-informed insights into deliberative forums, the engaged trustee model aims to foster a fair accommodation of human and wildlife interests when they come into tension within rewilding projects.

Friderike Spang is a Postdoctoral Researcher at the Center for Environmental and Technology Ethics - Prague (CETE-P). Prior to joining CETE-P, she was a Senior Researcher at the University of Lausanne, Switzerland. She earned her Ph.D. from the University of Western Ontario, Canada. Her research spans political philosophy and applied ethics. In political philosophy, she works on theories of compromise, disagreement, and deliberative democracy. In applied ethics, her work focuses on animal and environmental ethics. At CETE-P, her research combines these areas with technology ethics. Specifically, her work explores how democratic innovations and associated technologies can be used to represent the interests of non-human animals and future generations in political decision-making. Her work has been published in journals such as *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, *Political Studies Review*, *Politics and Animals*, *Journal of Deliberative Democracy*, and *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* (forthcoming).

## Peter Sandøe and Christian Gamborg

### Using horses in rewilding projects – how far is there a duty of care?

European rewilding projects increasingly introduce large domestic herbivores (such as horses or cattle) for grazing and browsing, as proxies for now extinct species that historically performed these ecosystem roles. These translocation rewilding practices raise difficult questions about how such animals should be managed: Should the animals be treated as wild animals, true to the spirit of rewilding projects, essentially left to fend for themselves through cold winters, droughts, and shortages of food? Or would doing so be ethically problematic, since we have a duty of care for these animals, as they have been bred as domestic animals, and confined in fenced areas within rewilding projects? This paper looks at this question through the lens of a particular case involving the use of horses for rewilding with minimal human intervention in future, what is known as, Danish national nature parks comprising 12.5% of state-owned nature areas. This case has generated significant *stakeholder* controversy about how introduced herbivores should be treated. However, there has to date been little information about the views of the *general public* about horses and translocation rewilding. Drawing on data from a nationally representative survey from 2022 ( $n=10,303$ ), we report public views on rewilding, animal welfare and management of nature. We found that, on the one hand, a majority (73%) imagined that living in the rewilding areas would give translocated animals, especially horses, a good opportunity to express natural behaviour. However, nearly half the public also expected potential welfare issues to emerge. We analyse these results in the light of various possible ethical approaches, and consider whether, and where, a balance might be struck between welfare considerations and the value of naturalness. We also consider whether these public responses might raise challenges about what's owed to wild animals more generally.

Peter Sandøe, Professor in Bioethics at the Royal Veterinary and Agricultural University - since 2007 University of Copenhagen. Peter Sandøe was educated at the University of Copenhagen (MA in philosophy 1984) and at the University of Oxford (D.Phil. in philosophy 1988). From 2020 he is director of the Danish Centre for the Study of Companion Animal Welfare. Since 1990 the major part of his research has been within bioethics with particular emphasis on ethical issues related to animals, biotechnology and food production. He is committed to interdisciplinary work combining perspectives from natural science, social sciences and philosophy.

## Mikko Puumala

### Biodiversity conservation and language concerning non-human entities

Animal ethics and environmental ethics have an uneasy history. Although both areas of philosophical inquiry share history and can be seen as a response to the anthropocentric tendencies of Western philosophy, their relationship has been characterized as a bad marriage that led to a quick divorce (Sagoff 1984). Despite some attempts at reconciliation (see Jamieson 1998; Callicott 1998), tensions remain. Biodiversity conservation is one such area of conflict. Typical, and perhaps most dramatic examples include exterminating invasive species to protect native species. Can we allow the killing of numerous sentient beings to protect far fewer living entities, even if they count as native, rare, keystone, endangered, or some other status that merits special

protection? This paper takes these tensions to the level of language use concerning non-human entities and seeks potential reconciliation (and identifies further problems) therein. The paper is part of a wider project where ethical extensionism, a classic approach for both environmental and animal ethics to extend existing moral theories, principles, and concepts to non-human entities, is further developed to concern common language-use ('language extensionism'). In the paper, conservationist language-use regarding nonhumans is taken as a special case of language extensionism. The paper will focus on a problem related to biologizing, dementalizing (see Aarnio & Aaltola 2023) conservationist language-use that only acknowledges certain species' functional or instrumental value in the context of an ecosystem, instead of acknowledging their intrinsic value and individuality. Language-use like 'wildlife management' seem less problematic in an environmental ethical context, but from an animal ethics perspective it is problematic. The paper seeks to address this issue and explores better alternatives to discuss nonhumans in a conservationist setting.

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Mikko Puumala is a postdoc researcher at the University of Turku, in the Turku Environmental Ethics Research Center (TEERC), where he also serves as the coordinator. He defended his doctoral thesis on climate ethics in 2023, and now works as a postdoc researcher in a multidisciplinary project on language and attitudes concerning non-human animals. His other research interests include environmental ethics, space ethics (environmental protection in outer space), philosophy of sustainability, and philosophical methodology. Puumala is also the coordinator of the Nordic Environmental Ethics Network (NEEN).



## Panel 7 Technologies of (Wild)life

Bernice Bovenkerk

Artificial life by artificial intelligence?

The convergence of synthetic biology and artificial intelligence (in particular generative AI) opens up a new field of potential applications, some of which may be geared towards conservation. Several big tech companies are already investing large sums of money into the generation of AI tools for synthetic biology applications. An application one could imagine is to have AI custom-design DNA, which could be engineered into a living organism. In this imagined scenario – sometimes referred to as DNAI – very specific modifications could be made to organisms that are threatened with extinction, or the reverse, to organisms that threaten other organisms with extinction (in particular ‘invasive’ species).

Before such applications become widespread it is important to address philosophical (in particular ethical and ontological) questions. When technologies converge, there are usually many more uncertainties and risks and ethical dilemmas multiply; how should we deal with these? This technology convergence seems to push the idea of (human or artificial?) design of nature onto a whole other level. If these designed organisms become part of conservation or rewilding schemes, how does this change the wildness of the organisms themselves and of receiving ecosystems? How should we understand the concept of life if it is artificially made, not by humans but by computers? To what extent is there a difference between designing new organisms with the help of ‘traditional’ forms of synthetic biology and AI-driven synthetic biology? How will the employment of AI-driven synthetic biology change power relations? Who stands to gain and who stands to lose from this technology? With such a highly complex application of technologies, more than ever knowledge will mean power and those who do not speak this technology’s language will be left behind, leading to epistemic injustice. In my presentation I will explore these questions and argue that we need to proceed with extreme caution.

Bernice Bovenkerk is an Associate Professor of Animal and Environmental Ethics at the Philosophy Group of Wageningen University. Her research interests include the ethics of animal and plant biotechnology, animal agency, the impact of AI on animals, the moral status of boundary animals (such as fish and insects), climate ethics, and deliberative democracy. She is author of the Springer monograph *The Biotechnology Debate*, and co-editor of the Springer volumes *Animals in Our Midst* and *Animal Ethics in the Age of Humans*. She is currently rounding of an Innovative Research Scheme funded project on taking animal agency seriously in animal ethics.

Brady DeShong

## Rigs and ruins: What decommissioned oil rigs can tell us about rewilding

Decommissioned oil rigs present an opportunity for us to re-examine our philosophy of rewilding. Oil rigs in the water are no doubt human monstrosities, put there to drain the Earth of its natural resources solely for human benefit. Not only are they environmentally harmful, but they are moreover extremely aesthetically displeasing. However, they have been found in many cases to be centres of thriving biologically diverse ecosystems. When coral grows on the surface of the rig underwater, it turns rigs into artificial reefs, creating a diverse habitat for many species. If we were to rewild these waters, that would entail removal of the oil rigs (under a broad definition of rewilding). Thus, we have a dilemma: remove the rig and restore the spot to its 'wild' nature pre-human intervention, thereby destroying the newly developed ecosystem, or leave it in the water to protect this new and diverse ecosystem, despite the fact that it is thriving on a human-made eyesore. My goal in this paper is to present and explore this dilemma as it comes from both oil rigs and other human-made ruins. I show that the former option, removal of the rig, reflects an emphasis on aesthetic values in rewilding, while the latter option, leaving the rig in the water, reflects an emphasis on biodiversity and preserving the life of individual organisms (and potentially species in some cases). After giving attention to both options, I argue in favour of leaving the rig in the water, claiming that a focus on life itself should trump aesthetic values. I then show how this impacts our ideas about rewilding more generally.

Brady DeShong, a PhD student and Florida State University. I received my master's degree from Texas Tech University and my bachelor's degree from Rutgers University. My research interests are mainly in environmental ethics and bioethics, though during my time at Texas Tech I focused mainly on metaethics. My research interests have certainly been influenced by my non-academic interests, which include various outdoor activities like hiking, backpacking, and paddling.

Andrea Gammon

## Retrofitting: A candidate practice of environmental maintenance & repair?

The growing focus on repair and maintenance in philosophy of technology, urges, among other things, an attention to technologies through time: how they persist, are worked on, are re-designed and reimagined over the duration of their use. However, there is an absence of environmental sites, topics, and practices in this literature, despite the broadly environmental concerns that motivate much of it. In previous work, I have argued that part of the reason for this lacuna is that environmental ethics and philosophers have not given much attention to ideas of environmental maintenance and repair and I have argued that we should.

This presentation is an attempt in that direction. I propose *environmental maintenance* as a category of maintenance relevant to environmental ethicists and philosophers that attends to existing maintenance practices that engineers, designers, and others already engage in. I focus on the practice of *retrofitting* – the modification of a building or structure to include a component or feature that was not included in the original design – and ask whether retrofitting presents a model

candidate for an *environmental* practice of maintenance and repair. I focus on examples of retrofit projects with clear environmental relevance (e.g., projects that mitigate, adapt, build resilience related to climate change, or demonstrate other overtly environmental aims) to study the environmental values motivating these projects and their emergence or change over time. I consider the implicit and explicit temporal horizons of retrofitting projects, suggesting that retrofitting as a practice can foreground connections between past, present, and future environments and inhabitation. Further, retrofitting broadens typically narrow environmental concerns to include considerations of well-being and ability, and I attempt to identify guiding principles, ideas, or practices that retrofitting offers for practices of environmental maintenance more generally.

Andrea Gammon is Assistant Professor of Ethics & Philosophy of Technology at TU Delft, where she teaches in a broad range of ethics and philosophy courses to engineering and design students. Her background is in environmental philosophy and the philosophy of technology; she first focused on climate engineering ethics in her M.A. (University of Montana, USA, 2013) and then on rewilding in cultural landscapes in her PhD (Radboud University, NL, 2018). Her current research brings philosophy of technology, specifically, maintenance and repair studies, into contact with environmental philosophy to attend to environmental aspects of technologies and the built environment.

# Panel 8 Ethics of Rewilding

Norbert Peeters

Plant blindness in rewilding

In recent years, rewilding has become somewhat fragmented, encompassing various forms, such as ‘Pleistocene’, ‘trophic’, ‘passive’, ‘island’, ‘urban’ and even ‘self-rewilding’. One common feature in many of these approaches is that wild animals still get centre stage. Rewilding could even be labelled zoocentric. This is particularly true of prominent rewilding organizations, with their strong advocacy for the reintroduction of animals, especially large herbivores and carnivores. Various reasons are given for this prioritization. Historically these animals have often been hunted to extinction or near extinction. Additionally, wolves, bears and eagles have a strong aesthetic appeal, frequently seen as emblematic of the wild. Furthermore, there is ecological support for this preferential treatment. Large herbivores and carnivores are considered ‘keystone species’, essential for an ecosystem to function autonomously, without human interventions. With the reintroduced gray wolves (*Canis lupus*) in Yellowstone National Park often held up as the poster child.

In 1999, American botanists James Wandersee and Elisabeth Schussler coined the term ‘plant blindness’ as an alternative to existing concepts like ‘plant-neglect’ and ‘zoocentrism’. People’s tendency to overlook and undervalue plants stands in stark contrast to the attention and admiration directed towards animals, especially wild ones. In a similar vein, one could ask if zoocentrism in rewilding actually reflects plant blindness. I am particularly interested to see if the promotion and execution of rewilding projects show hidden assumptions and potential biases regarding the role of plants in rewilding. Are plants overlooked or treated as second-class citizens in rewilding projects? Drawing on examples of various Dutch rewilding initiatives such as Kempen~Broek, Marker Wadden, and Gelderse Poort, my primary research question is: Do the promotion and practices of (trophic) rewilding suffer from plant blindness?

During this workshop, I aim to present my preliminary findings on this topic and engage in a dialogue with other experts about the role of plants play – and could play – in rewilding.

Norbert Peeters (39) is a botanical philosopher, external PhD-student at Leiden University, and lecturer at Wageningen University & Research. His dissertation focuses on the philosophical and historical roots of invasive plants in the 18th and 19th century. In the past he has published several books, e.g. *Botanische revolutie: de plantenleer van Charles Darwin* (2016), *Rumphius’ Kruidboek: Verhalen uit de Ambonese flora* (2019) and *Wildernis-vernis: een filosoof in het Vondelpark* (2021). Together with Esther van Gelder he is editor of the reprint of *Flora Batava 1800-1934 – De wilde planten van Nederland* (2023).

Cristian Moyano-Fernández

## The conundrum of ethical triage in rewilding

Conservation triage is a rational approach aimed at making difficult decisions regarding priority under severely constrained resources—e.g., allowing some critically endangered species to go extinct in order to save others (Wilson & Law 2016), or culling some nonhuman populations in order to save others and ecosystems integrity (Chauvenet et al. 2011). It often oscillates between the prioritization of three fundamental attributes that are recognized in nonhuman species: vulnerable, flagship, and keystone (Arponen 2012). This triad has interconnections with axiological levels rooted in different ontologies; and these ontologies are also the basis for cultivating particular roles and attitudes in conservation (Wienhues et al. 2023; Latombe et al. 2022), each with its specific aims, normative framework, and epistemic and ethical pitfalls.

How does rewilding fit into this mapping? My aim here is to address how the axiological and ontological roots of rewilding may justify a triage that clashes with other conservation strategies. Rewilding is a pluralistic approach—characterized by various methodologies, such as active or passive rewilding, Holocene or Pleistocene rewilding, large-scale rewilding in protected areas or urban rewilding (Pettorelli et al. 2019)—but it is primarily committed to keystone species and ecosystem integrity (Carver et al. 2021). This prioritization leads rewilding to take distance from other conservation strategies at axiological and ontological dimensions, regarding attitudes, biases, and so on.

Interestingly, while the need for prioritization in conservation is often accepted in practice, triage is sometimes a taboo option (Hagerman & Satterfield 2014). Some criticisms have noted that conservation triage is an inappropriate quantitative tool due to biases about the available resources (Wiedenfeld et al. 2021) and disagreement on the moral value of various objects of conservation concern (Vucetich et al. 2017). Similarly, some argue that all life counts in conservation (Wallach et al. 2019), which makes it difficult to support triage decisions. However, it still makes sense to analyse triage not only to measure the usefulness of the solutions offered (e.g. to species extinctions), but also to discuss when and why rewilding may be worthwhile.

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Denise Regina Percequillo Hossom

The ‘unwilding’ of the Przewalski horse: How genomic research and ancient DNA reframed the ‘return’ of the Przewalski horse to Eurasia

The history of horse domestication is a hotly debated area of sociocultural, historical, and biological research that relies heavily on the classificatory concepts of ‘wild’, ‘domestic’, ‘feral’, and ‘tame’. I collectively term these concepts the Wild-Domestic Distinction (WDD) and examine the case study of ‘wild horse problems’ to analyse concept operationalization in scientific practice. In examining WDD concept operationalization in research programs concerning the origins of horse domestication across the Eurasian Steppe, the ethical implications for a particular conservation agenda comes into focus; transnational conservation and reintroduction programs for Przewalski horse.

Examining recent debates over the classificatory status of Przewalski horse occurring between conservation biology and the historical sciences (Gaunitz et al. 2018; Gibbens 2018; Turghan, Jiang, & Niu 2022) highlights the ethical challenges raised by horse classification through WDD concepts. The implications of investigative disintegration (Meneganzin & Currie 2022) at the intersection of the historical sciences with contemporary wildlife conservation work are examined; contentions over the sociocultural, ecological, and coevolutionary history of horses and humans across the Eurasian Steppe frame the discourse over the role of Przewalski horse in the contemporary context of ecological restoration and biodiversity loss in a problematic way. The ‘return’ of Przewalski horse to Eurasia through reintroduction efforts after decades long intensive captive breeding programs is conceptually called into question.

I argue that Przewalski horse classification and the intersectional epistemic and ethical issues it presents require us to question the role of nonhuman animal classification as a proxy for moral action. As an alternative to the heavy reliance on WDD to guide our moral decision making and public policy discourses, I advocate engaging Indigenous and feminist ethics of care, (Whyte & Cuomo 2016) and 'kincentric ecology' (Salmón 2000) to recentre the relational nature of the ethical concerns present in the case of Przewalski horse.

Denise Regina Percequillo Hossom: I recently completed my PhD in History and Philosophy of Biology, and my dissertation provides an analysis of the concepts 'wild', 'domestic', 'feral', and 'tame'; collectively referred to as the 'Wild-Domestic Distinction' (WDD). Within a science and values approach, WDD concepts are examined through a focal case study; 'wild horse problems'. I engage the normative scope of equine welfare and public policy that entangle both epistemic and ethical facets of equine biology, natural and sociocultural history, and wildlife conservation to advance discourses in environmental ethics. I extend the methodological approach of the dissertation into examining the conceptual foundations of rewilding.