# Knepp Wildland turns farming debts into thriving rewilding success



Knepp Wildland, nestled in the heart of West Sussex, stands as a beacon of hope in the burgeoning trend of rewilding across Europe. This ambitious project, recognised as one of the UK's 'European Stork Villages,' has gained accolades for its transformative approach to land use and biodiversity restoration. Over the past 15 years, owners Charlie Burrell and Isabella Tree have pioneered efforts to restore the land, allowing nature to flourish free from conventional farming.

The Knepp Estate, which spans an impressive 1,400 hectares, borders the busy A24 road, an artery connecting London to Worthing. The journey into this rewilded paradise reveals not just a landscape in recovery but a compelling story of vision and perseverance. After years of struggling with mounting debts from traditional farming practices, Burrell and Tree made a pivotal decision around the turn of the millennium: to abandon conventional farming in favour of a rewilding model inspired by projects in Europe, particularly the Oostvaardersplassen in the Netherlands.

Isabella Tree has articulated the emotional and ecological impetus behind this radical shift, noting the estate was deeply in debt and unsustainable as a farming operation. As she recounted in a promotional feature for the film "Wilding," their journey evolved from necessity into a profound experiment in biodiversity. The couple's decision was heavily influenced by the theories of Dutch ecologist Frans Vera, who advocates for the reintroduction of large herbivores as integral components in ecosystem restoration. By introducing species such as longhorn cattle, Tamworth pigs, and red deer, the Knepp project aims to recreate the wood pasture ecosystems that existed in Britain before significant human impact.

The results of Knepp's rewilding efforts have been remarkable. Over the years, a diverse array of wildlife has returned, signalling the project's success as a model for ecological recovery. Long gone are the days of monotony; instead, the estate has become a thriving habitat for numerous species, including the once-declining turtle dove and the majestic purple emperor butterfly. Remarkably, the numbers of turtle doves at Knepp increased from just three pairs in 1999 to sixteen pairs by 2017, showcasing the project's critical role in reversing wildlife decline. The resurgence of these species is not merely a statistic; it underscores a significant restoration of ecological balance.

In parallel, the estate has also seen the reintroduction of beavers to its waterways, which play a crucial role in improving river health and biodiversity. Satellite monitoring projects have documented visible increases in tree and shrub cover and enhanced ecosystem functions over two decades, confirming the positive impact of these rewilding initiatives on the land. Such advancements add weight to Knepp's reputation as a leading lowland rewilding project in Britain, a living testament to what can be achieved when nature is allowed to take the lead.

Visitors to Knepp Wildland can engage with this extraordinary transformation through guided tours and workshops, traversing miles of public footpaths that meander through the estate. Facilities such as glamping and a restaurant serve to blend ecotourism with environmental conservation, offering a hands-on approach to understanding this innovative project. Furthermore, Knepp recently showcased its journey through the release of the documentary "Wilding," which delves into the intricacies of their approach to rewilding.

Knepp Wildland's story is not just about restoring habitats; it's about fostering a renewed relationship between humanity and nature. As the project continues to evolve, it serves as a poignant reminder of the potential for regeneration within both the environment and the spirit. By embracing the principles of rewilding, Knepp emerges not merely as a patch of land but as a symbol of hope—a place where the wild has returned and where communities can witness nature's resilience firsthand.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.countryfile.com/go-outdoors/days-out/knepp-rewilding-guide), [[2]](https://www.countryfile.com/go-outdoors/days-out/knepp-rewilding-guide)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.countryfile.com/go-outdoors/days-out/knepp-rewilding-guide), [[4]](https://www.eresus-nature.com/knepp-wildland/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.zsl.org/what-we-do/projects/space-observation-of-knepp-estate-nature-recovery), [[5]](https://wildlifeestates.org.uk/case-studies), [[6]](https://edition.cnn.com/2020/10/01/world/knepp-farm-rewilding-scn-cte-spc/index.html)
* Paragraph 4 – [[5]](https://wildlifeestates.org.uk/case-studies), [[6]](https://edition.cnn.com/2020/10/01/world/knepp-farm-rewilding-scn-cte-spc/index.html)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.countryfile.com/go-outdoors/days-out/knepp-rewilding-guide), [[7]](https://www.museum.manchester.ac.uk/wild/knepp-rewilding-project/)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.countryfile.com/go-outdoors/days-out/knepp-rewilding-guide> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.countryfile.com/go-outdoors/days-out/knepp-rewilding-guide> - An in-depth guide to Knepp Wildland, England's first major rewilding project, detailing its location, ownership, size, rewilding motivations, influences, visitor information, reintroduced animals, and other wildlife found there.
3. <https://www.zsl.org/what-we-do/projects/space-observation-of-knepp-estate-nature-recovery> - An overview of the ZSL's satellite monitoring project assessing the impacts of rewilding at Knepp Estate, highlighting significant increases in tree and shrub areas and improved ecosystem functions over two decades.
4. <https://www.eresus-nature.com/knepp-wildland/> - A detailed account of Knepp Wildland's transformation from intensive farming to a rewilding project, emphasizing the return of rare species, the introduction of free-roaming herbivores, and the estate's organic certification.
5. <https://wildlifeestates.org.uk/case-studies> - A case study on Knepp Wildland, showcasing its role as a leading lowland rewilding project in Britain, the return of various rare species, and the introduction of keystone species like beavers and white storks.
6. <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/10/01/world/knepp-farm-rewilding-scn-cte-spc/index.html> - An article highlighting Knepp Estate's success in rewilding, including the return of rare species like turtle doves and white storks, and its potential as a model for reversing species decline.
7. <https://www.museum.manchester.ac.uk/wild/knepp-rewilding-project/> - An exploration of Knepp Estate's rewilding project, focusing on the return of rare species, the increase in insect diversity, and the estate's role as a breeding hotspot for the UK's rarest creatures.