# White storks successfully reintroduced to southern England with thriving wild population



The ambitious project to reintroduce white storks to southern England has progressed significantly since its inception in 2016, marking a notable chapter in wildlife conservation efforts on the UK’s ecological landscape. This initiative, led by the Cotswold Wildlife Park and the Roy Dennis Wildlife Foundation, began by rehabilitating non-flying storks from Warsaw Zoo. These birds, unable to migrate due to injuries, have played a crucial role in establishing a sustainable breeding population at the Knepp Estate.

Initial releases saw twenty-eight young storks take to the skies in August 2021, a historic moment for the UK, as white storks had not been seen nesting here since the 15th century. The project’s success at Knepp illustrates a pivotal lesson in environmental restoration: "Sort the habitat out, the soils, insects, healthy water systems, and then your storks will come eventually," expressed Ms Vaughan-Hirsch, emphasising the interconnectivity of species recovery and habitat health.

Over the years, Knepp has transformed from agricultural land into a thriving landscape of scrub, grassland, and woodland. The rewilding efforts have enhanced local ecosystems, leading to the restoration of the nearby river and the introduction of beavers, which have helped create insect-rich wetlands. Such ecological shifts not only boosted stork populations but also underscored a broader principle: the impact of seemingly minor species on ecosystem health. As Ms Tree observed, "Even species that don't have a reputation as being keystone species have an effect on ecosystems."

By March 2025, the ongoing rewilding project earned Knepp Estate and the adjacent village of Storrington the distinguished title of the UK's first European Stork Village, a recognition granted by the EuroNatur foundation. This title reflects the project's success in establishing a breeding colony that has now spilled over into natural populations, with storks successfully breeding with wild counterparts. In a notable milestone, the first free-flying storks that hatched at Knepp have been documented migrating to Morocco for the winter, returning to nest in Sussex each spring.

Efforts to bolster the stork population are set to continue, targeting the establishment of at least 50 wild breeding pairs by 2030. To date, over 250 storks have been released across several sites in southern England, dispelling concerns about the feasibility of reintroducing such a historically absent species. The project not only aims to restore storks to their former range but also champions broader conservation initiatives that hinge on habitat rehabilitation and biodiversity.

With the stork now emblematic of nature recovery in the UK, the project serves as both a poignant symbol of hope for conservation and a practical guide for future rewilding efforts.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/czj487e0p9no), [[2]](https://www.cotswoldwildlifepark.co.uk/whats-on/park-news/white-storks-bred-at-cotswold-wildlife-park-take-flight-in-the-uks-first-stork-rewilding-project/), [[3]](https://knepp.co.uk/rewilding/reintroductions/white-stork/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/czj487e0p9no), [[4]](https://knepp.co.uk/view/safaris/white-stork-safari/), [[6]](https://www.rewildingbritain.org.uk/why-rewild/reintroductions-key-species/key-species/white-stork)
* Paragraph 3 – [[5]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/mar/17/storrington-in-west-sussex-named-uk-first-european-stork-village), [[7]](https://www.euronatur.org/en/what-we-do/news/knepp-and-storrington-named-european-stork-village)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/czj487e0p9no> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.cotswoldwildlifepark.co.uk/whats-on/park-news/white-storks-bred-at-cotswold-wildlife-park-take-flight-in-the-uks-first-stork-rewilding-project/> - In August 2021, 28 white storks bred at Cotswold Wildlife Park were released into the wild as part of the UK's first stork rewilding project. The initiative aims to restore wild stork populations to Britain, a sight not seen since the 15th century. The project is a collaboration between Cotswold Wildlife Park and the Roy Dennis Wildlife Foundation, with chicks bred from a captive population received from rehabilitation centres in Poland. The storks were released at Knepp Castle Estate in West Sussex, marking a significant milestone in the reintroduction effort.
3. <https://knepp.co.uk/rewilding/reintroductions/white-stork/> - Knepp Estate, in partnership with the Roy Dennis Wildlife Foundation, Warsaw Zoo, and Cotswold Wildlife Park, is actively involved in establishing a breeding population of free-living white storks in Britain. The project began in 2016 with the introduction of non-flying birds from Warsaw Zoo, rehabilitated after accidents. These birds, along with others, live in or around a fox-proof enclosure at Knepp, breeding and establishing the founding colonies that will attract other storks. The initiative aims to reintroduce white storks to Britain, where they were once native but became extinct in the early 15th century.
4. <https://knepp.co.uk/view/safaris/white-stork-safari/> - Knepp Estate offers a White Stork Safari, allowing visitors to observe the reintroduced white storks in their natural habitat. The safari includes a presentation and a guided walk through the rewilding project to see the birds in action. The initiative began in 2016 with the introduction of non-flying birds from Warsaw Zoo, and the colony has since established itself, with storks nesting in the tops of Knepp’s oak trees every spring and feeding their chicks throughout the summer. The project aims to reintroduce white storks to Britain, where they were once native but became extinct in the early 15th century.
5. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/mar/17/storrington-in-west-sussex-named-uk-first-european-stork-village> - In March 2025, Storrington in West Sussex, along with the nearby Knepp Estate, was designated as the UK's first European Stork Village. This recognition is part of a transnational initiative by the EuroNatur foundation to combat habitat loss for storks. The Knepp colony has developed around a group of rehabilitated storks from Warsaw Zoo in Poland. The first free-flying birds hatched chicks in an oak tree at Knepp in 2020, and the colony has grown steadily since, with storks now successfully breeding with wild birds and migrating to Morocco for winter before returning to Sussex to nest.
6. <https://www.rewildingbritain.org.uk/why-rewild/reintroductions-key-species/key-species/white-stork> - White storks, once native to Britain, were driven to extinction in 1416. Rewilding Britain is involved in reintroducing white storks to southern England as part of The White Stork Project, a collaboration with Cotswold Wildlife Park and Knepp Estate. The project aims to re-establish 50 wild breeding pairs of white storks in southern Britain by 2030. As of now, more than 250 storks have been set free across various project locations, including Surrey, West Sussex, and East Sussex. The continued release of captive-bred birds further enhances colony populations and promotes migratory instincts.
7. <https://www.euronatur.org/en/what-we-do/news/knepp-and-storrington-named-european-stork-village> - In March 2025, Knepp Estate and the village of Storrington in West Sussex were jointly designated as a 'European Stork Village' by the EuroNatur foundation. This recognition highlights their role in the successful introduction of white storks to the UK. The Knepp colony has developed around a group of rehabilitated storks from Warsaw Zoo in Poland. The first free-flying birds hatched chicks in an oak tree at Knepp in 2020, and the colony has grown steadily since, with storks now successfully breeding with wild birds and migrating to Morocco for winter before returning to Sussex to nest.