



edited by Ian Parsons

Great Misconceptions

Rewilding Myths and
Misunderstandings

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Rewilding Myths and Misunderstandings

A collection of perceptive, informative and challenging articles

Edited by Ian Parsons

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*Ask of the trees themselves how they should be treated, and they will
teach you more than can be learned from books.*

Friedrich Wilhelm Leopold Pfeil (1783–1859)

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6: Beyond rural rewilding: why rewilding is right for cities too

In this chapter, Siân Moxon argues that rewilding shouldn't be something for the countryside alone, and that the principles of rewilding are especially valid in urban environments.

Beyond rural rewilding

Rewilding has long been considered a country pursuit, and its conventional definitions and approaches are intended for rural contexts. But to be so exclusive risks overlooking the huge potential of urban rewilding. Rewilding principles can have immense benefits for both conservation and climate-change mitigation in cities, with the bonus of helping the large human populations that inhabit them regain, and maintain, a connection to nature. But for urban rewilding to work, city dwellers will need to become more like rural residents in their attitude to living alongside nature, while designers and policymakers will need to plan future cities with non-human species in mind.

Why urban rewilding matters

Urban rewilding is vital to help address the global ecological and climate crisis in a time of increasing urbanisation, with nearly 70 per cent of humanity expected to live in urban areas by 2050 (UN, 2018). With poor rural land management a core driver of alarming biodiversity loss in the UK (Burns et al., 2023), the countryside is not the idyllic oasis for wildlife that we might imagine. In contrast, for many species cities are an important refuge, while other species have become urban specialists; urban hedgehogs, foxes and herring gulls are more successful than their rural cousins (Hayhow et al., 2019), while more biodiversity is found in urban ponds than rural ones (Hill et al., 2017). Peregrine falcons are thriving in cities, having adapted to substitute tall buildings for their conventional cliff-top nesting sites, occupying over 200 urban sites in the UK (Davies and Hendry, 2023). Urban conservation works well, with provision of ponds, bird food and habitat boxes shown to be effective (Sutherland, Dicks and Smith (eds), 2020), enabling increases in, for example, bats (Hayhow et al., 2016).

Greening cities through urban rewilding benefits people as much as it does

wildlife. It can restore the fundamental connection with nature that many of us, especially city dwellers, have lost. There are numerous signs of this disconnect from nature. Many adults experience ‘plant blindness’, when they no longer notice wild plants (Balding and Williams, 2016). Sadly, most children cannot name even common, distinctive wildlife, such as bumblebees, blue tits and oak trees (Humphries, 2019), inspiring the illustrated *The Lost Words: A Spell Book*, aiming to recapture the magic of nature for children (Macfarlane and Morris, 2017). Regaining this connection with nature can instil a stewardship of the environment from childhood and counter the stresses of modern city life into adulthood. Being in nature enhances our mental health, calming us by reducing our stress levels. Consequently, urban nature has social benefits. Views of nature accelerate patient recovery times in hospitals, and boost productivity in offices and schools, while access to nature supports creativity, child development and social interaction, and is associated with lower crime rates. Green spaces also nurture our physical health, encouraging active travel and outdoor recreation, and mitigating air and noise pollution. Finally, greener cities look more attractive, boosting tourism and the local economy (Hiemstra et al, 2019). Interestingly, many of these environmental, social and economic benefits of green spaces increase with their biodiversity (Harrison et al., 2014).

As climate change takes hold these advantages of nature will turn from niceties to necessities. Cities exacerbate the impacts of climate change, particularly flooding and overheating. Their density of human-made materials creates an abundance of hard, dark surfaces which absorb and radiate heat, making cities artificially warmer than surrounding areas. These hard surfaces also rapidly shed rainwater, resulting in flash flooding. Introducing greenery increases the proportion of permeable surfaces and tree canopy, which absorb and intercept excess rainwater and provide natural cooling and shade, tempering these effects (Hiemstra et al, 2019). Given that climate change will bring increasingly hot, dry summers, warm, wet winters, and extreme weather events in the UK (Met Office, 2023), its cities will need more green space to adapt.

How urban rewilding is happening

Thankfully, change is coming, as influential sources are raising awareness of the potential of urban rewilding. The application of rewilding to cities is gaining momentum through media exposure, helped by Lulu Urquhart and Adam Hunt’s ‘A Rewilding Britain Landscape’ winning Best in Show at the Chelsea Flower Show in 2022 (Davies and Horton, 2022), and The Wildlife Trusts’ Wilder Spaces

gardens winning Best in Show at RHS Malvern (The Wildlife Trusts, 2023), demonstrating that spaces intended for people can also be designed for wildlife. Its relevance to urban contexts is gaining further traction through recent seminal publications, such as Zoological Society London's *Rewilding Our Cities* report (Pettorelli et al., 2022), *The Book of Wilding* (Tree and Burrell, 2023), and *Urban Jungle: Wilding the City* (Wilson, 2023).

Importantly, this design and literary thinking is becoming embedded in policy in the UK and beyond. London has become the world's first National Park City, with its mayor launching a charter committing to making the capital 'greener, healthier and wilder' (National Park City Foundation, 2023). This manifests in regional policy, such as the London Environment Strategy with targets to make over half of London green space and increase its tree cover by 10 per cent by 2050 (Greater London Authority, 2023b); and the London Rewilding Taskforce's roadmap for rewilding (Greater London Authority, 2023c). Adelaide in Australia has since achieved National Park City status, and by 2025 at least 25 cities are expected to join it, including Glasgow and Southampton in the UK; Rotterdam in the Netherlands; and Chattanooga in the USA (National Park City Foundation, 2023). This reflects ambitious policy worldwide. For instance, through its pioneering bioclimatic urban plan (Zappa, 2023), nature-depleted Paris is committed to increasing its green space to 50 per cent and creating new urban forests, planting 170,000 trees by 2026 (Oliver, 2021). Singapore's Green Plan 2030 sets out the city's ambitious targets for adding 1,000 hectares of green space and planting one million trees, meaning every household will be within ten minutes' walk of a park (Singapore Government, 2023).

Such policy is starting to take shape through inspirational case studies in cities worldwide, which have often been tested by pioneering early experiments in urban nature. 'Pocket parks', based on a concept embodied by New York's popular 1960s Paley Park, are being formed on vacant plots in cities (Paley Park, 2023). One such is Princess Gardens in Berlin, which transformed a former wasteland into a community hub for organic food production and biodiversity; architects Nomadic Green worked with the local community to demonstrate through this pilot project how unused city plots can become oases for nature and people (Architectuul, 2023). 'Tiny forests', dense native woodlands based on the Japanese Miyawaki forest idea, are reviving tennis-court-sized urban plots (Urban Forests, 2017). These are spreading throughout the Netherlands – where another scheme, Utrecht's Muziekplein forest, provides wildlife habitat and helps local schoolchildren to engage with nature – and other European countries (IVN, 2023), including London (Hunston, 2023). Car-free play streets are being implemented in residential areas, emulating the Vauban neighbourhood of Freiburg in Germany,

created over 20 years ago with no parking spaces and a 3 mph speed limit, replacing traffic with green space, pedestrians, cyclists and playgrounds. Newer examples include the Shanghai Zhuanghang Community Garden in China, a landscaped street incorporating wildlife habitat with natural play features themed around a native species of firefly (Moool, 2020).

On city peripheries, Germany's landschaftspark such as Duisburg Nord, completed in 1994, have demonstrated how former industrial heritage can be reimagined as green cultural hubs, hosting activities from cycling to outdoor cinema (Landschaftspark Duisburg-Nord, 2023). Similarly, on the outskirts of New York City Freshkills Park is transforming a former landfill site into a wild haven. The redevelopment will create a 2,200-acre park over 30 years, combining wetlands, meadows and creeks with public event spaces, playgrounds and recreation trails (Freshkills Park, 2023).

We need to create more of these biodiverse green spaces and connect them with equally nature-filled routes to form comprehensive urban habitat networks for wildlife and humans. Recent examples of such routes include New York's High Line, a linear park with planting designed by Piet Oudolf and managed for pollinators, which has replaced a former elevated railway (The High Line, 2020). Singapore's Nature Ways project is creating green routes, already stretching a distance of 190 km, that act as wildlife corridors between the city's green spaces, and connect residents with local nature. Bishan-Ang Mo Kio Park, part of the network, features a renaturalised river with banks of wildflowers and picnic lawns, improving access to the water for residents (An, Chen, and Li, 2020). Other new initiatives that offer real promise include the reintroduction of beavers to city waterways, such as in the London Borough of Ealing (Bowen, 2023).

As cities encroach on surrounding landscapes, or the destruction of natural habitat to provide resources for cities forces animals to seek opportunities elsewhere, animals are taking the initiative. The BBC's Planet Earth II television series highlights how wildlife is taking advantage of the opportunities offered by cities, showing spectacles as diverse as urban hyenas in Harar in Ethiopia, flocks of starlings performing murmuration flights over Rome, and leopards stalking Mumbai's streets by night; locals often tolerate or celebrate these encounters, suggesting cultural differences with UK attitudes to urban wildlife (Planet Earth II, Cities, 2016). The children's book *Wild Cities* captures the magic we could all see in this, marvelling at the delights of Sydney's flying foxes, Warsaw's wolves, New York's turtles, Singapore's otters, Paris's herons, Beijing's swifts and Calgary's bears (Lerwill, 2021). Urban rewilding is a way to manage this reality and purposefully design multispecies shared space within cities. During lockdowns in the Covid-19 pandemic, animal influxes to the deserted city streets led to urban sightings



Fig. 6:1 Postcard imagining a future rewilded London.

of feral goats, deer, coyotes, wild boar, beavers and wild turkeys (Moxon, 2021a), bringing a sense of hope for many, and reinforcing the value of our connection with nature. Evidently, however, this lesson was short-lived, forgotten as humans rushed back to normal life.

Why cities should break rewilding's rules

Many of the above examples and the media use of the term 'rewilding' suggest a relaxed definition that encompasses any scale of intervention, any type of nature and any approach to its management. While this might offend conservation purists, it is something to be embraced, to allow freedom of design for rewilding in the city and exploit populist appeal. Any interpretation of rewilding should be welcome, as long as it contributes towards the three broader aims of benefiting wildlife, people and climate-change resilience in the city. Rewilding Britain's statement, 'Urban rewilding is focused on bringing nature and wild spaces into cities and towns to benefit wildlife, and people's mental and physical health' (Rewilding Britain, 2023) is helpful, offering room for different approaches and implementation at different scales. There is good reason in cities to break some

typical rules of rewilding concerning aesthetics, species and human intervention.

Indeed, given its proximity to people, urban rewilding demands special treatment to avoid amplifying universal controversies around aesthetics, safety and species, alongside consideration of uniquely urban issues, such as perceived irrelevance to the city (Moxon, 2021b). Arguably, to please people and gain their initial support, urban rewilding should not be 'too wild'. From a design perspective, some tidiness – in the form of clipped hedges, geometry and built elements – is desirable to make nature aesthetically acceptable in the city by providing contrast and framing for the planting, and harmonising with the surrounding architecture. This is especially true in spaces that are on display to passers-by, such as public squares and front gardens, whereas in allotments, back gardens and parks a more naturalistic approach can be taken.

Few urban sites can truly become self-sustaining ecosystems, so habitat can be skewed somewhat towards attracting favoured species that will engage people by, for example, providing nest boxes for robins and solitary bees. However, it is impossible to control which species will actually make use of new habitat. There is certainly room for non-native species in the city, allowing gardeners and designers freedom to fulfil their aesthetic preferences while extending the nectar season and variety of plants for pollinating insects (Frankie et al., 2019). Furthermore, long-established non-native animals, such as grey squirrels and parakeets, must realistically be tolerated – and in any case they bring delight to many people through their visibility and character (Cerri, Martinelli and Bertolino, 2020). In addition, real conflict between humans and wildlife is less of a risk in urban than rural environments, as there will rarely be space within the city limits for the controversial reintroductions of predators or herds of large herbivores that worry local people in rural rewilding proposals.

Besides, in urban contexts we can be less concerned about the unintended negative impacts of rewilding that may beset rural interventions. These include actions such as providing nest boxes and bird feeders which favour certain species to the detriment of others, as has been observed in the countryside (BBC News, 2017; Elbein, 2022); after all, urban areas already favour the bold, adaptable, generalist species that will make use of our offerings. Nevertheless, we need to recognise that the artificial homes and food sources we provide for urban wildlife have effects that differ from those of their natural equivalents, and require maintenance, including regular cleaning to avoid the spread of disease.

While fakery has its place, unhelpful forms of mimicry go too far, the proliferation of synthetic grass lawns and plastic ivy screening directly opposing all three aims of urban rewilding by creating sterile spaces devoid of wildlife, contributing to climate change through plastic production, and worsening human

health by releasing microplastics (Pip, 2023). But street art in the form of wall murals depicting local wildlife effectively uses urban culture to communicate a powerful reminder of our need to reconnect with nature.



Fig. 6:2 Mural in Poznan, Poland, reminding passers-by of our need to connect with nature in the city (Siân Moxon).

A new code of city living

Breaking conservationists' rules for rewilding, which have been set for rural contexts and assume returning land to a natural state with native species (Moxon, 2024), should make it easier to excite people about urban rewilding. Nevertheless, people are still the main barrier to rewilding in cities, as they are unused to encountering nature in their daily lives and are often unwilling to put up with its inconveniences. So good communication is essential to engage people in the rewilding process and to encourage cultural and behavioural change. Conservation messaging should educate people on the value of urban nature and their own role in fostering it in their own outdoor spaces, such as gardens, balconies and even window ledges. But it should not hide from addressing people's genuine concerns around urban rewilding. This must include tackling some uniquely urban downsides to rewilding, including inequity of access to nature, vermin, invasive species and 'green gentrification', whereby original communities are displaced by being outpriced from their neighbourhood after environmental improvement (Pettorelli et al., 2022).

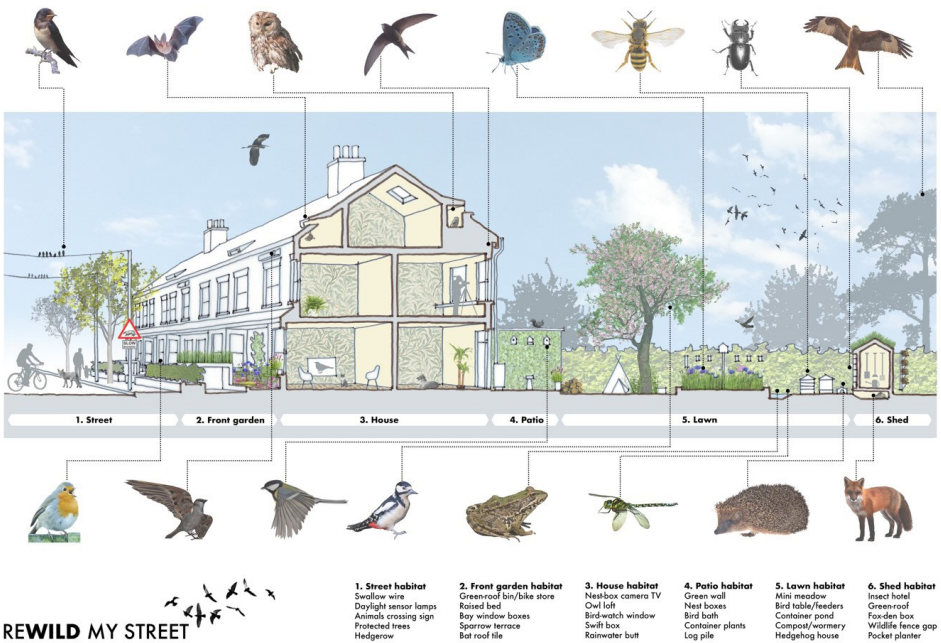


Fig. 6:3 Drawing showing wildlife features residents can add to their own home, garden and street.

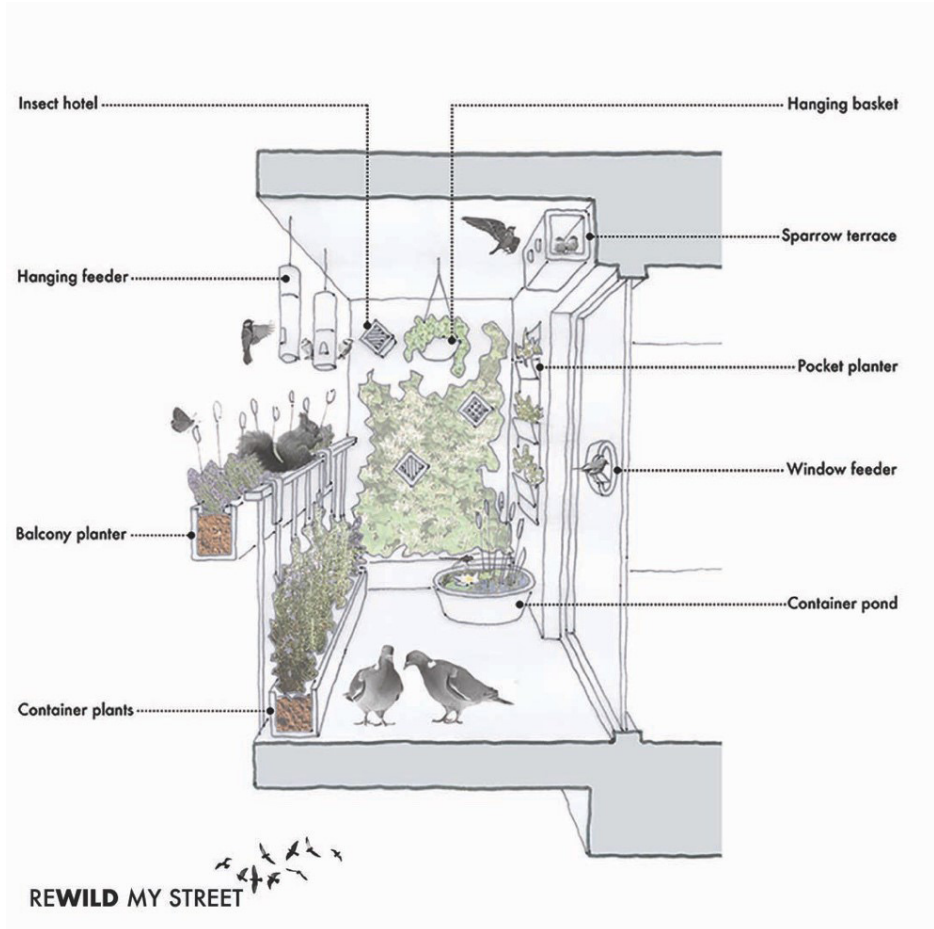


Fig. 6:4 Drawing showing wildlife features residents can add to their own balcony.

Consequently, rewilding the city will not please everyone, and will require city dwellers to become more like many rural folk in their attitude to living alongside nature. It will necessitate a shift in mindset towards greater tolerance of other species. This will require a new code of conduct, to ensure harmonious coexistence between humans and wildlife in the cramped urban environment, enforced through some vital policy changes. This will establish some ground rules to protect wildlife and boundaries in terms of what is acceptable to humans. The main areas under review will concern our approach to pets, pests and mess.

Pets in the city

City dwellers will need to rethink their prioritisation of pets over wildlife. While the explosion of cat and dog ownership during lockdown is positive in revealing our deep human need for connection with animals for solace, the impact of our pets on wildlife must be mitigated.

During the pandemic the UK's dog population soared to 12 million. Dogs might rarely injure or kill wildlife, but their mere threatening presence in the environment adversely alters the behaviour of wildlife, for example stopping birds foraging, feeding their young or resting, ultimately lowering habitat quality (Lees, 2021). So to limit disturbance of wildlife dogs should ordinarily be walked on short leads and precluded from more sensitive natural spaces. In many cities in Canada, the USA and Europe, including Paris, Berlin and Milan, city parks include fenced enclosures where dogs can be exercised off the lead. Similar dog play parks are planned for the London Borough of Hillingdon, while in Liverpool dogs are banned from many open spaces, and in Cambridge dogs must be kept on a lead in many parks (Ferguson, 2023). Designated dog areas give dogs a safe place to run around, while minimising their interaction with wildlife and people in the wider park. This has the added benefit of meaning that children's play areas need not be fenced to keep dogs out. Surely this containment of dogs rather than kids is the right way around. Similarly, homeowners can be advised on how to keep their dogs safe in their gardens, while still providing plants, water features and boundary gaps for wildlife. Keeping dogs out of the garden at night can also avoid the risk of conflict with foxes and hedgehogs, which could be dangerous for both our pets and the wildlife.

The UK's 12 million pet cats are a more obvious problem, being responsible for killing up to 270 million animals annually, thanks to their strong hunting instinct (Steinmark, 2022). Cats should not therefore have a default right to roam, but be kept indoors, at least overnight and during the bird-nesting season. In parts of Europe, including Waldorf in Germany, cat owners are required by law to keep their felines inside throughout spring to protect local birds. At this time of year many bird species have nestlings and fledglings that are unable to fly and therefore vulnerable to passing cats. Throughout the year birds are more vulnerable to predators during their peak times of activity, at dawn and dusk; and rodents and mice are nocturnal, making them more likely to be encountered by cats that are out by night. Keeping cats indoors at night – which is easily achieved with a daylight-sensor- or timer-controlled cat flap – also makes them less vulnerable to car collisions in the darkness. Feeding cats a grain-free diet, incorporating play into their daily routine and ensuring they wear a brightly coloured collar with a

bell can also help. But hopefully the US culture – where 70 per cent of cats are kept indoors, compared to 30 per cent in the UK and Europe (Steinmark, 2022) – of entertaining housecats in securely enclosed ‘catios’³ will one day take off in the UK.

We also need to discuss the upsurge in urban beekeeping. Urban honey is a delicacy owing to the variety of plant species that bees encounter in the city, and beekeeping, like urban growing, has its role in rewilding by engaging citizens with natural processes and encouraging planting of nectar-rich habitat. However, a Paris study found that in areas with beehives wild bees were less abundant (Chung, 2020). Hive numbers should hence be limited to avoid excessive competition with wild bees and other pollinators.

As pet owners and beekeepers are by definition animal lovers, it should be possible to agree on solutions that safeguard both kept animals and wildlife. The UK Government’s important Action Plan for Animal Welfare, which includes sections on both pets and wild animals (Department for Environment and Rural Affairs, 2021), could easily be updated to include codes aimed at keeping the two apart, for the protection of both.

Pests in the city

We need to review our attitude to ‘pests’ in the urban environment, distinguishing between what is a minor inconvenience that could be accepted as part of nature and what is a genuine hazard to humans. On objective reflection, very little in the UK fits into the latter category. After all, we tend to expect citizens of other continents to tolerate much more dangerous wildlife around human settlements, such as elephants in Africa and bears in North America, in recognition of these species’ conservation value. Given the trend of biodiversity decline in the UK, we need to make some comparatively small sacrifices to look after the wildlife on our own doorsteps. Introducing clear regulation and legislation in this area might bring about wider tolerance of ‘nuisance’ species.

There needs to be protection for foxes, Britain’s second favourite mammal after the hedgehog (Royal Society of Biology, 2016), yet maligned by many city residents for their nocturnal noise, raiding of unprotected rubbish bins, indiscriminate digging and chewing, and potent poo. We should value these attractive, intelligent creatures who have adapted to live alongside us so readily. Currently, a family of foxes, owing to their large territory, might easily be lovingly fed by one neighbour then euthanised by pest control at another’s behest. That action, as well as being perverse, is pointless, as another fox will soon take over the vacant territory. Instead,

³ Cat-patios: outdoor cat enclosures.

they can be outfoxed by wrapping chicken wire around potted plants to stop them digging them up, providing a dog tether to deter cubs from chewing your possessions and keeping a poo scoop handy in the garden.

Similarly, it should not be common practice to remove the nests of wasps – which offer natural pest control by preying on other insects – and wild bees, which are important pollinators. We also need to value other insects, including aphids and greenfly, for their role at the base of the food chain, attracting the birds and mammals we tend to prefer. The same goes for slugs and snails. Rather than poisoning them and consequently harming their natural predators, such as songbirds and hedgehogs, through use of pesticides, we should make more habitat to encourage these predators. While this is establishing, we can use natural deterrents, such as coffee granules, eggshells and copper tape, or parasitic nematodes, to reduce numbers, and plant companion plants, such as marigolds, to repel them, while avoiding those, such as hosta, that they find irresistible. We can also be more tolerant of ‘creepy crawlies’, simply moving spiders and insects outside if they bother us inside our buildings.

The same principles apply to plant species. We need to rebrand weeds as wildflowers or ‘hero plants’, as coined by the Royal Horticultural Society (Grierson, 2023), to discourage their persecution. Pesticide Action Network’s guide, ‘Greener Cities: Celebrating pavement plants’, is a good starting point for public re-education (Claydon, 2023). These maligned plants are tough species that are perfectly suited to the local climate and soil conditions, and have evolved with our indigenous wildlife to offer them food and shelter, particularly for the larval stage, with many caterpillars dependent on them. We should be more accommodating about these species that can thrive with minimal attention, while being mindful that climate change will increasingly favour more Mediterranean plants, such as drought-tolerant lavender and rosemary. For example, dandelions offer a pop of joyful spring colour for us, as well as an essential early nectar source for pollinators emerging from hibernation. Ivy also offers early nectar when in flower, nest sites for songbirds later in spring, a late food source through its black berries in autumn, and evergreen shelter for hibernating moths in winter. Moss is waged war against in British lawns – but carefully cultivated and revered for its beauty and texture in Japanese gardens. Instead of reaching for weedkillers, which harm other plants, persist in the soil, kill insects and may inadvertently poison our pets, we should simply hand-weed to manage their spread at the optimum time of year for wildlife. In Germany, pavement plants are seemingly routinely left to grow, softening and adding character to residual urban spaces, from roundabouts to road verges.

We need a reassessment of and a measured response to genuine pests, namely vermin and new invasive species, where they pose a risk to public health and native

ecosystems. For example, we will never eradicate the brown rat from cities, so our boundary for drastic action should be the outline of buildings. In outdoor spaces, encouraging other species, such as their natural predator, the fox, should help redress their prominence.

Mess in the city

We need to clean up our act and address pollution in the urban environment in all its forms, whether from litter, vehicles or artificial light.

While merely unsightly for us, street litter can be fatal for wildlife. Litter can trap, injure and kill inquisitive wildlife. In London's royal parks, plastic bags, balloons and beer-pack rings, along with habitat damage from barbecues, cause particular devastation (*BBC News*, 2021a). Avoidance of plastics in the urban environment must extend to those used as underground weed barriers and artificial lawns.

Conversely we must become more relaxed about the messiness of nature. Pollen, sap and berries from street trees may fall on parked cars, but this is harmless and a minor inconvenience. Hay fever sufferers can medicate their minor symptoms. Fallen autumn leaves are not 'litter', but should be left where possible as winter habitat for insects. Where removal from paths or roads is important for safety reasons, they can be composted as nutritious leaf mould to feed plants or formed into leaf piles elsewhere. Pruned branches and twigs, bark and other dead or decaying wood can also be piled up to create useful habitat. Similarly, seedheads should be left uncut until new growth appears in spring, as their hollow stems are often used by overwintering insects. In Japan this aesthetic of decaying nature is celebrated in the traditional art of *ikebana*, a style of flower arranging that sometimes contains wilted and dried plants to help express all stages of life (Hays, 2012).

We should take light pollution as seriously as land and water pollution. Outdoor lights, often used for decoration or security, disturb wildlife, whether animals such as bats that are active by night or those that should be resting then, such as robins. Where lights are essential, they should be in low-intensity, warm tones, located low down and downward-facing, and controlled with timers or sensors to limit their duration (RHS, 2023). All UK councils should adopt a lighting strategy similar to the City of London's, which gives design recommendations for reducing light spill to protect biodiversity (Spiers + Major, 2018). Many North American cities already have lighting policies, such as Philadelphia's, to switch off lights at night during bird migration periods to reduce bird deaths (Paddison, 2021). Similarly, we

should avoid fireworks, which create intense light and noise, scaring both wildlife and pets (Animal Ethics, 2023). For noise and air pollution reasons, we also need to reduce the dominance of cars in city streets. Doing so, alongside the human health benefits, would reduce the risk to wildlife of traffic collisions and the impact of road noise on wildlife, from birds to insects (*BBC News*, 2021b).

Enabling rewilded cities

Undoubtedly, a new approach to redeveloping cities is needed from designers and policymakers to echo and support any shift in attitude and behaviour among citizens.

Designers working in the built environment will need to try to think like an animal. Urban designers should incorporate wildlife tunnels under roads, insect crossings within paths, lighting that minimises disturbance of wildlife, and rain gardens. Architects should incorporate bird boxes, insect hotels and bat roosts in building walls and roofs, alongside green roofs and walls. Landscape architects should include ponds, wildlife gaps in boundaries, and habitat boxes for hedgehogs, frogs and birds. They should plant native leaves for larvae, nectar-rich flowers for pollinators, berries for birds. They should install cover at the ground, shrub and tree layers, and they should seek to minimise hard landscaping. The Wildlife Trusts' 'Homes for People and Wildlife' offers useful guidance for housing (The Wildlife Trusts, 2018), but comparable advice for other building types is much needed. An interdisciplinary approach, where designers and building contractors work with ecologists and behavioural scientists, will be key to the success of urban rewilding. RSPB's collaboration with Barratt Homes to create biodiverse new housing developments provides a useful template and pilot projects (RSPB, 2023). Equally, manufacturers will need to work with conservationists to ensure that the effectiveness of products intended to provide wildlife habitat is informed by research and testing.

This design and construction shift needs to be supported by better statutory guidance from planning and building control. Existing minimal policy comprises limitations on impermeable hard landscaping to counter flood risk, and tree protection orders to protect specific trees. But town planning should go beyond that, to better protect all existing vegetation and require new habitat in all developments. The new policy in the UK of 'biodiversity net gain', whereby new developments must enhance the site's habitat value, is a welcome step towards this (Department for Environment and Rural Affairs, 2020). However, this principle should extend to private housing, requiring extensions to incorporate green roofs and walls, and habitat boxes, and garden relandscaping to include habitat

boxes and ample vegetation. The spatial habitat map being developed as part of London's Local Nature Recovery Strategy (Greater London Authority, 2023) is encouraging, as city regions should identify key spaces for different types of rewilding project and ways to link them.

Building regulations should address the biodiversity crisis as urgently as they are addressing the climate crisis, not least because the airtight buildings needed for energy efficiency offer fewer accidental nesting and roosting spaces for wildlife (Gunnell, Murphy and Williams, 2013). New buildings and extensions should be required to use, for example, bird-safe glass in windows, and built-in habitat boxes in roofs and walls.

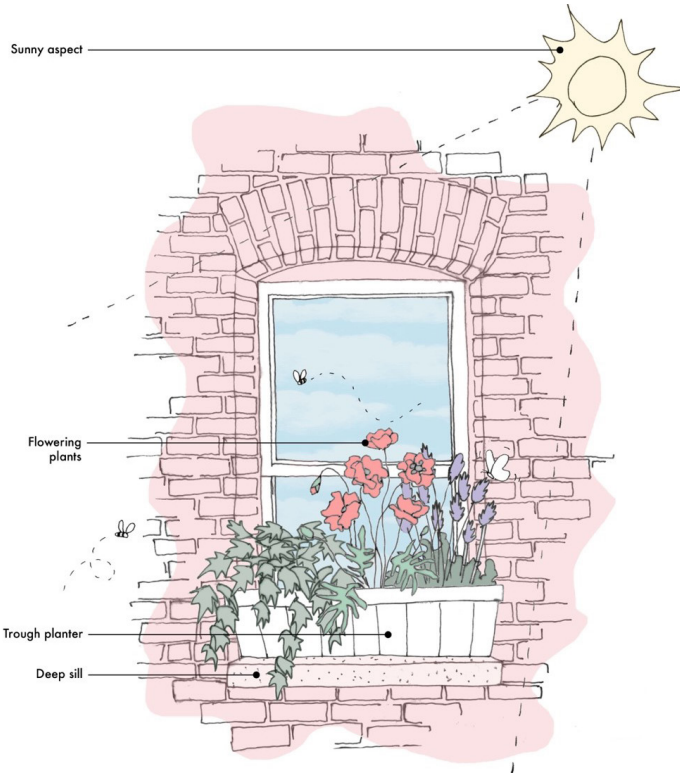
Schemes that empower residents and local communities to take action will be invaluable. France is leading the way with Paris's *Permis de Végétaliser* scheme, in which residents can adopt public spaces for gardening projects (Ville de Paris, 2023), and with Rennes' participatory planning scheme, *Fabrique Citoyenne*, where residents can propose community improvement projects, often with an environmental emphasis, for funding in their local neighbourhood (Rennes Ville et Metropole, 2023). In the UK, *Trees for Streets* liaises with local councils nationwide on behalf of residents who sponsor a new tree on their street (*Trees for Streets*, 2023); and *Abundance London* carries out planting projects, from hedgerows to meadows, in public spaces in south-west London (*Abundance London*, 2023), which could be replicated elsewhere. My own *Rewild My Street* campaign affords a design toolkit to inspire and empower urban residents to adapt their homes, gardens and streets for wildlife (Moxon, 2023).

A strong message about the need to foster urban biodiversity should be sent to citizens from government at national, regional and local level. Building upon the long-overdue UK phasing out of peat in garden compost (Department for Environment and Rural Affairs, 2022b), by banning non-wildlife-friendly management practices (such as the use of chemical pesticides, fertilisers, plastic lawns and leaf-blowers) by homeowners and garden-maintenance companies would achieve this. It could herald a move away from the urban obsession with tidiness regardless of the impact on wildlife, towards a culture where more relaxed gardening practices, such as avoiding cutting lawns during *No Mow May* (Plantlife, 2023) and leaving fallen leaves to benefit invertebrates for *Leave the Leaves* (Xerces Society, 2006), become the norm. Unhelpful practices, such as insurance companies recommending removal of street trees for subsidence or off-street parking for reduced premiums, should be robustly questioned.

Towards urban rewilding

In conclusion, urban rewilding is urgently needed, for both wildlife and humanity. The city offers some freedom to test ideas and work towards a culture shift of accepting, then demanding, an increasingly wild form of nature in cities to help restore biodiversity.

Rewilding is certainly a valid concept for urban contexts, where it would have benefits for conservation and climate-change mitigation, and reconnect many people to nature. To ensure urban rewilding is successful, city dwellers will need to adopt a new code of living alongside nature. This will need to be reinforced by new approaches to urban planning from designers and policymakers



FRONT GARDEN ZONE - Window Box

Fig. 6:5 Window Box drawing from the Rewild My Street campaign, a design toolkit to help urban residents adapt their homes, gardens and streets for wildlife.

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Fig. 6:1 Postcard imagining a future rewilded London. (Siân Moxon/Rewild My Street (with graphic design assistant Nadia Mokadem & altered photos courtesy of Potapov Alexander/Shutterstock, Karen Arnold, pau.artigas, Lawrence Elgar Blog, Steve Cadman, Jordan Carson-Lee/Shutterstock, Peter Church, Adrian Colston, Didier Descouens, EricIsselee/Shutterstock, Freebie Photography, J Gade/Shutterstock, Gordon, H Helene/Shutterstock, George Hodan, Gary Houston, Isarra, Nataliia K/Shutterstock, Aptyp koK/Shutterstock, Bohdan Malitskiy/Shutterstock, Nelson L, P Martin, Dennis Matheson, Dudley Miles, Luis Molinero/Shutterstock, Ninjatacoshell, Keith Pritchard/Shutterstock, Rishichhibber, Denise Schmittou, Charles J Sharp, Piotr Siedlecki, Sonicpuss/Shutterstock, Adam Soukup, Super.lukas, Tarter Time Photography, Andreas Trepte, Peter Trimming, Bryan Walker, Chris Whippet.

Fig. 6:3 Drawing showing wildlife features residents can add to their own home, garden and street Siân and Jon Moxon/Rewild My Street (with altered photos courtesy of Charles J. Sharp, Pau.artigas, Super.lukas, Didier Descouens, Ninjatacoshell, George Hodan, Piotr Siedlecki, Peter Mulligan, Potapov Alexander/Shutterstock).

Fig. 6:4 Drawing showing wildlife features residents can add to their own balcony (Siân and Jon Moxon/Rewild My Street (with altered photos courtesy of J. Gade/Shutterstock, Alexander/Shutterstock, Piotr Siedlecki, Super.lukas).

Fig. 6:5 Window Box drawing from the Rewild My Street campaign, a design toolkit to help urban residents adapt their homes, gardens and streets for wildlife (Siân Moxon and Viktoria Fenyes/Rewild My Street).

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The term rewilding has become part of the common vernacular and with it has come a lot of misunderstanding and even misuse. This has led to a great many misconceptions about what the word actually means. *Great Misconceptions* brings together different writers, with different experiences, exploring some of those misconceptions, misunderstandings and myths when it comes to what rewilding means to them.

The book boasts an impressive team of writers covering a varied mix of important topics. This is a book to inform, provoke thought and debate and stimulate conversation about rewilding conservation.

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