

Why has Natural England committed money through agri-environmental schemes to support the rewilding (Wild land) project at Knepp estate?

The re-wilding project underway at Knepp is an unprecedented opportunity to explore and evaluate the benefits of the strategy of non-intensive meat-production for wildlife and ecosystem services on a considerable area of land. Situated as this land is in southern England, it is also an opportunity to engage neighbouring landowners and the wider public in an appreciation of the importance of ecosystem services, of which a healthy and diverse flora and fauna is an important component. Large-scale, less intensively managed schemes such as this Wildland Project are relatively slow to reveal many of the benefits – indeed, some of the disadvantages may be the most apparent in the short term, but this does not mean that the Wildland project is failing.

Although the concept of ‘ecosystem services’ may at present seem irrelevant to many people, it is vitally important that our dependence on such services is recognised and understood. The Knepp project has the potential to make a major contribution to this understanding, by providing a real-life model that, properly interpreted and presented, can be accessible to everyone. Our human dependence, ultimately, on the maintenance of the environment into which we evolved is so great that NE support for the Knepp project through agri-environment funding schemes is more than justified.

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