

REWILDING KNEPP

TIMELINE

- 12th century* William de Braose (1144-1211), lord of the Rape of Bramber, builds the motte and bailey keep, now known as Old Knepp Castle.
- 1206-15* King John visits Knepp on several occasions to hunt fallow deer and wild boar.
- 1573-1752* Knepp estate owned by the Caryll family, Sussex iron-masters.
- 1787* Sir Charles Raymond buys Knepp estate and gives it to his daughter Sophia and son-in-law, William Burrell.
- 1809-12* Sir Charles Merrik Burrell commissions John Nash to design Knepp Castle with a park designed by Humphry Repton.
- 1939-45* Knepp Castle, requisitioned by the War Office, becomes HQ of the Canadian Infantry and Armoured Divisions during WWII.
- 1941-3* Widespread clearance of scrub and ploughing of permanent pasture at Knepp, including the Repton park, as part of WW2's 'Dig for Victory' campaign.
- 1947* Clement Atlee's post-war government passes the Agriculture Act guaranteeing fixed market prices for farm produce in the UK in perpetuity.
- 1973* UK joins the EU and converts to farming subsidies under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).
- 1987* Charlie Burrell inherits Knepp Estate from his grandparents. The farm is already losing money.
- 1987-1999* Intensification of the farm, including amalgamating dairies, improving infrastructure, and diversifying into ice-cream, yoghurt and sheep's milk, fails to deliver profits.
- 2000* Sale of dairy herds and farm machinery; arable put out to contract.
- 2001* Restoration of the Repton park, with funding from Countryside Stewardship.
- 2002* *February* - Introduction of fallow deer from Petworth House to the restored Repton park.

- December* - Charlie sends the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) a 'letter of intent to establish a biodiverse wilderness area in the Low Weald of Sussex'.
- 2003 First visit by scientists from English Nature to consider rewilding at Knepp.
- June* - Introduction of 20 Old English Longhorns to the Repton park.
- June* - CAP reform, based on decoupled aid, allows farmers to take land out of production while still receiving subsidies, thus allowing Knepp to come out of conventional farming.
- 2001-06 The 'Southern Block' of the Knepp Estate is left fallow, beginning with the worst fields and leaving the most productive fields to last.
- 2003 *August* - Neighbouring farmers and landowners invited to 'A Wild Wood Day' at Knepp, in an attempt to encourage them to support and/or join the rewilding project.
- November* - Introduction of six Exmoor ponies to the Repton park.
- 2004 Countryside Stewardship funds extension of the park restoration to the 'Middle' and 'Northern Blocks'; boundary fences around the Middle and Northern Blocks erected.
- July* - 23 Old English Longhorns introduced into the Northern Block.
- December* - Introduction of two Tamworth sows and eight piglets to the Middle Block.
- 2005 *July* - Duncan, an Exmoor stallion, introduced to the Middle Block.
- 2006 *January* - 'An Holistic Management Plan for a naturalistic grazing project on the Knepp Castle Estate' drawn up for Natural England.
- May* - Inaugural meeting of Knepp Wildland Advisory Board.
- 2007 *Summer* - First turtledoves recorded at Knepp.
- 2008 1.5 mile River Adur restoration project at Knepp gets the go-ahead from the Environment Agency after 8 years of consultations and feasibility studies.

February - Natural England scientists advise that Knepp is unlikely to receive backing for the foreseeable future.

June - Andrew Wood, founder of the Higher Level Stewardship agri-environment scheme, visits Knepp.

2009 Knepp receives notice of Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) funding for the whole estate (to start on 1st Jan 2010), so now the Southern Block, too, can be ring-fenced for free-roaming animals.

March – Nine-mile perimeter fence built around the Southern Block.

March - First ravens nest at Knepp.

May - mass migration of 11 million painted lady butterflies from Africa descends on Britain; at Knepp, 10,000s are attracted by an outbreak of creeping thistle.

May - 53 longhorn cattle introduced into the Southern Block.

August – 23 Exmoor ponies introduced into the Southern Block.

September - 20 Tamworth pigs introduced into the Southern Block.

Scrapes created along 3km of River Adur tributary floodplains.

Five-year monitoring survey reveals astonishing wildlife successes, including breeding skylarks, woodlarks, jack snipe, ravens, redwings, fieldfares and lesser redpolls; 13 out of the UK 's 17 bat species, and 60 invertebrate species of conservation importance including the rare purple emperor butterfly.

2010 *February* - 42 fallow deer introduced into the Southern Block.

July - Beaver Advisory Committee for England set up, with Charlie as Chair.

Sir John Lawton's review 'Making Space for Nature' submitted to government, with recommendations for 'more, bigger, better and joined up' areas of nature in Britain.

2012 A survey by Imperial College London identifies 34 nightingale territories at Knepp (from none in 2002), making it one of the most significant sites in the UK for this critically endangered bird.

2013 *April* - red deer introduced to the Middle and Southern Blocks.

State of Nature report charting the continued cataclysmic decline of British species.

400 species identified in 3 transects at Knepp over one recording weekend, including 13 birds on the [International Union for Conservation of Nature](#) (IUCN) 'Red List' and 19 on the 'Amber List'; and several extremely rare butterflies and plants.

Studies by Imperial College identify 19 species of earthworm at Knepp, indicating a marked improvement in soil structure and function compared with neighbouring farms.

2014 'Knepp Wildland' campsite and safari business opens.

Summer - 11 male turtle doves territories recorded; first sightings of short-eared and long-eared owls. Knepp now has all 5 UK species of owl.

2015 Charlie becomes Chair of Rewilding Britain.

March - Official release of beavers into the River Otter in Devon – the first reintroduction of an extinct mammal in England.

July - Knepp is now site of UK's largest breeding population of purple emperor butterflies.

Knepp receives People. Environment. Achievement. (PEA) Award for Nature.

Knepp receives 2015 Innovative and Novel Project Award at the UK River Prize for the River Adur restoration project.

2015/2016 Dave Goulson of Sussex University records 62 species of bee and 30 species of wasp at Knepp, including 7 bee and 4 wasp species of national conservation importance.

2016 A pen is built at Knepp to receive injured white storks from Poland – the beginning of the White Stork Project which aims to reintroduce this lost species to the UK.

Knepp is one of three sites in the southeast where a colony of reintroduced white storks will be established in order to attract wild, free-flying storks and kick-start a breeding population in the UK for the first time in 600 years.

The first of many violet dor beetles, a large dung beetle last recorded in Sussex fifty years ago, is discovered in the dung of longhorn cattle at Knepp.

Searches for the eggs of brown hairstreak butterflies show an astounding increase of 1600% on the previous year, resulting in 2017 being a bumper year for this species.

2017

Summer - 16 male turtle dove territories recorded; peregrine falcons nest in an oak tree; red-backed shrike sets up a territory at Knepp for several weeks.

Knepp receives the Anders Wall Environment Award for contribution to creating a 'positive rural environment' in the European Union.

2018

January – Knepp Estate is singled out in DEFRA's 25 Year Environment Plan as an outstanding example of 'landscape-scale restoration in recovering nature.'

Summer – 20 male turtle dove territories recorded.

September – Soil research by Cranfield University finds that, under rewilding at Knepp, soil organic carbon and microbial biomass has more than doubled, and there has been a significant increase in fungal biomarkers (mycorrhizae).

Land managers owning, in total, a million acres visit Knepp to investigate the possibilities of rewilding.

A dung beetle survey by the University of the West of England records over 11,000 individual beetles at Knepp compared to 2% of this number on nearby organic farms.

2019

May – UN report warns that one million species are at risk of extinction in the next few years, with serious consequences for human beings as well as the rest of life on Earth.

May – A pair of white storks (one a Knepp juvenile, the other a wild bird) nests in the top of an oak tree in the Southern Block. Unfortunately, the eggs do not hatch.

May – 23 nightingale territories recorded.

August – A juvenile female white stork from Knepp flies across the English Channel, the first of the project to cross to Europe, heading on migration towards Africa.

Summer – 19 turtle dove territories recorded.

County-wide surveys for turtle doves this year estimate only 80 territories across the whole of Sussex.

2020

Spring - golden oriole and hoopoe recorded

Spring/summer – invertebrate surveys record 656 invertebrate species, 7% of them rare. With 129 deadwood insect species Knepp is now the 11th best site on the Saproxyllic Quality Index for Great Britain.

15 May – the same pair of white storks that nested unsuccessfully the previous year hatch three chicks. The last record of successful breeding of white storks in Britain was in 1416. Another pair hatch a single chick in another oak tree a few weeks later. All chicks fledge successfully.

Summer – 23 turtle dove territories recorded.

Summer – two species of nationally important lichens (lemon tart and sap-groove) are discovered.

2021

Spring – Knepp joins forces with coastal farmer James Baird to create Weald to Waves, a project to establish wildlife corridors between Knepp and the sea and northeast to Ashdown Forest. A Memorandum of Understanding is signed with interested landowners.

April – the grizzled skipper butterfly is recorded at Knepp for the first time, bringing the site butterfly list to 37 species.

Summer – 14 white stork chicks successfully fledge from 7 nests, including a single chick from a nest on a chimney at Knepp Castle.

Summer – 20 turtle dove territories recorded; and 40 nightingale territories.

Summer – the small red damselfly, a new species for Knepp, brings Knepp's total dragonflies species to 26.

October – Sir David Attenborough launches the *Earthshot* prize. The first programme in the *Earthshot* documentary series features Sir David at Knepp – the only place in the UK included in the series.

November – a pair of beavers is introduced to a 'semi-open enclosure' in the Southern Block. Both escape within weeks and are subsequently recaptured. One, sadly, dies of a virus shortly afterwards. The other is transferred to an enclosure on

National Trust land. Public reaction to seeing free-roaming beavers in Sussex is almost universally positive.

Data analysis of digital laser scanning technology by Queen Mary University, London, estimates 1.3 million square metres of scrub and young trees have naturally colonised Knepp since the beginning of the rewilding project.

Back from the Brink: Ancients of the Future project is completed at Knepp, including bat, lichen and saproxylic invertebrate surveys and the haloing of future veteran trees in the Repton park.

2022

January – Environment Secretary George Eustice announces funding for rewilding and cites Knepp as an exemplar site.

January – two more beavers introduced to the Southern Block, this time into a temporary enclosure where it is hoped they will settle and have kits and become loyal to the site, before being released into the larger area.

January – *The Wonder of Song* airs on BBC, featuring Sir David Attenborough and Knepp's nightingales.