

Giving Back Wild

A Guerilla Guide to Re-wilding Earth

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Consensus is boiling that humans have become hyper-exploiters, impacting and taking so much from nature that remaining ecosystems are entering death spirals. Is it possible for human's bred-in exploiter culture to shift from a taking lifeway from the wild to a way of giving?

Just as humans can turn civilization's wrenches against logging machines to halt destruction, they can turn their civilized brains and bodies to recovering earth's wild.

Rewilding Earth draws from restoration ecology, the method scientists use to restore land toward its most recent pristine condition. The drawback of restoration ecology is its focus on functions serving civilization, not purely for wild habitat.

But anarchists can adapt the science with a liberation ethos. Humans have blocked wild animals and nature from living on their own terms. Just as animals need human allies in liberating themselves, nature as a whole needs human allies. Rewilding Earth is human interaction with nature for nature liberation.

Exploiter culture has shuffled species about with unexpected detrimental consequences. Species introduced against their will into habitats not their own have degraded natural areas, even contributed to extinctions. The aim of the interaction is regaining lost ground for return and strengthening of co-adapted indigenous wildlife communities.

Humans everywhere are acting on their wild calling to restore habitats. Individuals with specialized knowledge work freely on their own hiding in plain sight. Groups make a larger statement to the surrounding community and can strengthen and spread.

The first step in guerrilla rewilding is learning which plants and animals live around you and how they interact. This can feel daunting at first, but local guidebooks and connections with others with similar interests offer support and inspiration. Each locality likely has assistance and information in places like universities, libraries, government agencies, and organizations such as native plant society, Audubon and other wildlife groups.

Start slowly. Choose a place you visit regularly and feel motivated to adopt. As you come to know the place, your interactions will become more intuitive.

Examples of Inviting and Assisting Wildlife

* Place round logs and sided logs flat side down on moist soil in shade near water sources for salamanders. Snakes and lizards prefer logs in sunny grass.

* Create natural water holes and a radius of lush vegetation around water sources for cover. Mud puddles add minerals to butterfly diets. Leave piles of stones, fallen branches and leaves in piles near wet areas for amphibians.

* Protect and enlarge patches of shrubbery for ground birds.

* Coax wildlife in by creating their preferred conditions (e.g., expanding native grass patches for snakes).

* Plant a diversity of flowering native species to attract native pollinator bees, butterflies, moths and humming-birds.

* Return structural diversity of trees, shrubs, ground cover—perennials, annual, grasses, ferns and moss—for nesting, foraging and cover.

Life Revolves Around Plants

To un-degrade natural areas Re-wilding Earth draws from the Bradley method, a strategy of gradual removal of non-native invasive plants allowing nearby indigenous plants to recover ground. Created by sisters Joan and Eileen Bradley in Australia, this method has proven successful in the bush and on other continents as well.

The three basic principles are:

1. Begin control in undisturbed areas, and then work out toward heavier infestation.
2. While removing nonindigenous plants, minimize disturbance to soil, native plants and wildlife, and
3. Do not over-clear.

* Focus on strategic, paced, indigenous regeneration. Observe native species and their interconnections over time. Remove weeds that can be expected to be replaced soon by regenerating natives.

* Aim for increased stability. The post-agriculture hallmark is quick disruption to nature. Change needs to be slowed and reversed with gentle shifts.

* Increase indigenous diversity. What nature remains in cities are remnants of native communities under constant, rapid attack by opportunistic introduced species. Start with native remnants, and invite return of the missing ecosystem pieces. Observe and draw from nearby wilder communities with similar conditions.

* Monitor. Return and re-return to the same place, using all senses to notice how life and their connections are changing, envision what is possible, plan and re-plan.

* Maintenance: Nearby introduced non-natives constantly attempt to spread into natural areas; this will be an ongoing battle.

Weed Control (from Gentlest to Most Disruptive)

Remove seedlings: Where non-natives are moving in, this is likely the most important intervention.

Covering and trampling: Give natives the advantage. Place pulled weeds on top of live weeds. When walking in a natural area, step on nonnative species.

Remove flowers/seeds: This can afford time for encroaching natives to regenerate, or serve as a temporary measure to halt spread until weed removal.

Repeat cutting: This eventually exhausts most roots while keeping the soil stable.

Snagging: Girdling or topping and removing branches from a tree has the added advantage of creating vital snag habitat.

Hand removal: Gentle loosening & pulling weeds, holding down the soil with one hand while removing with the other. When leaving weeds on site, place them on top of their own kind, condensing not spreading them.

As an area recovers, other species will move in to take hold. (If unsure of identification, take a picture for an expert to confirm.) Pace is determined by rate of native plant spread. If nearby native populations are few, re-introducing natives may be needed.

Propagation (from Gentlest to Most Disruptive)

Thinning stump shoots: When a mature native tree falls, a mat of shoots may spring up. By selecting a couple strong shoots and cutting back all others, the tree may regrow.

Seed dispersal: Certain species propagate easily from seed. When seeds form, take some to scatter.

Live staking: Certain species propagate well by staking branch cuttings.

Layering: Certain species layer at nodes or branch tips to form separate plants. By lightly covering these plants at the node or tip with soil, they will grow roots, and can be left or divided.

Dividing: Certain species can be divided at the roots, rhizome or stolon.

Bare root planting: When planting watering in, creating moats to hold water or ringing with natural mulch can lead to higher survival rates.

Transplanting: If a species is growing lushly in one area and needed in another, this could be a good option.

Human disconnection from nature instigated assaulting nature to the point that most nature must be set free from humans frolicking in it, at least for a while to recover. With increasing human and pet populations fragmenting dwindling natural areas, defragmenting wildlife habitat is critical.

Entrances to work trails can be camouflaged behind thickets to discourage more encroachment. New forming trails can be closed with plant barriers like thorny shrubs.

The wildest way to be in nature now is Rewilding Earth toward liberation.

Thank you for giving by using your brain and body to return indigenous habitat.

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