

II NATIONAL REWILDING SYMPOSIUM

SUMMARIES BOOK



Organization: Rewilding Portugal

Partners: Rewilding Europe, Turismo de Portugal, Galeria da Biodiversidade

THE SYMPOSIUM

The II National Rewilding Symposium, with the main theme being “Wildlife Return to Portugal”, held at the Gallery of Biodiversity in Porto, in the 3rd and the 4th of November, organized by Rewilding Portugal, and funded by Rewilding Europe and Turismo de Portugal, aimed to celebrate and deepen rewilding practices in Portugal, bringing together researchers, managers, and public administrators to discuss ecological restoration, species reintroduction, and population reinforcement, with a particular focus on the return of the beaver and the Iberian ibex.



ATTENDEES

95 presential attendees in two days

+2.000 people watched it online

12 gave feedback

TOPICS

Ecological restoration

Return of iconic species

Coexistence

FEEDBACK

100% satisfied with the event organization

Highlights: location, catering, staff, moderator

92% learned more about the rewilding approach

FIRST DAY (3RD NOVEMBER)

The event was opened and moderated by Bárbara Pais, who emphasized the importance of collective participation, encouraging the audience to submit questions and comments in real time via QR code and Mentimeter.com. The main focus was to extract knowledge and experience from both speakers and participants, fostering a joint reflection on how to make Portuguese ecosystems more alive and functional.

Pedro Prata, Executive Director of Rewilding Portugal, welcomed participants, thanking the event's sponsors, organizers, and team. He stressed that the symposium sought to unite efforts to make Portugal wilder, sharing European best practices, identifying challenges, and exploring solutions for restoring nature and ecosystem functionality.

To set the tone for the first panel, a poetic reflection was shared, emphasizing the importance of truly “seeing” nature with open eyes and ears, without preconceptions, and stimulating participants to observe and question actively throughout the symposium.

Block 1 – “Wildlife Return in Europe and Portugal”



EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE, PROVIDING A BROAD VIEW OF REWILDING ACROSS EUROPE.

Carolina Navarro, Head of Wilder Nature at Rewilding Europe, presented the comeback of wildlife in Europe over recent decades, highlighting success stories such as the European bison, Eurasian beaver, Iberian lynx, and wolves. She emphasized that recovery is possible even in densely populated areas but requires coordinated human action. She advocated moving from coexistence to “co-prosperity,” where wildlife recovery also benefits local communities, giving examples of sustainable production and added value for local products.



NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE, FOCUSING ON INITIATIVES AND CHALLENGES IN PORTUGAL.

Pedro Prata, Executive Director at Rewilding Portugal, discussed the vision for a wilder Portugal by 2050, focusing on the Greater Côa Valley. He highlighted the need to restore ecosystems and natural processes, protect threatened species, and make conservation feasible legally and financially through tools like easements and co-management between the state and civil society. He shared practical examples of species reintroduction, protection of private lands, and community involvement, advocating ambitious, measurable, and scalable actions to ensure wildlife recovery and ecosystem resilience.



HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE, OFFERING ECOLOGICAL AND TEMPORAL CONTEXT TO UNDERSTAND ECOSYSTEM CHANGES.

Afonso Barrocal, Conservation Biologist at CE3C, emphasized the importance of integrating historical and paleontological data into conservation planning. Using examples like the Iberian wolf, brown bear, Eurasian lynx, and European beaver, he showed that understanding past distributions helps avoid shifting baseline mistakes and enables more accurate, ambitious restoration targets. His work informs how species and ecosystems can recover and adapt to future changes.

KEY POINTS ADDRESSED

Ecology	Focus on species reintroduction, habitat restoration, and maintaining ecological balance.
Economy	Potential benefits include eco-tourism and rural employment; projects require sustainable funding and long-term maintenance planning.
Regulation	Compliance with national/EU laws, impact assessments, and public consultation are essential.
Social Impact	Community engagement and education increase support and reduce conflicts.
Strategy	Clear objectives, scientific monitoring, and incremental scaling are critical. Collaboration among NGOs, governments, and private sector is key.

TAKEAWAYS

- Rewilding is more than just releasing animals; it requires scientific, legal, and social planning – a significant part of Rewilding Europe's and Portugal's work in the last years.
- Balancing ecological conservation with human interests is essential.
- Economic opportunities exist, but regulatory and financial challenges must be managed and addressed without the usual fear of speaking about financial sustainability for nature conservation NGOs.
- Community engagement and transparent communication are critical to reduce conflicts.
- Success depends on clear objectives, continuous monitoring, and gradual scaling.



Block 2 – “The role of reintroductions and population reinforcements”

The second panel had a special focus on the technical aspects of species reintroductions and population reinforcements. A panel that was dedicated to explore how reintroductions restore ecological processes, biodiversity, and landscape dynamics. It also had an emphasis on audience engagement, and the participants were encouraged to ask questions and contribute insights.



SUCCESSFUL REINTRODUCTIONS IN THE NETHERLANDS

Leo Linnartz, Team Knowledge Manager at ARK Rewilding Netherlands, highlighted the role of large herbivores and beavers in restoring ecosystem processes. Using examples from the Netherlands, he explained how reintroductions of species like bison, beavers, and horses create mosaic landscapes that enhance biodiversity, from plants to insects, and restore natural hydrology and soil dynamics. He stressed that grazing is an ancient ecological process, not equivalent to modern mowing, and emphasized the importance of engaging people with nature to ensure long-term conservation success. His work demonstrates that reintroductions are about restoring ecological functions, not just individual species.



THE EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE AND THE EUROPEAN WILDLIFE COMEBACK FUND

Sophie Monsarrat, Rewilding Landscapes Manager at Rewilding Europe, highlighted the European Wildlife Comeback Fund as a key tool for restoring keystone species across Europe. She emphasized that while some species have naturally recolonized, many require active reintroduction or population reinforcement due to barriers and low abundance. Focusing on over 30 keystone species—including large herbivores, predators, and scavengers—her team works to restore ecological processes such as natural grazing and nutrient cycling. Sophie showcased examples from multiple landscapes, stressing that viable populations must be able to live independently in the wild. The fund provides flexible financial support for reintroductions, 36 species in 13 countries already.



POPULATION REINFORCEMENT AND RECOVERY OF THE CINEREOUS VULTURE IN PORTUGAL

José Pereira, biologist and conservation specialist, president of Palombar, presented the LIFE “Return of the Cinereous Vulture” project, focused on reinforcing *Aegypius monachus* populations in Portugal. He emphasized that while the species has been slowly recolonizing since 2010, active translocation and soft-release of rehabilitated vultures are crucial to boost population size and genetic diversity. The project combines acclimatization aviaries, supplemental feeding, nest platform installation, and habitat management to support breeding success. José highlighted the importance of minimizing human contact, monitoring individuals with rings, and fostering collaboration with local communities, authorities, and partner organizations. Since the project began, Portuguese breeding pairs have increased from 40 to over 100, demonstrating the effectiveness of coordinated conservation efforts.

KEY POINTS ADDRESSED

Ecology	Focus on reintroducing scavengers and semi-wild herbivores, habitat restoration, and restoring natural predator-prey dynamics.
Monitoring and behaviour	Ensuring social cohesion in herds, promoting natural foraging and anti-predator behavior, and reducing artificial feeding are key for ecological success.
Regulation	Navigating EU laws on carcass disposal, veterinary treatments etc. is critical; exemptions and derogations are needed for semi-wild species.
Social Impact	Public perception varies; community engagement and education are essential to accept wild or semi-wild animals and coexistence with predators.
Strategy	Use of mobile or private feeding areas, fencing for conflict reduction, and gradual expansion into connected corridors; international collaboration is important.

TAKEAWAYS

- Semi-wild species need space, social structure, and predator-prey dynamics to fulfill their ecological role.
- Artificial feeding is a transitional tool; the long-term goal is natural food availability.
- Collaboration across countries and sectors is essential for migratory and climate-shifting species.
- Public acceptance, legal adaptations, and careful monitoring are critical for scaling and sustainability.



Block 3 – “Success stories in the Iberian Peninsula”

In this final panel of the day, the session brought together three distinguished experts who shared concrete success stories from the Iberian Peninsula, in reintroduction and reinforcements cases. Three inspiring examples that show how conservation and species recovery become possible when science, determination, and collaboration come together: the recovery of the Iberian lynx and the potential to replicate this model with the wildcat, the reintroduction of the osprey in Portugal, and the comeback of the purple swamphen in Iberian wetlands.



THE CASE OF THE IBERIAN LYNX AND THE POSSIBILITY OF REPLICATING IT WITH THE WILDCAT

Rodrigo Serra, Director of the National Centre for Iberian Lynx Reproduction, presented the remarkable recovery of the Iberian lynx and the lessons it offers for conserving the European wildcat. He described how coordinated efforts between Portugal and Spain — combining captive breeding, habitat restoration, and scientific research — have brought the species back from the brink of extinction. Serra noted that more than 400 lynx have been released into the wild in Portugal and Spain, with Portugal's population now exceeding 350 individuals. He concluded by emphasizing that this successful model could inspire similar action for the wildcat, but hybridization risks have to be effectively managed.



THE REINTRODUCTION OF THE OSPREY IN PORTUGAL

Paulo Célio, affiliate professor at the Universities of Montana and Porto, shared the story of osprey reintroduction in Portugal. He explained how historical records and place names revealed the species' past abundance and detailed the decline that left it virtually extinct in the country. The project involved international collaboration with experts from Finland and Sweden, creating field bases, feeding programs, and artificial nesting platforms to support juveniles brought from abroad. Célio highlighted the ongoing challenges: ospreys are migratory, sensitive to human disturbance, and limited more by nesting sites than food availability. Since 2015, two breeding pairs have successfully established, producing 14 juveniles, showing that persistence and careful habitat management can allow the species to reclaim parts of its historical range.



RECOVERY OF THE PURPLE SWAMPHEN IN EUROPE AND PORTUGAL

Ricardo Lopes, biologist and researcher at the University of Lisbon and curator of the Ornithology collections at the National Museum of Natural History and Science, presented the recovery of the purple swamphen in Portugal and across the Iberian Peninsula. He explained how the species was nearly extinct due to intensive hunting and wetland degradation, and how captive breeding and reintroduction programs in protected areas helped restore viable populations. Lopes highlighted the importance of Iberian cooperation, with birds from Spain and Portugal forming breeding pairs, and the need to establish meta-populations to reduce risks. Since 1998, hundreds of juveniles have been released in multiple regions, with growing success thanks to wetland restoration, genetic monitoring, and public engagement.

KEY POINTS ADDRESSED

Ecology	Good examples; importance of nesting sites, prey availability, and suitable habitat; managing invasive species etc.
Monitoring and behaviour	Tracking wintering and breeding populations; maintaining territorial behavior in lynxes; observing adaptation of Purple Swamphens to wetlands etc.
Regulation and funding	Working with companies can provide critical resources for conservation but have to be transparent and ethical, to avoid projects that can harm nature recovery
Social Impact	Engaging local communities is essential; apex predators like lynxes provide ecosystem regulation that benefits both wildlife and human activities.
Strategy	Combining soft and hard release techniques for lynxes; increasing nesting platforms for ospreys; habitat connectivity and stepping-stone populations to allow natural expansion.

TAKEAWAYS

- Suitable habitat, prey availability, and social structure are critical for reintroduced species to thrive.
- Soft release and gradual population establishment improve survival and long-term population growth.
- Collaboration among scientists, local communities, and industry stakeholders enhances conservation success.
- Public engagement, education, and careful monitoring are key to coexistence and sustainable expansion.



SECOND DAY (4TH NOVEMBER)

Bárbara Pais, the moderator, welcomed participants to the second day of the symposium, highlighting the impressive talks from the previous day on wildlife recovery in Europe and Portugal. She emphasized the importance of transboundary cooperation, particularly with Spanish colleagues in the Portuguese case, some of whom were attending the event.

Block 4 – “The importance of the beaver as an ecosystem engineer”

The day's focus began with beavers as ecosystem engineers, coinciding with the “Beaver Moon,” a supermoon named for the period when beavers historically grew thick winter pelts and were heavily hunted. Bárbara noted that beavers are making a comeback in Europe and Portugal, and the panel would share expertise on supporting their recovery and management, giving good examples from other countries that could be used in the Portuguese reality.



BRINGING THE BEAVER BACK TO ENGLAND

Robert Needham, Director of Restoration at the Beaver Trust, presented the ongoing efforts to reintroduce beavers across the United Kingdom, highlighting their role as keystone species and ecosystem engineers. Needham detailed the practical strategies for coexistence with landowners, including tree protection, flow devices, and monitoring programs, as well as the legal framework governing beaver reintroductions in Scotland and England. He illustrated how beavers transform monoculture forests into wetlands and diverse riparian habitats, benefiting biodiversity, improving water management, and enhancing ecosystem services.



COEXISTING WITH THE BEAVER IN THE EUROPEAN CONTEXT

Gerhard Schwab, a biologist and wildlife management specialist from Germany, presented the history and reintroduction of beavers across Europe, emphasizing their role as keystone species and ecosystem workers. He described how beavers, once nearly extinct due to hunting for fur, meat, and castoreum, were gradually restored through targeted releases in countries including Germany, France, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Spain, and the UK. Schwab highlighted their ecological impact, showing how beavers transform rivers and floodplains into wetlands, increase biodiversity, retain water during floods, and maintain flows during droughts.



ECOLOGY AND ROLE OF THE BEAVER – THE REALITY OF THE SPECIES IN SPANISH TERRITORY

Benjamin Sanz, Spanish tracking specialist, presented tracking techniques: tree cuts, bark stripping, branch transport, root consumption, footprints, scent mounds, and seasonal differences in feeding marks. He highlighted how beavers change feeding areas over time and how water depth and recent markings help distinguish family groups from solitary individuals. He concluded by outlining the value of this monitoring: understanding territory occupation, movement, group number, habitat use, and the best periods for detection. Overall, Sanz portrayed the beaver as a re-emerging native species whose careful tracking is essential for managing its quiet expansion in Iberian rivers.

KEY POINTS ADDRESSED

Ecology	Beavers in Iberian ecosystems build bank dens and lodges in water; importance of suitable rivers, riparian vegetation, and natural refuges.
Monitoring and behaviour	Tracking populations, lodge construction, dispersal patterns, and impacts on waterways; observing adaptation to different habitats and vegetation.
Regulation and funding	EU legal protection transformed beavers from persecuted to protected species; reintroduction projects require transparency, compliance, and monitoring.
Social Impact	Engaging local communities is essential to minimize conflicts; beavers regulate ecosystems, benefiting biodiversity and ecosystem services.
Strategy	Careful monitoring, territory protection, gradual adaptation to human-influenced habitats; use of stepping-stone areas for natural expansion.

TAKEAWAYS

- Suitable habitat and resource availability are critical for beaver survival and expansion.
- Community engagement and conflict mitigation facilitate coexistence.
- Legal frameworks and scientific protocols increase reintroduction success.
- Continuous monitoring allows strategy adjustment and ecosystem protection.



Block 5 – “The return of the Ibex to Portugal”

This panel focused on the ecology, reintroduction, and socio-economic potential of the mountain goat (Ibex) in Portugal. The discussion explored how reintroducing this species can restore ecological processes, enhance biodiversity, and provide opportunities for sustainable tourism and local economic development. Audience engagement was encouraged, with participants invited to ask questions and share perspectives.



ECOLOGY AND ROLE OF THE IBEX IN NATURAL ECOSYSTEMS

José Granados Torres, from the Natural Environment Management Service of Granada, presented the ecology and management of the Iberian ibex (*Capra pyrenaica*), emphasizing its role as an ecosystem-engineering ungulate that shapes vegetation, disperses seeds, and supports predators and scavengers. Granados highlighted current challenges linked to high densities, including vegetation damage, disease transmission, and lower body condition and trophy quality. He also reviewed taxonomy, genetic diversity, and age/sex structure, noting generally low genetic differentiation but important local types. The ibex remains both a key Mediterranean herbivore and a species requiring active, adaptive management.



THE TOURISTIC AND ECONOMIC POTENTIAL OF THE IBEX, INCLUDING PHOTOGRAPHY

João Ferreira, nature photographer, presented the tourism and economic potential of the Iberian ibex, focusing on wildlife photography as a powerful tool for attraction and value creation. He noted that ibex offer ideal photographic opportunities: they are numerous in certain areas, often allow close approach, remain engaged in natural behaviour around observers, and inhabit visually striking landscapes. These traits make them especially appealing for photographers and nature tourism. Ferreira emphasized that ibex can generate significant indirect benefits for local communities by drawing visitors, promoting outdoor recreation, and encouraging conservation-minded tourism. He framed the species as a natural asset capable of supporting sustainable economic activity while increasing public appreciation of mountain ecosystems.



THE POTENTIAL OF THE IBEX AND ITS REINTRODUCTION IN SERRA DA ESTRELA

Manuel Malva, biologist and Rewilding Portugal's consultant, presented the ecological and socio-economic potential of reintroducing the Iberian ibex to the Serra da Estrela, framing the species as a key ally for restoring mountain ecosystems in transition. He described how the decline of traditional pastoralism has created an herbivore deficit, leading to unchecked vegetation growth, fuel accumulation, and increasingly severe wildfires. The ibex, adapted to rugged and nutrient-poor landscapes, could help rebalance ecological processes by naturally reducing biomass, promoting fire-resilient vegetation mosaics, enhancing biodiversity, and contributing to the recovery of trophic dynamics. Malva emphasized that an ibex reintroduction would also carry cultural and economic benefits: lowering fuel-management costs, strengthening regional identity, and generating new opportunities for nature-based tourism.

KEY POINTS ADDRESSED

Ecology and Rewilding	The Iberian ibex shows strong ecological potential in the Serra da Estrela, benefiting from high food availability and limited overlap with domestic goat
Predation and dynamics	The lack of predators limits full ecosystem functioning. The wolf is key to re-establishing the “landscape of fear” and reducing the need for population control.
Economic opportunities	The species attracts wildlife watchers and photographers, with successful examples already. Nature photography can generate new local revenue streams.
Regulation and practices	Participants discussed the creation of a photography permit for nature photographers operating in protected areas, to ensure responsible practice.
Fire management	As a wild herbivore, the Iberian ibex can contribute to reducing vegetation fuel loads, playing a complementary role in integrated wildfire management.

TAKEAWAYS

- The Iberian ibex holds strong ecological and economic potential in Serra da Estrela and other Portuguese mountain areas, with low disease conflict risk when land use is appropriately managed.
- Predator absence limits natural ecological processes and increases reliance on population control.
- Nature tourism — particularly wildlife viewing and photography — represents a growing and sustainable economic opportunity for local communities.
- Appropriate regulation can ensure best practices and enhance the economic value associated with the species.
- Herbivores like the Iberian ibex can support fire management strategies by contributing to natural fuel reduction.



Block 6 – “The strategy for nature restoration in Portugal”

This panel focused on strategies for restoring natural ecosystems in Portugal, highlighting practical approaches to enhance biodiversity, ecosystem resilience, and climate adaptation. Discussions addressed the role of restoration in rivers, forests, and broader landscapes, emphasizing evidence-based management and long-term sustainability. Audience engagement was encouraged, with participants invited to ask questions and share perspectives.



NATURE RESTORATION AS A SOLUTION AND BUILDING RESILIENCE IN THE FACE OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Cristina Branquinho, Researcher and Professor of Ecology at CE3C and the University of Lisbon, presented how nature restoration in Portugal must be grounded in ecological resilience, especially in dryland ecosystems increasingly affected by drought, desertification and biodiversity loss. Branquinho also emphasized that restoration is not only about planting trees but about removing disturbance pressures and enabling natural processes to recover. Ultimately, she stressed that restoration must ensure long-term ecological, social and economic success, requiring preventive policies, careful monitoring and a shift towards strategies that rebuild resilience rather than relying solely on engineered solutions.



RIVER RESTORATION IN PORTUGAL AND PRACTICAL IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES

Nuno Bravo, from the Portuguese Environment Agency, outlined how river rehabilitation in Portugal relies on nature-based techniques to restore ecological processes. He presented practical interventions such as live staking, brush mattresses, and micro-weirs, showing how these help rebuild bank stability, improve hydromorphology, and revive riparian structure. Bravo also highlighted national efforts to map and prioritize barriers affecting longitudinal, lateral, and vertical connectivity, including the PRIHO programme for removing obsolete hydraulic infrastructures. He emphasized that restoring free-flowing rivers requires detailed inventories, remote-sensing prospection, and integrated ecological and socio-economic assessment.



FOREST MANAGEMENT TO PROMOTE BIODIVERSITY AND SUPPORT ECOSYSTEM RECOVERY

Helena Freitas, Professor at the University of Coimbra and UNESCO Chair in Biodiversity Safeguard for Sustainable Development, explored how forest management must evolve to promote biodiversity in Mediterranean landscapes. Drawing on current scientific evidence, she described how increasing aridity, more frequent droughts, pests, fires, land abandonment, and uneven human pressures are pushing Mediterranean forests to their limits. Freitas emphasized that resilient landscapes depend on planning that aligns with local ecological dynamics, avoiding monocultures and supporting rural economies through extensive agriculture and active land management. She highlighted the need for mature, diverse forests better adapted to fire, noting that controlled burning can be a strategic tool when guided by ecological knowledge.

KEY POINTS ADDRESSED

River restoration	The removal of obsolete barriers on the Côa River was discussed: despite technical-administrative delays, APA remains committed to the project.
Community acceptance	Removing barriers is challenging due to limited community understanding of ecological benefits. Education and transparent communication are key.
Human-Nature Relation	National study on Portuguese perceptions shows a strong desire for reconnection with the natural world. This trend must be communicated to policymakers.
Governance & Administration	Portugal suffers from an administrative void that hampers nature conservation. Legislative and administrative frameworks lag behind sector needs.
Context-specific approach	Universal subsidies often become counterproductive by incentivising measures that do not fit local ecological conditions. Territory-specific policy design is crucial.

TAKEAWAYS

- River restoration, including barrier removal, is a key ecological objective, but requires political will, funding, and improved community engagement.
- Public desire for reconnection with nature is high; integrating emotional, cultural, and relational dimensions into policy is essential for acceptance and success.
- Centralised decision-making: policies must be tailored to territorial realities.
- Ecological management strategies must reflect regional differences to avoid harmful one-size-fits-all interventions.
- Rewarding landowners who adopt low-intensity, nature-positive land use supports ecosystem services and more resilient landscapes.
- The energy transition must be balanced with robust ecological safeguards, supported by stronger environmental literacy to avoid systemic harm.



CLOSING REMARKS

Over these days, we have learned the importance of working with nature's intelligence, including beavers, wild mountain goats, bison, scavengers, dung beetles and much more - preserving complete trophic chains is essential for healthy ecosystems. Most of our landscapes currently support less than 10% of the species they could sustain, highlighting the urgent need for effective ecological restoration strategies. A key lesson has been the humbleness required when studying species: even experts with decades of experience continually discover new insights. This humbleness should also guide decision-making, which must be informed by research, monitoring, and scientific expertise to ensure practical implementation.

Government action emerged as critical. Ahead-of-the-curve compensation measures, capacity building at local and regional levels, and law enforcement support are essential. Reducing pressures through regulation, creating no-go zones for infrastructure, and introducing targeted legislation - such as conservation easements - were highlighted as priority actions. Finally, the symposium emphasized inspiration and community engagement: combining knowledge, experience, and financial resources enables bold action. Participants were encouraged to connect, collaborate, and take initiative to protect biodiversity, applying technical insights while fostering local engagement.

Thanks to all speakers, organizers, hosts, funders and participants for contributing with all your knowledge, passion, and energy. The symposium leaves us richer in understanding, inspired to act, and looking forward to continuing this work in future gatherings.

Thank you for helping us make Portugal a wilder place!



O REGRESSO DA VIDA SELVAGEM

2º SIMPÓSIO NACIONAL DE REWILDING



3 E 4 NOVEMBRO
GALERIA DA BIODIVERSIDADE
PORTO

