

The role of young people in the UK species reintroduction movement

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1. Introduction

Species reintroductions are an expanding and developing area within the environmental sector. A reintroduction can be defined as an attempt to re-establish populations in areas that they previously occupied after a local extinction (Houde et al., 2015; Evans et al., 2022; IUCN, 2013). Reintroductions are carried out for varying purposes. For example, some focus on restoring locally extinct species (Houde et al., 2015; Batson et al., 2015; Seddon, 2011) such as the European bison (*Bison bonasus*), which was reintroduced in 1952 (Dănilă et al., 2022; Bleyhl et al., 2015), whereas other reintroductions aim to promote species conservation by restoring lost ecosystem functioning (Zamboni et al., 2017; Seddon et al., 2014; Robinson et al., 2020). For example, the grey wolf (*Canis lupus*) was reintroduced to Yellowstone National Park in the United States (Boyce, 2018) to control the increased overgrazing by elk (*Cervus canadensis*) since their extinction. Growing wolf numbers reduced elk populations in the park and shifted their distribution away from streams where they were more easily preyed upon (Dobson, 2014) therefore allowing riverbanks to recover (Carey, 2016).

In the UK, there have been several reintroductions, including that of the natterjack toad (*Epidalea calamita*), which experienced vast declines due to habitat loss in the 20th century (Phillips, 2020). Despite early failed attempts to reintroduce (Beebee et al., 2012), by 2009, a success rate of 70% had been achieved from a total of 27 translocations, with adults returning to their original sites to breed successfully. Another example is the Scottish reintroduction of the white-tailed eagle (*Haliaeetus albicilla*), which followed a 1918 extinction due to human persecution (Evans et al., 2009). Following two failed attempts, there were successful releases of individuals from Norway in three phases between 1975 and 2012 (O'Rourke, 2014; Whitfield et

al., 2009). As of 2021, there were 132 breeding pairs (RBBP, 2021), although it is unclear whether the individuals have dispersed sufficiently (Evans et al., 2009). Such reintroductions form an integral part of the rewilding movement in the UK, helping to secure desired conservation outcomes and connect people with nature. Securing their continuation and increase depends on young people entering the nature sector to continue conservation and tackle the biodiversity crisis in the decades to come. To ensure this happens, it is paramount to provide more entry-level jobs, training, paid opportunities, development courses and room for career progression. This inclusion must be intersectional and aim to tackle the exclusion of marginalised groups, including groups such as women, people from the global majority, and those with disabilities, within the environmental sector (Zahir & Jarvis, 2023; Geen, 2024)

Expanding the opportunities available to young people passionate about the environment is essential for bringing different perspectives, ideas, and experiences into the nature sector and developing a stronger environmental community which speaks to the concerns and interests of a broader cross-section of society. This younger generation brings enthusiasm, passion and drive to make a change, with over 80% of young people being eager to take action to help the environment (Natural England, 2021; Geneva Environment Network, 2025). This article will discuss and reflect on the stories of four young adults in the conservation sector, exploring what they do, what inspires them, and their efforts to engage the younger generation in the wider UK reintroduction landscape. It aims to showcase examples for, and connect with, students from Geography and related subjects who may be particularly excited about and qualified for reintroduction-related work, but might struggle to find relevant opportunities, pathways, or inspirational stories to support their involvement. I reflect both on my own experiences in this area and those of three others, Brittany Maxted, Katiana Saleiko, and Anna Williams, based on email exchanges.

2. Şeniz Mustafa

Between 2023 and 2024, I conducted research on the diet of reintroduced white storks (*Ciconia ciconia*) at Knepp Estate, a major rewilding project in West Sussex. This population was reintroduced as part of the wider White Stork Project partnership in 2016 (White Stork Project, 2024), and at that time in 2023, no analysis had been performed to understand their foraging diet. My research

confirmed that individuals were re-adjusting to their environment, and that their environment was suitable, with access to an appropriate diet akin to that of their wild counterparts in Western Europe (Mustafa et al., 2025).

I now work as the urban beaver officer at the Ealing Beaver Project (The Ealing Beaver Project, 2020), which is the UK's only publicly accessible urban beaver project, located in West London. I work to engage and educate the public about beavers, our project, and other wildlife that have benefited from it, as well as other ways to get involved through volunteering, such as habitat management and surveying for species like the brown hairstreak (*Thecla betulae*) and the locally reintroduced harvest mouse (*Micromys minutus*) (Ealing Wildlife Group, 2025). The project's success demonstrates that people can coexist with wildlife and the importance of equal access to nature for urban communities.

It has been incredibly fulfilling to have contributed to the way we understand reintroduced species and to have engaged directly with local communities. I didn't have a nature-focused background growing up, living in Greater London, and I had to work incredibly hard to seek out opportunities and gain the confidence that I was heading in the right direction. Although it is a large responsibility to develop expertise in a field, it is always worth seeing the curiosity and joy it evokes in others. It is essential to me that I do my part to make things better for future generations, and that means adopting and enacting an inclusive mindset. As someone from the global majority, where I have often found myself in predominantly white spaces, I hope to inspire more young people from all backgrounds, facilitate more collaborative community-based projects and continue pushing the boundaries for organisations to be more proactively and purposefully inclusive.

I feel inspired by the changes in access to nature, the emergence of nature-positive attitudes, and the opportunity to bring my experience in species reintroductions back to the Greater London area, where more people like myself can benefit. I have shared this passion by giving workshops and talks to young people, including running a workshop for the Youngwilders (Youngwilders, 2024) at their annual youth summit on white storks. I have led various other nature-focused workshops for young people aged 18 to 30 for the London Wildlife Trust, Crystal Palace Park Trust, and Youngwilders. Additionally, I have delivered speeches and panel discussions on the importance of young people and inclusion for organisations such as the Vincent Wildlife Trust and the Mammal Society, among others. In my new role

as Urban Beaver Officer, I have begun to amplify this work by collaborating with inclusive organisations and creating a more inviting and accessible space for young people from local communities to become curious and inspired by beavers.

3. Brittany Maxted

Similarly, Brittany Maxted works with another reintroduced bird as the Osprey Officer for the Poole Harbour Osprey Translocation Project (Birds of Poole Harbour, 2025b). Working with the Roy Dennis Wildlife Foundation (Roy Dennis Wildlife Foundation, 2025), her work aims to restore this iconic species to its historical range by leading staff and volunteers in caring for, monitoring, and releasing young ospreys (*Pandion haliaetus*). As a direct impact of the project, ospreys have successfully returned to Southern England for the first time since 1847 (Birds of Poole Harbour, 2025a). This success has brought new life to other projects that Brittany is now working on, including the reintroduction of the red-billed chough (*Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*) to the Dorset coast.

As a passionate conservationist, Brittany is inspired by the restoration of the natural world and is aware that her work has helped reverse a species' fate, leaving a landscape richer than when she first encountered it. She commented that she feels most inspired and humbled by the positive impact the project has had on the public's well-being, recalling when she received incredible responses to the live stream nest camera that was installed on the first osprey nest. For instance, a teacher contacted her to explain the positive impact it had on her students with Special Educational Needs (SEN). Although reintroductions are not always motivated primarily by social impacts, she feels that they are an important and valuable outcome of such projects.

Brittany described working within reintroduction science and practice as a hugely exciting space to start a career in, as one of the fastest-growing areas in conservation. However, she shared the challenges that this work can bring, being a young woman in a male-dominated space. She described feeling that her ideas and opinions have not always been taken seriously, which exacerbates her experience of imposter syndrome, which often comes with being one of the less experienced people in those spaces. However, she has found that over time, within the sector, there has been a positive shift in attitudes, which means she is now surrounded by trailblazing young people leading the way and driving progress.

In Brittany's work, she strives to provide opportunities for conservation students to get involved whenever possible, and she hopes that they gain valuable experience

and feel empowered to take ambitious steps in their careers. Moreover, she described wanting to provide young people with the same opportunities she had been fortunate enough to receive and help nurture a culture of knowledge sharing and collaboration in conservation. For instance, she offers free opportunities for young people to engage with nature, including participation in the School Bird Boat Project and the Young Birders Club at Birds of Poole Harbour.

4. Katiana Saleiko

Working within Forestry England (Forestry England, 2025) as the species reintroduction officer in the southern district, Katiana Saleiko leads and assists various conservation translocation projects. Katiana's role, funded by the Forest Wilding Programme and DEFRA (GOV.UK, 2025), focuses on core wild areas driven by natural processes and the recovery of priority species that significantly impact their ecosystems. This includes conducting research on specific species present within their forests, such as pine martens (*Martes martes*), and undertaking feasibility studies for other species, including the Eurasian beaver (*Castor fiber*) and red wood ants (*Formica rufa*).

Katiana is inspired by being involved in projects vital for ecosystem restoration, which involve reestablishing lost ecological interactions and reintroducing missing species to stabilise ecosystems. More specifically, seeing species present in the landscape after the time and effort have been made to reintroduce them is what she finds to be the most rewarding experience. She finds that comments of support from those who have met with and engaged with her through her talks, meetings in the field, or when collaborating on a project to be reaffirming that her work is fundamental to achieving biodiversity goals.

Since beginning to work in conservation, specifically on species reintroductions, over the past six years, Katiana has been given many exciting opportunities. As a young person working within the sector, Katiana speaks to groups of younger children and college and university students about her career. She believes these talks enable her to demonstrate her determination to succeed in biodiversity conservation and species reintroduction. Although her path to her current role was not streamlined, she wants to ensure that younger people understand that their enthusiasm will shine through and to take any opportunity given to them that will push them forward to where they want to be. In this effort, she has taken on a shadow volunteer to join her on-site visits, expert discussions and practical work

necessary to achieve a successful project. Katiana looks forward to utilising her experience and passion to continue engaging and inspiring other young people.

5. Anna Williams

Working as the species recovery engagement officer at The Missing Lynx Project (The Missing Lynx Project, 2025) Anna Williams explores the possibility of bringing the lynx (*Lynx lynx*) back to the UK. The project conducts a social consultation and engagement process to determine whether acceptance of a potential lynx reintroduction by stakeholder groups and communities local to the project area exists (Missing Lynx Project, 2025). The project's interim report found that 72% of 1700 respondents to their questionnaire demonstrated a high level of support and a positive attitude to the project (Missing Lynx Project, 2025). However, a risk to farming activities was identified as the greatest potential risk of returning lynx, and so the project will continue to work with farmers to determine how the project should be managed if lynx were reintroduced (Missing Lynx Project, 2025). Anna's work focuses on delivering the project's social consultation and engagement, primarily through planning and providing The Missing Lynx Exhibition, which toured 10 venues across Northumberland, Cumbria, and southern Scotland in 2024. Anna shared how she enjoys engaging with a diverse range of people from various backgrounds, and how she is most inspired by being able to pass on her enthusiasm to others. In her work, discussions about lynx provide a way to inspire people to spend more time in nature or make small changes in their everyday lives to become more nature-friendly and sustainable. Moreover, she is inspired by the bigger picture and the people she is surrounded by who are determined to restore the natural world. Her experiences have shown her that positive environmental change is possible in the UK, even if it may take time, and that her involvement makes a meaningful contribution to this broader change.

Anna feels lucky and honoured to work within the conservation sector as someone with a keen interest in species reintroductions and their ability to restore balance to ecosystems. She believes that the conservation movement in the UK is at a turning point, and that we must think and dream big to reverse the catastrophic declines in biodiversity and restore our ecosystems. Furthermore, Anna commented that we must reintroduce some of the missing species we have lost over the years to restore the natural processes that contribute to the healthy functioning of an ecosystem. To share this inspiration, the Missing Lynx Exhibition will tour again in 2025, engaging

younger audiences by providing them with the opportunity to learn more about the biodiversity crisis, lynx themselves, and how lynx can benefit our ecosystems.

6. Conclusion

This article showcases a small number of the growing number of young people starting or established in careers related to species reintroductions, facilitating the long-term management of reintroduced species and associated projects. These individuals span diverse roles, from working on master's student projects to those involved in singular or multi-species reintroductions, as well as in scientific and engagement roles. However, they share a passion and desire to make a difference within the species reintroduction space and to pass on the inspiration they feel in their roles to other young people striving to start their careers in this sector. Their stories are shared here with the aim of inspiring others to recognise the multifaceted opportunities available and to derive some learnings to inform future nature recovery research and practice involving young people.

All the projects and roles described above require a multi-faceted approach, assessing both the ecological and social dimensions of species reintroductions and working with multiple different communities to achieve success. This can be rewarding and engaging, but as the above examples illustrate, this work is not without challenges, particularly when entering the species reintroduction space as young people, women or people from global majority backgrounds, amongst other affected marginalised groups (as represented by all or some of the people whose stories are included here to some degree).

The environmental sector is the third least diverse sector in the UK (The Race Report, 2024), and as of 2019, only 3.1% of environment professionals identified as being from minoritised backgrounds compared to 19.9% of other occupations (Green Jobs for Nature, 2022). This is something that needs to be addressed so that all young people have an equal chance to enter and succeed within the sector. While this is outside of the scope of this article, highlighting the voices and experiences of those young people currently working within the sector, particularly those from marginalised backgrounds, can help identify opportunities for change. Ultimately, If the environmental sector is to achieve its goals of protecting and restoring biodiversity in the UK, then those more established in the sector must collectively work hard to facilitate the transfer of skills, experience, and knowledge to younger generations, enabling them to continue restoring our ecosystems and the wider environment.

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