

**FERAL – Searching for enchantment on the frontiers of rewilding, by
George Monbiot
Allen Lane, 2013**

I don't often read a book and think "This needs to be made into a TV series" – but this book is an exception. Judging by the number of tweets saying "I have just finished Feral..." I am not alone in valuing this book.

Monbiot takes the idea of rewilding – a theme that has been steadily gaining momentum in recent years – and proceeds to discuss the many benefits of reintroducing wild animals, extinct in the UK, alongside re-forestation of our uplands and the recovery of fish populations in the oceans.

He uses his zoological knowledge and his journalistic skills to seek out facts and opinions that he blends together with personal stories and anecdotes into a narrative that challenges and informs in good measure. And he takes it on himself to be challenged too, as he devotes a chapter to a meeting with a Welsh sheep farmer who added considerable discomfort to Monbiot's surety over his central thesis.

The role of paleoecology in the concept of re-wilding is visited repeatedly in the book, to make the point that we must use our scientific knowledge and understanding to do more than re-create the ecology of our youth, but go back to an ecology that reflects the post ice-age forests that are the original dominant habitat in the British Isles. This stands against the supposed prevailing view that biodiversity in the UK context means meadows, flowers and butterflies, but not woodland, forest and wild animals and that the blasted heath of our grouse moor uplands have greater importance than the original forests that covered our hills.

This book has come at a crucial time in the environmental debate: it follows up Richard Louv's *Last Child in the Woods* with the call for all of society to re-engage with the natural world and it adds considerably to the important debate about rewilding our landscape and the re-introduction of lost species. Its key message also overlaps to some extent with the land-use plan in the Zero Carbon Britain report written by the Centre for Alternative Technology.

Monbiot takes great pains to emphasise that this is not a plan that can be implemented from above: it must have grassroots support to ensure that it does not become another repressive imposition on pressured rural communities. But equally, who beyond a narrow elite are served by grouse moor?

It is amazing how since its publication, there have been many people in the press discussing the same theme, particularly in relation to flooding, without of course mentioning this book... It is already having considerable influence which reinforces its reputation as a "must read". Prepare to be challenged and get hold of this book.