



# BeWild Prize

WWF-BELGIUM • AUGUST 2023

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## The BeWild prize

The BeWild prize is a prize awarded to the most inspiring **master thesis** on **rewilding in Belgium**.

The **2023 prize** is a trip to a rewilding area in Romania. WWF and its partners are working with local communities in the Tarcu Mountains to rewild the landscape for nature and humans to thrive. 150+ European bison are roaming freely in this region of the Carpathians. You'll visit the Eco-Hub [WeWilder](#), join our rangers during a bison monitoring or tracking activity, discover the Romanian food culture with traditional ingredients from local producers, immerse yourself in a unique experience on the frontline of nature conservation.

*WWF-Belgium anticipates awarding this annually. The prize may differ year to year depending upon resources and opportunities available.*

### About BeWild

BeWild is an initiative by WWF-Belgium to gather and share knowledge, enable field actions, enthuse people but also trigger ideas to help rewild Belgium.

### For who?

All students working on a master thesis in a Belgian University. The thesis needs to address rewilding on the Belgian territory and can be written in English, Dutch or French.

### SELECTION CRITERIA

- **ORIGINALITY OF THE RESEARCH**

The research should propose an innovative approach or present new and/or scalable ideas or perspectives in rewilding.

- **CONTRIBUTION TO THE TOPIC(S)**

The thesis must make a significant/impactful contribution to understanding, delivering, or addressing an issue directly related to rewilding.

- **SCIENTIFICALLY ROBUST**

The jury will evaluate the quality of the methods employed, the relevance of the experimental protocols, the rigor and the reliability of the results.

- **CLARITY AND CONVINCING NATURE OF THE CONTENT**

The thesis should be well-structured, convincingly written, with a coherent and rigorous presentation of ideas.

THE JURY CONSISTS OF WWF  
BELGIUM REPRESENTATIVES

### TO APPLY, SEND

- A one-page A4 summary of your dissertation in PDF format
- Your dissertation in PDF format
- Your supervisor's email address

To [bewild@wwf.be](mailto:bewild@wwf.be) before 30  
September 2023



## WHAT IS REWILDING?

The [IUCN rewilding principles](#), agreed between over 150 rewilding experts, guide practitioners to rewild safely, and suggest mechanisms for policymakers as well as funding agencies to assess effectiveness and therefore to [prioritize support](#).

According to the IUCN, rewilding is the process of rebuilding (following human disturbance) a natural area by restoring (1) natural processes, (2) connectivity between such areas and (3) the complete or near complete food web at all trophic levels. Rewilding is an ecosystem restoration approach. It is not just about conserving but is about restoring too.

Rewilded ecosystems should - where possible - be self-sustaining requiring no or minimum intervention management, recognizing that ecosystems are dynamic and not static.

REWILDING FOCUSES ON [THREE KEY PRINCIPLES](#):

### **Trophic Complexity**

Increasing diversity in the food chain results in enhanced ecosystem function and stability.

### **Connectivity**

Improved connection in landscapes supporting wildlife movement and dispersal, genetic exchange, and facilitating shifts in the ranges of plants and animals in response to climate change and other environmental threats.

### **Natural Disturbances**

Creating space for unpredictable events is a critical component of ecosystem dynamics and natural regeneration.

## EXAMPLES OF TOPICS COULD INCLUDE THE ECOLOGICAL, SOCIAL, OR ECONOMIC IMPACT OF

- dam removal
- nature-based solutions for climate change or biodiversity loss
- impact of natural grazing and the (re)introduction of species (herbivores, scavengers, predators) to enable missing ecosystemic functions and restore functional complexity
- free-flowing rivers
- large protected areas
- ecological connectivity
- natural disturbances
- ...

Topics include everything that is in line with the broad concept of rewilding.



## Different approaches to rewilding

The concept of rewilding is multifaceted. There are different approaches to restoring natural processes and it is often impossible to restore all of these (due to human, financial, cultural, spatial, ... constraints). The initial context and the state of the landscape will determine which of these processes will be restored. Some rewilding projects are called “trophic rewilding,” using an ecological restoration strategy based on species reintroductions to restore trophic cascades to promote self-regulating ecosystems, but not all rewilding projects reintroduce extinct species and instead focus on other natural processes.

### **What is the difference with the more common nature conservation approach?**

“Protect the best, rewild the rest”: the more traditional nature conservation approach is important to conserve rare species or habitats in our country. Rewilding is a complementary approach to nature conservation; [they are not mutually exclusive and should not compete](#) with each other. There are multiple areas (protected or not) that can benefit from this approach to increase natural processes.

Common nature conservation approaches in Belgium often focus on bringing back nature to a previous state (often linked to traditional agriculture). This approach requires constant human interventions to maintain populations of species and specific predetermined habitat types, and to fight ecological succession. Rewilding is a more dynamic approach, without necessarily pre-determining and fixing a ‘Nature target’. Restoration actions can be part of the initial stages of a rewilding project, but then human interventions are minimized to let natural processes structure the landscape (‘laissez-faire’).

### **What about the link with people?**

Rewilding requires local engagement and support. Rewilding actively engages all stakeholders, embraces participatory approaches, and relies on a transparent local consultation throughout the planning process. Rewilding should encourage public understanding and appreciation of nature and should help tackle any concerns about co-existence. We wish for BeWild to be(come) a movement that inspires all members of society to (re)connect with nature.