

THE GRAPEVINE – Issue 24:27th Aug 2020



Dear Friends,

I have been reading an amazing book: Wilding - A Return of Nature to a British Farm. It is the story of Knepp, which is a 3,500 acre estate just south of Horsham, West Sussex. Since 2001, the land – once intensively farmed - has been devoted to a pioneering rewilding project. You may have seen it featured on BBC1s Countryfile a while ago. Using grazing animals as the drivers of habitat creation, and with the restoration of dynamic, natural water courses, the project has seen extraordinary increases in wildlife. Extremely rare species like turtle doves, nightingales, peregrine falcons and purple emperor butterflies are now breeding here; and populations of more common species are rocketing.

The vision of the Knepp Wildland Project is radically different to conventional nature conservation in that it is not driven by specific goals or targeting species. Instead, its driving principle is to establish a functioning ecosystem where nature is given as much freedom as possible. The aim is to show how a 'process-led' approach can be a highly effective, low-cost method of ecological restoration - suitable for failing or abandoned farmland - that can work to support established nature reserves and wildlife sites, helping to provide the webbing that will one day connect them together on a landscape scale.

In the book of Genesis (Gen 1.28 and 2.15), God specifically calls on humans to care for his world, both the living and the non-living creation. He invites us to look after creation as good stewards without abusing it for our own selfish ends. By caring for it properly, we enable it to be fruitful and to play its intended role in giving glory to God. Christians believe that one day the cosmos will be renewed and re-created as the "new heaven and new earth" (Revelation 21) when Jesus will return. It will bring the fullness of life that God intended for his creation: a place where people will truly be at home with their creator God.

How we treat the environment now ought to be a preview, a film trailer, a practice run if you like, of what we will do in the new creation. The future hope of a renewed creation is not a reason to abandon any care for this one. The opposite is the case: there is every incentive to use the goodness and fruitfulness of this world to do what is pleasing to God now. We are connected to the earth and rely on it to care for us, as we in turn should care for it. Martin Luther, who began the Protestant Reformation in 16th-century Europe is supposed to have remarked, "If I knew Jesus would return tomorrow, I would plant a tree today."

Countryfile this past week was at the 5,000-acre Somerleyton Estate, near Lowestoft, to learn more about their 'WildEast' project which aims to return 20% of the region back to the wild by encouraging everyone to pledge 20% of their landscape to nature. I will be giving over 20% of my garden to re-wilding over this next year. Perhaps you might join me.

***'Be fruitful, and multiply,
and replenish the earth'***

