

Transcript

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James Shooter

It's early spring and I'm stood at the top of a hill in the Iberian Highlands rewilding landscape. We've walked a short distance through impressive stands of Black pine and Spanish juniper. There's a satisfying crunch underfoot from the carpet of fallen oak leaves. The only sound interrupting the intricate chorus of birdsong enveloping us at this particular vantage point, which is encircled by even higher hills with even more trees. The bird call I'm most interested in, though, is this. [cinereous vulture call].

It might not sound like much, but these are the cries of a cinereous vulture, also known as the Eurasian Black Vulture. This is one of seven birds acclimatizing back to the wild in a bespoke enclosure just a few meters in front of me. The birds can't see me and I can only get a glimpse of their wingtips at the top of the aviary as they flap their gigantic wings.

And in two months' time, the doors will open and they'll be released into this phenomenal landscape to soar and scavenge and do as vultures do, once again.

[Intro] I'm James Shooter, host of the Rewild podcast, and this is Iberian Highlands.

Spain is big at over half a million square kilometres; it is the fourth largest country in Europe. Its landscapes are diverse. And as I've been working my way down the eastern flank, I've stopped at various wetlands along the way. At the Ebro Delta, I was so excited to see an Osprey soaring over the reeds, traveling north on their way back from the Gambia or Senegal. These could be the same birds that my friends back in Scotland will be looking at in a few weeks' time.

That blows my mind, although not to brag, but there's the added bonus of bright blue skies and warming sunshine, in my view. I am meeting the team from Rewilding Spain in the charming town of Molina de Aragon. Red-billed chough are performing their aerial acrobatics above the towers of a 10th century castle on the hill above me. And alarmingly, griffon vultures seem to be following me wherever I go. I know I'm a pasty Brit, but I hope I don't look that ill.

I jump in the back of a truck with Pablo Schapira, team leader for Rewilding Spain. We wind our way through a maze of forest tracks, up to the acclimatization enclosure. Here, the cinereous vultures have been recovering from various injuries and are getting ready to be released back into the wild.

We go through a security gate led by a man only known as Kempes. It's a nickname for his resemblance to 1980s Argentinian footballer Mario Kempes. He has long hair, wears a trilby, and lights his cigarette from a pack of lucky strike. The team offered to find out his real name for me, but I like the mystery bit.

It is Kempes' job to look after the vultures. He checks on them, keeps their water topped up and feeds them scraps of meat. He's totally responsible for their lives, but the vultures will never see his face. It's imperative the birds don't become desensitized to human presence and start associating them with food. Or else their second chance at a wild life may fail.

The cage is backed by wood to act as a visual barrier, and he feeds them through a small hatch. On the other three sides, the vultures are looking out onto an enticing new home of pine forest and open skies. This is prime vulture real estate.

Pablo and his team have been putting up artificial nesting platforms in the distance, a small human intervention to encourage the recolonization of the species and a return to wilder skies. A number of life size models are already sitting in the nests. Demonstrate to the soon to be released birds that it's safe to nest in the area.

After enjoying a few minutes in the presence of these incredible animals. We retreat back down the hill to a quiet spot amongst the trees. Pablo has been working for African parks over the last 12 years, a non-profit conservation organisation, managing protected areas across the continent, spending time in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia and Mozambique.

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Pablo Schapira

But then I thought that I had, in my mind, always, okay, I would like to go back to Spain and do conservation in Spain and do rewilding in Spain. And that opportunity came up with rewilding in Spain with this new initiative from Rewilding Europe. And there when I saw it, it was exciting. It was exciting to see an initiative with this ambitious long-term project, which I have never seen before in Spain.

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James Shooter

Iberian Highlands is rewilding Europe's 10th rewilding landscape, 850,000 hectares of some of Spain's best wild spaces.

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Pablo Schapira

And that is two different regions in Spain – Castilla-La Mancha and Aragón. And there are three different conservation areas. We have Sierrania de Cuenca Natural Park, Alto Tajo National Park where we are right now and the Montes Universales. So, this initiative combined very unique landscape features. This is a place where one of the biggest rivers in Spain is born – the Tajo River, and that makes all this water sheet very, very important to one of the biggest forests in Spain.

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James Shooter

This Iberian Highland rewilding landscape and the wider region surrounding it is known to some as empty Spain. Human populations have been decreasing here for

many years, reaching densities not dissimilar to those found in Siberia. Less than two people per square kilometre. Traditional activities in the countryside, like livestock farming, are no longer economically viable, and the living conditions out here are tough. For many people, the towns and cities soon became much more attractive places to live and work.

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Pablo Schapira

We are at an altitude between 3000 2600 meters and this is actually the coldest place in Spain. So, in Molina de Aragon, where I'm based right now, we had -15C last week and that's a common thing to have in winter. So, people didn't want to live in these areas anymore.

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James Shooter

I'm grateful. It's not -15 today.

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Pablo Schapira

Yes. Yes, you are just here for two weeks. But two weeks before we had -15. And I'm talking about ten in the morning, not just at night.

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James Shooter

Spain is focused most of its efforts in the protection of nature through the establishment of 16 national parks, the country's highest level of protection. Natural parks were later established as a lower protected area where some natural extraction is allowed to take place within their boundaries. Pablo tells me the focus of the past was more in line with traditional conservation, protecting what was left.

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Pablo Schapira

Now in the last ten years, 15 years, more and more people are saying, well, maybe we should look back and bring back animals that were here before and not just try to give what we have and be a bit more ambitious, not just focusing on the national park, but focus on restoration of all the areas that have different level of protection.

So, I think that there's a good trend now with rewilding, that people are seeing more and more the need for rewilding because it provides you ecosystem services, but also because it's a source, potentially, of business. And these areas, especially in rural areas, they have not been able to attract people to come here to live. And nature is a potential economic movement and people are beginning to see that it's probably a good option.

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James Shooter

And there's a big difference, isn't there, between kind of protection and restoration. So, yeah, whilst the focus on the past is perhaps being protection, it's important to move across to that other definition.

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Pablo Schapira

Definitely. Definitely. It's something that especially in Europe, hasn't been integrated into conservation. If you talk about conservation in Africa, for example, you don't talk about rewilding because it's already integrated into conservation. If there is no more lions, you bring them back, that's it.

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James Shooter

Spain is one of Europe's most biodiverse countries sitting between the Atlantic Ocean and Mediterranean Sea. It hosts four of the nine Biogeographic regions of the EU. Atlantic, Alpine, Mediterranean and Micronesian, which allows for a rich mix of fauna and flora and a high level of endemic species. It has 20 million less people than the UK, where I'm from, spread out over a land area more than double its size. With all this seemingly good news, why does it need rewilding?

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Pablo Schapira

When you look at these areas, you see yeah, compared to other areas in Europe, they are very wild. I mean, but the reality is when you start looking in details, you see that in the trophic chain, there's still some levels that are lost. So, for example, in this area, you see this area you have a lot of a deer, roe deer, fallow deer, but you don't see big herbivores anymore. So now you see all these forests, they are getting very much dense, a lot of biomass. And when there's a fire, it is a huge wildfire. So, you see there's a lack of big herbivores. And that's one of the things that we are trying to do, is to restore, is bringing back big herbivores, using horses or using the Tauros or other big animals that can help us to do that.

That's one of the things. But also, when you look around, you see, well, there's no predators. So, there was the lynx here, there were wolves. There were other animals that are now not here. So, there is a need, because to control all these populations of roe deer and fallow deer you need somebody to regulate that. If you look around, for example, you see a lot of griffon vultures around, there is plenty, it's one of the biggest vulture populations in Europe. But there's no black vultures anymore. There's no bearded vulture anymore. So, we're studying all these animals and there is a big potential.

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James Shooter

It's exciting to think that because the Iberian Highlands has so much natural habitat left intact, they can focus right away on species reintroductions to help crank the ecosystem engine into Top Gear again.

Of the three protected areas which make up a large part of this rewilding landscape, 60 to 70% are owned by local municipalities.

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Pablo Schapira

So basically, we're working more with the public owners. And basically, what we are doing - and there's been a lot of work done in the last two years - to discuss with the municipalities and to show them what are the benefits of rewilding. And we already have some deals with municipalities, where we have, for example, grazing rights.

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James Shooter

Hunting, timber and grazing rights are the three uses of natural resources allowed within natural parks. These activities may sound extractive to begin with, but interestingly, they're actually allowing a route in for restoration. As a public resource, grazing rights go to tender, as it's not been economically viable for many individuals to take this on recently. Rewilding Spain is able to get the contracts, pay an annual fee to the municipality, and they then return the important ecological function of natural grazing to the forest through the introduction of large herbivores.

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Pablo Schapira

Basically, what we started to do this with three municipalities, and they have seen a real benefit because in the moment that we are moving animals, we contract people. We contract what's called head managers. They are taking care of the animals, looking after the fencing and that really brings one family back into the town.

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James Shooter

Despite the income from grazing rights slowing down as people left the region, the municipalities do still make money from timber extraction. But this is another area where, funds permitting, these activities can be made to work for nature and people too.

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Pablo Schapira

We are looking at potentially do some reserves of old growth forests and by doing that we could potentially compensate these municipalities and tell them: look, you are going to cut all this old growth forest because you need the money for the timber. So, how much money would you get for this timber? Okay, we monetise that. So, then we want to compensate you and we make a reserve here and that's what is not going to be cut anymore. And that's going to give money to the municipality and that's going to create a reserve for biodiversity and also an area where people can be proud because they are protecting their forest and they can come with their families and enjoy.

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James Shooter

Whilst empty Spain has allowed nature to survive at a higher rate than anywhere else in the country. Communities still exist here and they are really struggling. If rewilding can bring new opportunities for people and improve life in these rural settlements, then everybody wins.

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Pablo Schapira

The only way that people are going to support and are going to be positive about rewilding, is that it brings socio economic benefit and that means having a school open, having a bar, having activities. All people have been seeing in the last 20 years, is that all the towns are getting empty and how they are struggling to get the doctor in winter or how they are struggling because now they have to move their kids to a school that is 50 kilometres away every day.

So, we need to create benefits for people. And by bringing back people, reactivating the economy of these areas, people are going to see a benefit. And people appreciate very much when they see a new initiative, when they see new movement of people. And I tell you, I came back here with my wife and my kid, who is two years old, and people were very happy.

I'm moving to a small-town next year and there is only seven kids in that school. That's kids from three to 11 years. And seven is the limit. If one kid leaves the school, they have to close the school. So, by me coming to this village with a kid, they are so happy, now they have two extra kids, so they are not in danger to close the school.

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James Shooter

Now that's a good headline. Rewilding saves Closing school! Yes, it's just one extra family for now. But when you working with such depleted populations of people, every new arrival makes a huge difference. With more job opportunities in rewilding, potentially more families will come, leading to more resilient communities that truly value their natural surroundings. Whilst Iberian Highlands was only launched in 2022, they seemingly had a lot of success quickly and that doesn't always happen when it comes to nature restoration.

An extensive study allowed rewilding Europe to secure a large grant from the Endangered Landscapes program to kick start the process. This was followed by further funding from nature Cartier and Rewilding Europe themselves to help get the restoration work started. Key collaborations with local partners on the ground, Terra Naturalis and Asociación Micorriza has ensured that the process really hits the ground running. It seems obvious, but get the money into the right hands and we can soon start turning nature loss around. It's that simple.

00:15:09:10 - 00:15:27:21

Pablo Schapira

So, thanks to that, things are moving very, very quickly and I think that we are taking advantage of this dynamic to keep pushing very quickly. Because we want people to see

things happening as soon as possible because it's not promises anymore. And that's what people want to see. People want to see things happening.

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James Shooter

I've no doubt the 850,000 hectares of Iberian Highlands is going to be a big win for nature, but there's also huge opportunity for further landscape scale initiatives in this nature rich country.

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Pablo Schapira

So, what we are doing already at Rewilding Spain, is having contact with other organizations in other places in Spain that want to do the same. The moment they saw the launch of Iberian Highlands in October, a lot of them contact us and say: wow, we want that here. So, we are already exploring possibilities to scale up in other areas in Spain.

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James Shooter

Whilst the Iberian Highlands are faring well for nature, as Pablo said, there are some key players missing in the trophic structure. Most notably, Apex Predators. I am meeting Marina Monaco, now, the Rewilding Officer for the initiative to find out why and what might be done to bring some back.

00:16:18:12

Marina Monico

The Iberian Wolf was completely eradicated at the beginning of the 20th century from hunting pressure. It was a big enemy. Then the Iberian lynx also disappeared in the last century when the rabbit population crashed due to introduced disease, and no sightings have been recorded in the recent past. And then the Iberian chain was the last place in the Mediterranean Spain, where the brown bear became extinct in the 19th century.

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James Shooter

For one of these species in particular, their comeback across Iberia has been one of the most inspiring stories of conservation success in recent times. Back in 2002, there were just 94 Iberian lynx left in the wild. By 2020, that figure had reached 1111, a more than tenfold increase in less than 20 years. This incredible turnaround was made possible by a dedicated partnership of 21 organizations coordinated by Junta de Andalucia and funded by four consecutive rounds of EU life funding.

A captive breeding for release program was established at several centers across Spain and Portugal to reinforce the wild individuals left. To safeguard the species it's said that the total number of animals still needs to be trebled by 2040. So, whilst the lynx hasn't reached the Iberian Highlands landscape yet, further reintroductions are very much on the cards.

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Marina Monico

We are planning to do an experimental release in a little bit south from here in the Serrania de Cuenca, to evaluate the response of the species in the area because the rabbit population is not very high and if that is successful and we see that the animals adapt to hunting other small species. Then we will see if we can look for other areas and bring more lynx.

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James Shooter

Whilst the Iberian lynx largely prey on wild rabbits, they will also eat ducks, young deer and partridges. If they can do well here, then it's an extra steppingstone for improved connectivity for a species very recently on the brink of extinction. Iberian lynx are one thing, but wolves create a suite of different issues for those that farm alongside them.

Positively, though, a subsidy system exists in Spain that not only pays out compensation if a wolf takes some of your livestock, but proactively supplements the income of those farming in areas where wolves exist. This subtle shift in emphasis towards a pre-payment model, creates a more positive relationship between wolf and farmer. You may never encounter any issues at all, but you'll still get paid. I think that's a very forward-thinking policy for farming more holistically with nature.

Scavengers as equally important as apex predators in a fully functioning ecosystem. The vultures I spent time with this morning are another key species the team are hoping to reinforce.

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Marina Monico

The thing is that black vulture selects breeding areas and prefers to nest in continuous and slightly fragmented forests far from population, travel noise and communication routes. And so, for this reason, this species can be very important and it's a good indicator of environment quality, it is also an umbrella species.

We can say that in Spain in general, it's one of the places within Europe that has been well preserved. So, it's an iconic species.

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James Shooter

Over two and a half thousand breeding pairs reside in the country, which makes for 90% of the European population - go Spain! And their plans for restoring scavengers don't stop there. They'll soon be looking at the exceptionally cool bearded vulture too. No carcass will go to waste.

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Marina Monico

We are looking for boosting natural recolonization through specific feeding while we are working to obtain other individuals from the Pyrenees, for example, for

translocation, and then reintroduce them here as we are doing for the black vulture, through acclimatization and release. So yeah, also there are plans to bring back this species. Well, they are already here, but just to help them to establish.

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James Shooter

Translocation in this context literally means moving animals from one place to another with the aim to restore depleted populations by introducing healthy individuals from elsewhere. The translocation of scavengers like bearded and cinereous vultures, in the Iberian Highlands will improve the ecological role of nutrient recycling and reduce the spread of disease. They've suffered from persecution, habitat loss, lead poisoning and a reduction in large carcasses in the landscape.

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James Shooter

The return of large herbivores in the form of semi wild cattle and horses will not only provide some sustenance for vultures but will hopefully reduce the risk of devastating forest fires like which occurred in 2005.

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Marina Monico

The origin was a barbecue that some hikers neglected in a picnic area. And the fire raved 15,000 hectares affecting mostly pine and oak, like the forest we've got here, black junipers forest. Part of that fire affected the natural park of the Alto Tajo with about 2400 areas actively burning. And the most terrible thing is, that even 11 firefighters lost their lives by trying to extinguish the fire. And natural grazing with large herbivores are doing a great job of clearing these scrubs and removing the excess of vegetation which contributes to fuel in case of fire. And I think that's what happened with that fire we were talking.

So, with this natural grazing, the recovery of burn areas is quicker and it's more diverse and rich in terms of biodiversity, because it creates more heterogenous areas, more open areas, and then it changes and increases the composition and the structure of the vegetation present in the area. So, it's positive.

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James Shooter

Herds of Tauros, semi wild cattle that are being back bred from ancient breeds to emulate the now extinct European bovine, the aurochs and Serrano horses a very old breed, local to the region, are being utilized to provide a missing part of natural grazing. Whilst deer and ibex remain, they eat in a different way, selectively nibbling the most succulent vegetation, whereas the larger herbivores take bigger, more general clumps of everything. They are dynamism to forest recovery, remove excessively dry ground vegetation to keep fires at bay and keep patches of open ground amongst the forest canopy.

In the arid areas, they improve grassland conditions for a variety of steppe species like Dupont's lark, Black bellied sand grouse and both little and great bustard. Star species that photographic hides could potentially be set up for, making a valuable contribution to ecotourism businesses in the area like they do in the West of Spain.

I'm leaving the forest now to join up with Lidia Valverde, the communications officer at Rewilding Spain, meeting up now with Jose Jimenez, a local business owner who's making his living from nature tourism.

I'm keen to hear why people come to the area to experience wild Spain and what rewilding might do for businesses like his. We meet up at a small town called Paralejos de los Truchas. The Griffin vultures are still following me about and clouded yellow butterflies dance around in the afternoon sunshine, their wings so bright they look like they've been dipped in lemon Jell-O. I always think butterflies look like they're flying under the influence, though. So perhaps they have been.

Jose is 58, but he's not like many of the 58 year olds I know. He tells me he trains for his nature mountain guiding by hiking 25 kilometres every day. He wears a bandana, has a pierced ear and says everything with a grin. I try not to stand too close to him as he makes me look very uncool. Lydia is translating for us.

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Jose Jimenez/Lidia Valverde

The company was created in 2015 and we are focused on nature tourism and we are pioneers in inclusive nature tourism. So, we try to put nature in value and to make nature accessible to every kind of person. So, they are specialized in customizing nature experiences and in offering these nature experiences also to disabled people, which is a real challenge. But this is something that they feel very connected to, providing the opportunity to people to enjoy nature and in a context that is not usually available for them.

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James Shooter

Jose tells me that two blind ladies once came to him and asked him to be their guide, they were so impressed with the experience, they told him they felt deceived by previous experiences before him. He's qualified to guide mountaineering for the visually impaired and has also taken blind customers outside the region to listen to the howls of wolves.

After all, he says, they're almost more beautiful to hear than to see. His company, Sentir El Alto Tajo, translates as "To feel Alto Tajo", which I think is just a little bit lovely. We should all feel nature a lot more. Whatever our situation.

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Jose Jimenez/Lidia Valverde

But most of our customers are Spanish people. But we have also received people from Germany, Italy, United Kingdom. And what people look for here, is having this particular personal connection with nature in silence. This is one of the maybe the features of this

landscape that is so unpopulated that it's very easy to go somewhere and without finding any other person. So, it is very easy to connect to have that personal connection with nature in silence and feeling all the sounds coming from birds, from the trees.

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Jose Jiminez/Lidia Valverde

It's essential for us as human beings to be able to have that personal and direct connection with nature. You cannot compare that personal experience when you hear an eagle crying above your head or when you touch the ground or with the smells that come from the forests. It's a connection with the whole. And it's like realizing in a completely different way that you are part of that whole. So, it's very important that every day more and more people can feel that connection because in that connection lies what will save mankind.

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James Shooter

I liked Jose before he started speaking, but I like him even better now. His poetic words perfectly describe our need for a healthy relationship with the wild. We could do with a lot more Joses in the world. His passion for the wild is infectious, and that's so important for getting people fired up to save what we've lost. There's plenty of wildlife to enjoy still in the Iberian Highlands, though, and this is one of the factors drawing people in.

00:28:33:20 - 00:29:10:17

Jose Jiminez/Lidia Valverde

I would differentiate between star species and the popular species. In terms of the most popular species. People who are not so specialized in nature and animals and biodiversity, what they look for are golden eagles, the Griffon vulture, of course the black vultures, which is difficult to find here, as well as the Egyptian vulture and the Bearded vulture. We are fortunate because we have the full Spanish kind of vultures in the area, but only the Griffon vulture has a stable population. And another species that is very, very popular is the otter. The otters need very clean waters to live in and it's a precious moment when you can find one of them and see them just in the rivers. The star species here are no doubt the wild cat very, very difficult to see. And the Iberian desman.

00:29:37:16 - 00:30:02:00

James Shooter

The Iberian. What now? Never heard of it. Don't worry. Neither did I. But this is what I adore about nature. There's almost an infinite number of wonders to discover. And this one so wonderful. I'm going to suggest you pause the podcast, take a few moments to Google it and come back so we can celebrate together. Don't worry, I'll wait.

Now, wasn't that worth it? If you weren't able to pause and Google it? Behold my Shakespearean description. It looks like the tiny lovechild of an elephant, a shrew and a mole. I bet you are googling it now. But more importantly than that, it acts like a canary

in a coal mine for water quality. It needs very pure waters to survive. And its rivers have become increasingly polluted over time and its range has retracted.

But whether you're here for the Desmans or the mountains, Jose isn't fazed. As long as you care. The emphasis on guests here is quality over quantity.

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Jose Jiminez/Lidia Valverde

What we need to bring here, are people who can feel connected to nature, who understand the value of all this heritage. And that can also feel involved in the need of protecting and saving all this heritage from disappearance and from that point of view, we think that the initiatives like Rewilding Spain are very helpful for us because it provides us with a context to wrap the kind of things that we are offering to people that come here. So, we can explain that nature can bring that value. And the recovery of nature is helpful not only for nature itself, but also for people.

00:31:37:14

James Shooter

Within increasing amounts of environmentally aware travellers. Large rewilding initiatives like Iberian Highlands and companies like Jose's can offer immersive and meaningful journeys whilst also giving something back.

Rewilding Europe Travel is a relatively new UK based company incubated by rewilding Europe, working to provide small groups with incredible and insightful experiences in Europe's nature rich landscapes. The team at Rewilding Spain have helped connect them with Jose, whose company will now act as ground agents for their international travellers.

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Jose Jiminez/Lidia Valverde

They are really enthusiastic about the idea, because they were really willing to reach international customers, but they really didn't know how to do that. So, with this partnership with Rewilding Europe Travel, the connection is done. Now they don't need to think about how to make those connections with international customers because rewilding Europe Travel is going to take charge of that part. So, for them, the Sentir el Alto Tajo company, it's like a giant step in the in the plans for the future. So, they are really, really enthusiastic about what the future will bring.

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James Shooter

One of the issues Jose hopes this new relationship will help overcome, is the seasonality of visitors coming here. The small town we met Jose in looked almost deserted when we arrived, with many of the houses empty and their shutters closed. Apparently just 70 people are resident throughout the winter months, but in the summer up to 2000 can descend. That's not sustainable for business, infrastructure or healthy communities.

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Jose Jiminez/Lidia Valverde

So, the challenge for touristic sector here in the area is to find a way to make tourism not something seasonal, but something that just flows throughout the year. And nature tourism could provide an opportunity to make that possible.

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James Shooter

I'm here in March and I'm absolutely loving it, and if I love it, then I'm sure others would too. In fact, as a wildlife guide myself, I'm certain of it. I've already taken a handful of business calls from Jose to distribute to my contacts back home. The wildlife has been amazing. The hikes have been spectacular and unsurprisingly, the food and wine have been superb too.

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James Shooter

And whilst Pablo scared me a little when he mentioned -14 degrees, for the most part, the weather has been perfectly pleasant. We've been eating outside in the early spring sun and as someone more acclimatized to weather in the Scottish Highlands, I'm not melting in the summer heat either.

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Jose Jiminez/Lidia Valverde

We are fully convinced that rewilding and the initiative of Rewilding Spain in this landscape is crucial for us for the future, because it's going to have a very relevant role in creating awareness amongst people to understand that this is something that we have to do together so we can all together again feel part of the whole and have a future.

Of course, things have to be done in the right way and we as a company want to be part of that movement. But yes, for sure, we think that rewilding is an answer for providing people with opportunities to come back, to stay and to make these villages and towns just have a new life ahead.

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James Shooter

My time in the Iberian Highlands has been an inspiring visit. I've seen habitat connectivity like never before and heard stories of wildlife returning at pace. It's wonderful to think of those seven cinereous vultures soaring in the skies, above recently reintroduced Iberian Lynx prowling in the habitat below, and that habitat is now more resilient to wildfire events, thanks to the increasing amount of natural grazers working the land.

But if one thing's hit home more than anything, is that nature and people can thrive together. We aren't two separate entities. We're entwined, interconnected, and it's high time we recognize that. If we look after nature, nature will look after us. I love the thought that schools in rural towns like Pablo's will no longer be at risk from closing, thanks to the sons and daughters of Rewilders, herd managers and wildlife guides alike. A generation of children growing up alongside each other, knowing that their nature

loving parents enabled them to have friends their own age and an education on their doorstep. That's surely one way to grow a healthy respect for the environment within the next generation.

As an outsider I'm not sure if I should, but thanks to Jose, I now also have my own personal vision for the Iberian Highlands, and that's one where my new favourite mammal, the Iberian desman, is recovering and spreading once more through a network of crystal-clear river systems, no longer polluted by humans. Because, after all, what's good for the desman, is good for us.

[Outro]

Thanks for joining me for episode three of the Rewild podcast. I hope you enjoyed discovering the delights of the Iberian Highlands. Stick it on your list to visit. You won't be disappointed. Many thanks to Pablo, Marina and Jose for their contributions. To Lidia for translating so well and to Campos, for allowing me a glimpse into the lives of those fantastic cinerous vultures.

The music was by Andrew O'Donnell of Beluga Lagoon, and the artwork was created by Gemma Shooter. The biggest of thanks goes to Rewilding Europe for collaborating with me on this series. This is an organization making rewilding happen through positive action on the ground.

Next month, I'll be exploring the Mediterranean wetlands of the Camargue with Tour de Valat in France. Do join us then. Catch you next time!