



## Rainforests of the UK – a briefing by The Wildlife Trusts

Vast areas of the UK were once covered by lush temperate rainforest. Also known as Atlantic woodland or Celtic rainforest, these wet, mossy woods stretched the lengths of Scotland and Wales, covered parts of the north and southwest of England, and areas of Northern Ireland.

The Wildlife Trusts are working with others to restore and expand UK rainforests. These new projects form part of a wider ambition to protect and restore at least 30% of the UK for nature by 2030.

Creating and connecting wilder landscapes is fundamental for nature's recovery and adapting to the impacts of climate change. In this, rainforests have a critical role to play.

### What are UK rainforests?

UK rainforests are temperate rainforests, part of a globally rare habitat also found in Japan, New Zealand, Canada and Chile. These are wet places, rich in biodiversity, dripping with moisture and often wrapped in mist.

These ancient woods are home to a rich tapestry of inter-connected life. Trees in UK rainforests include sessile oak, birch, rowan, holly, alder, willow and hazel. Wet conditions support a luxuriant abundance of mosses, liverworts, lichens, and ferns. Many of these grow on the trees, or cover boulders, crags and ravines.

The dampness is ideal for fungi, including globally rare species to thrive. Other wildlife includes stoats, red squirrels, and pine marten, plus endangered birds like wood warblers, redstarts, and pied flycatchers.

### Where are UK rainforests?

While the majority of the UK's rainforests have been cut down, there are fragments that remain. These isolated pockets could provide the foundation for restoring our wilder woods. They include:

- **Wales** – in Ceredigion, Powys, and Gwynedd, including [Coed Crafnant](#)
- **Scotland** – the Highlands and Argyll, including [Ballachuan Hazelwood](#)
- **England** – in the Lake District and Dartmoor, including [Dart Valley](#) and [Marsland nature reserve](#)
- **Northern Ireland** – in the glacial valleys of Antrim including [Glenarm](#) and [Straidkilly](#) nature reserves

### Why do so few remain?

Rainforests were destroyed over thousands of years by changes to the way people used land. This included the need for timber, land for farming, and the development of transport networks, industry, towns, and cities. A great deal of forest clearance has happened in recent decades. Around the world, since 1990 alone, it is estimated that 420 million hectares of forest has been lost.

Danger doesn't stop at deforestation. Ongoing threats to UK rainforests include pests, diseases and invasive species, pesticides and pollution, high levels of grazing and the impacts of climate change.

## Rainforests and people

People have long had a deep connection with rainforests, and they are full of mysticism, folklore and history. In his book, *The Lost Rainforests of Great Britain*, author and campaigner, Guy Shrubsole, speaks of a rainforest in Dartmoor as “being a sacred oaken grove... seen as a domain of pixies and fairy folk”. These are magical places that capture the imagination.

Communities will be at the heart of restoring rainforests in the UK, just as they have been throughout the long history of The Wildlife Trusts. Restoring rainforests will follow the same ethos of ensuring that local people are involved and will benefit. These projects can significantly contribute to the natural beauty and cultural heritage of the areas where rainforests are brought back – and provide opportunities for green jobs and tourism.

The Wildlife Trusts want people to help nature to recover, creating healthier, happier places to live and work. A wealth of research shows how spending time in nature benefits our health and wellbeing and reduces costs to the NHS.

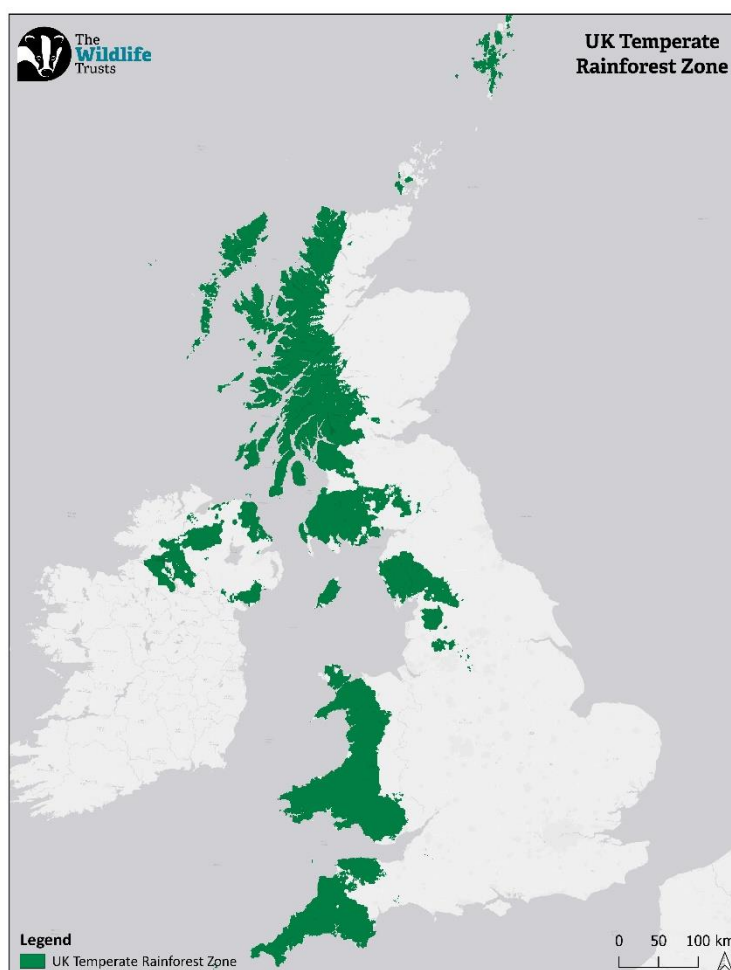
## Rainforests for nature and climate

The UK is one the most nature-depleted places on earth. To restore nature in abundance – which is critical for addressing climate change and producing food – we need to create and expand our wild places. This should include a focus on restoring and protecting our key carbon stores, peatlands, saltmarsh and forests.

As trees grow, they absorb carbon from the atmosphere which is stored in the soil, roots, trunks, and branches of the tree itself. The lichens, mosses and ferns that thrive in rainforests also carry out this function, increasing the huge potential of UK rainforests to store carbon.

To achieve the Government's net-zero ambition, it is estimated that woodland cover needs to increase to at least 17% across the UK by 2050 (it is currently around 13% and only around half is made up of native tree species that are part of intricate wider ecosystems).

See our interactive map of UK rainforests [here](#).



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