



cattle

Cattle are commonly introduced to nature recovery initiatives as an ecological proxy for the extinct auroch, a megafaunal ancestor that was present in Britain in the Holocene. Modern cattle share similar behavioural and physical characteristics to aurochs and fill the ecological roles of their prehistoric ancestors that are missing from our landscape today.

Environmental Benefits



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Grazers

Cattle are primarily grazers, but they also supplement their diet with browse throughout the year according to their nutritional needs. They create uneven swards by wrapping their tongues around taller grasses and herbs. This benefits ground flora species and supports a wide range of invertebrates that thrive in diverse vegetation communities.

Tree Disturbance

Many breeds of cattle possess horns which they rub on trees to seek anti-inflammatory compounds from tree vegetation. This behaviour causes disturbance to trees, exposing the heartwood to create crevices and deadwood that benefits a variety of insects, birds and bats.

Seed Dispersal

Cattle are highly effective seed dispersers, transporting over 70 plant species through their coats, hooves and gut which further enhances landscape diversity.

Mosaic Landscapes

Herds follow the guide of an elder female (or matriarch), collectively moving across landscapes which leads to concentrated disturbance and soil compaction, while leaving other areas untouched. Mosaic landscapes and important microhabitats are formed as

Enriching Soil Health

Collective dunging enriches soil health and fertility by returning nutrients to the land to boost productivity. The dung supports keystone species like beetles and other invertebrates that carry out important ecosystem processes.

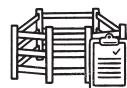
Managing Cattle for Nature Recovery

Key management considerations include:



GPS Collars for Tracking

GPS collars make locating cattle and carrying out health checks easier, and NoFence (or similar) technologies can minimise the need for physical fencing in some circumstances, if appropriate training has been carried out.



Necessary Infrastructure

Robust, stock-proof fencing is essential. Ear tagging and TB checking require the coralling and handling of individuals; therefore, suitable handling sites and infrastructure must be available, including facilitating for horned cattle if necessary.



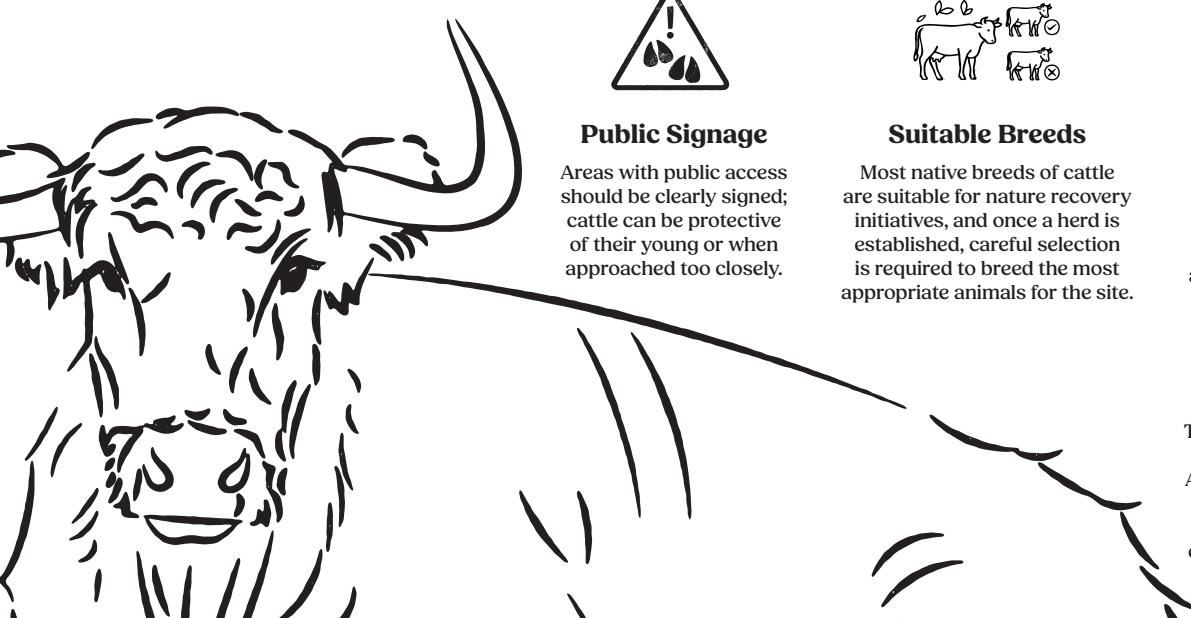
Dedicated Staffing

As well as handling to meet legal requirements, regular health checks and monitoring are required, so a dedicated team and access to veterinary advice are essential.



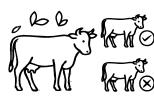
Population Management

Ensure appropriate social structures for each species is observed and maintain appropriate densities based on the carrying capacity of the area.



Public Signage

Areas with public access should be clearly signed; cattle can be protective of their young or when approached too closely.



Suitable Breeds

Most native breeds of cattle are suitable for nature recovery initiatives, and once a herd is established, careful selection is required to breed the most appropriate animals for the site.

Taurus

Taurus (a new breed of cattle designed to create a future Auroch) could be considered for introduction to nature recovery projects, and are classified as domestic cattle for management purposes.

Legal Restrictions

The management of domesticated cattle in Britain must comply with specific legal and regulatory requirements:



TB Testing

Bovine TB testing is mandatory but testing interval is dependent on the risk level of the site location.



Fallen Stock Rule

Carcasses of deceased individuals must be removed from land and disposed of without wildlife gaining contact.



Identification

Cattle (unless dairy) must be ear-tagged within 20 days of birth. Accurate records of all individual movement, births and deaths must be maintained.

A note on Diverse Herbivore Assemblages

Each herbivore has unique physical and behavioural traits that shape the environment in different ways and create habitats for a variety of species. Their combined impact supports a broader range of species and rewilding projects should therefore aim to introduce a variety of herbivore species where possible. Please refer to our other herbivore guides for more information.

The Large Herbivore Working Group (LHWG) is a UK-based network of experts formed in 2022 to support the restoration and introduction of large herbivores as part of nature-recovery efforts. It develops guidance, informs policy, and shares best practice across the sector. The LHWG is currently funded until 2027 and hosted by the Landscape Recovery team at The Wildlife Trusts.

Please note these species and nature recovery profiles produced by the LHWG are not legal advice and are intended to provide a high-level overview to support your understanding of considerations needed for large herbivore introductions and management for nature recovery initiatives in England.

Design and artwork by Lauren Hulbert.