



wild boar

Wild boar were once a widespread species in Britain, but excessive hunting and habitat loss led to their extinction in the 17th century. Escapes and illegal releases have resulted in small, fragmented wild populations establishing themselves in areas such as the Forest of Dean and other parts of England as well as Wales and Scotland. Their unique rootling behaviour and diet categorises them as a keystone species, and they play a vital role in shaping ecosystems, making them an important species to reintroduce to support nature recovery.

Environmental Benefits



Omnivores

Boar are generalist omnivorous but also graze and browse to supplement their varied diet. They rootle the ground in search of worms, grubs, roots, rhizomes, and tubers, and also consume fungi, fruits, molluscs, and even carrion.



Rootling

Their rootling behaviour breaks up dense vegetation and compacted soil, exposing bare ground. This enables conditions that provides habitat to benefit a wide range of other species including burrowing insects and heat-basking reptiles such as lizards and snakes. Emphemeral ponds can also be created in areas of rootled ground which provides perfect habitat for species such as natterjack toads and fairy shrimps.



Exposing Bare Soil



Carbon Storage

The upturn of soil from boar rootling also improves soil stability and increases carbon storage. The bare ground creates space for wind dispersed plants such as willow to seed, which increases carbon in the soil as their roots establish.



Vegetation Diversity

Their disturbance via rootling unearths ancient seeds buried deep in soil and disrupts vegetation growth, preventing the dominance of a single plant species. Additionally, boar have a unique digestive system that allows them to consume toxic plants that other herbivores would avoid. Enzymes in their stomach help increase germination of certain plants, promoting a more diverse plant community.



Nutrient Cycling

As opportunistic feeders, boar are also known to feed on carcasses, accelerating decomposition and enriching nutrient cycles. If large herbivore carcasses were permitted to stay in situ in nature recovery areas, reintroducing wild boar could play a vital role in enhancing natural ecosystem processes.

Managing Wild Boar for Nature Recovery

Key management considerations include:



Public Safety

There may be perceived concerns round public safety in areas where boar are to be released, but boar are widespread in other parts of Europe coexisting alongside humans.



Sourcing Animals

Sourcing individuals – current restrictions prevent importing animals from certain European countries but free living boar could be allowed to expand naturally from existing populations.



Population Management

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



Diseases

Boar can spread diseases such as African Swine Fever (ASF) which could impact commercial pig farmers. Therefore, it is important to carefully plan reintroductions and population expansions to prevent the spread of diseases.



Dedicated Staffing

Once established, wild boar will need to be managed like some other wild species, such as deer. This will need a dedicated landscape scale approach to maintaining healthy population numbers.



Alternative Breeds

While wild boar are the optimal species for achieving maximum ecological benefits, many nature recovery initiatives have chosen more domesticated pig breeds, such as Tamworth or Iron Age pigs. These breeds perform similar ecological functions to wild boar and are not listed under the DWAA.

Therefore, where introducing wild boar is not possible, using alternative domesticated animals may be a viable solution. However, pigs are unique as a domesticated species in that there is a legal requirement to find and check pigs every day, which can be difficult in large nature recovery initiatives.



Legal Restrictions

The introduction of wild boar in Britain must comply with specific legal and regulatory requirements:



Wild Release Licence

Boar are listed on Schedule 9, part 1B of Section 14 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (WCA) and require a licence from Natural England for release into the wild.



DWAA License

Boar are listed on the Schedule to the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976 (DWAA), which restricts their release into fenced enclosures without a licence granted by the local authority.



Monitoring

Boar living in the wild are classified as wild animals and do not require daily checking as domesticated pigs require.

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.