

## **Transcript**

*00:00:00:03 - 00:00:26:16*

*James Shooter*

I'm sat in the dark in the tin box of our camper van. Eyes wide open, windows ajar. The visual cues of what's taking place around me are long gone and only sound joins me now, which is handy because this is a podcast after all. A pair of tawny owls are intermittently calling to one another from the trees around me, making contact before they hunt in the night ahead. A little further away

*00:00:26:22 - 00:00:59:10*

*James Shooter*

flocks of cranes are trumpeting from the safety of a large lake, one of the best sounds in nature, in my humble opinion, and synonymous with wild wetlands. But the star performer eerily rumbling through the darkness, making my hairs stand on end. Is this... Red deer. It's the rut. And these boys are bellowing loudly. Vocal intimidation is part of their arsenal.

*00:00:59:12 - 00:01:26:01*

*James Shooter*

If that doesn't work, they'll be locking antlers and battling it out for the rights to meet with a harem of females. Although they're a little preoccupied right now, they're usually part of a team of four-legged tree trimmers, helping to restore the naturally open landscape of this waterlogged world. But I'll have to come back to that as amongst the excitement and through the open window, I'm sorry to say, there's a slightly less welcome noise has joined the party - mosquitoes.

*00:01:26:03 - 00:02:04:23*

*James Shooter*

The roar of red deer might be intimidating for some, but it's the buzzing of these little bloodsuckers that fills me with fear. They're an important part of the ecosystem, they're an important part of the ecosystem, they're an important part of the ecosystem, they're an important part of. I'm James Shooter, host of The Rewild podcast, and this is Lille Vildmose. It's my first time in Denmark, and I've enjoyed exploring this fascinating country. So far

*00:02:05:04 - 00:02:26:11*

*James Shooter*

the watery worlds of the West have stood out the most. Parties of whimbrel are constantly on the move, heading south after a Scandinavian summer. Bearded tits are flocking together in the reedbeds, and there's a constant babble of greylag geese, a few thousand strong, which never seem far away. I had the privilege of watching young white-tailed eagles attempting to hunt them on the wing.

*00:02:26:13 - 00:02:51:16*

*James Shooter*

Though the half-hearted attempts just made it seem like they're enjoying flushing them every few minutes. Further north on the opposite coastline of the country I've arrived at Lille Vildmose which translates to 'little wild bog'. Ironic, really, as there's nothing little about this site. It's Denmark's largest protected area at just under 8000 hectares and holds northwestern Europe's largest raised bog.

*00:02:51:18 - 00:03:23:18*

*James Shooter*

After escaping the mosquitoes inside my van, I'm meeting Thomas Christensen, who works for the Aage V Jensen Foundation who run this site. We've got three areas to cover the southern section, which is the intact raised bog, the middle section, which is where historic extraction has taken place and where most of the restoration efforts are focused. Then finally, the northern section, which is the driest part of the site, it's here where we're heading out on a mini safari to try and spot some of the large herbivores that have been reintroduced.

*00:03:23:20 - 00:03:27:22*

*Thomas Christensen*

You are now entering the Holy Land.

*00:03:27:24 - 00:03:28:20*

*James Shooter*

I like the sound of that.

*00:03:28:23 - 00:03:59:23*

*Thomas Christensen*

We're driving into Tofte forest now, the natural area of where the first initial part that we move into now, that's the that's forested land with open spots in between the 2000 hectares of that. And it's it's only about 900 hectares covered by forest. The rest is open shrubland or even grasslands.

*00:04:00:00 - 00:04:28:18*

*James Shooter*

I think with landscapes like this and kind of driving or walking through them, knowing that there's big stuff out there, that's part of the excitement. Yeah, you don't necessarily have to see them. It's just the feeling that, that you might, you know, it gives that sense of yeah, excitement and just a slightly heightened.

*00:04:28:20 - 00:04:48:11*

*Thomas Christensen*

As we come up here and it will turn into sort of the right hand corner here. But if you look out towards the east, you'll see one of our viewing towers just standing outside. So people, although they can't just move in here and the public can't just move on their own, they have chances of looking into the area for some of these viewing towers.

*00:04:48:11 - 00:04:54:13*

*Thomas Christensen*

And that's part of what we do in terms of extension as well. Yeah, she is. Oh, yeah.

*00:04:54:15 - 00:04:56:20*

*James Shooter*

Yeah.

*00:04:56:22 - 00:05:02:07*

*Thomas Christensen*

And it's sort of a trademark for the foundation that we've built these huge, big viewing towers.

*00:05:02:10 - 00:05:38:08*

*James Shooter*

Yeah, that's great. I yeah, I always go back and forth in my mind between the need for, not peopleless landscapes, but yeah, undisturbed areas and weighing that up against access and allowing people to see and experience it for themselves. Yeah, it's a hard one to know exactly what's right to do, isn't it? I mean, I think in the way the world is, we need areas like this actually, where they are undisturbed for the vast majority of the time and to just allow it.

*00:05:38:10 - 00:05:51:14*

*James Shooter*

And yeah, I guess providing infrastructure like viewing platforms like organized visits where you can still come in. But it's but it's, you know, controlled is, is really important actually. And that's a good balance to have.

*00:05:51:16 - 00:06:16:09*

*Thomas Christensen*

Yeah. And I think if we've we need to train the public and the people will actually understand what it is we're doing and the need for doing things like this. We do need to grant some sort of access, but it could be like what we can do here, we can do something around the the circumference and they will have a look inside that oh oh, wow.

*00:06:16:11 - 00:06:19:19*

*Thomas Christensen*

Have you got of four legged ploughs.

*00:06:19:21 - 00:06:28:19*

*James Shooter*

Three wild boar, just tails up, running off. Brilliant.

*00:06:28:21 - 00:06:50:14*

*James Shooter*

This woodland is utterly beautiful. Huge veteran oak trees with open patches of grassland now studded with juniper, holly and Hawthorn coming through. Acorns are continually dropping out of the sky. So much so that I consider a helmet might have been

a good addition to the day. This is a landscape shaped by historic hunting grounds, adored by the Counts that used to live here.

*00:06:50:16 - 00:07:19:17*

*James Shooter*

In fact, the boar were reintroduced by the landowner of the time in 1926. The fence around this section, all 2000 hectares of it, is the only reason they're allowed to stay. Denmark gets very twitchy about free roaming boar because of their large pig farming industry and fear of African swine flu spreading. The scattered boar have left behind moguls of turf and earth where they've been rooting about, looking for food. They're the rotavators of nature. Some call it damage

*00:07:19:17 - 00:07:41:03*

*James Shooter*

and yes, you can see why their effects might be unwanted if they were to break into a golf course. But this disturbance is good for the ground. They rough up the surface and allow pockets of bare soil for seeds to infiltrate, sometimes offering the only way in through thick mats of grass. They encourage diversity of the plant life on the forest floor.

*00:07:41:05 - 00:08:09:13*

*James Shooter*

Right next to this are the first hints of some slightly larger animals. Bison. They have been here to. Unsurprisingly, they've also been leaving behind some bison sized pats of dung. Now you probably don't normally get too close to animal poo yet I find myself kneeling down next to this lot to appreciate the wealth of life inside. Dung beetles tunnel further in to get away from my increasingly close face and maggots of various species of flies are wriggling about on the surface.

*00:08:09:15 - 00:08:29:19*

*James Shooter*

It might not be everyone's cup of tea, but these are the building blocks of the food chain, a poo platter, so to speak. It feeds the critters and feeds the soil. I suddenly realize I'm probably looking a bit strange to Thomas, who I've just met and decided it's time to get back in the vehicle in the hope of finding the culprits.

*00:08:29:21 - 00:08:37:22*

*James Shooter*

Oh, yeah. Wow. That's such an eerie sight, actually, there. The shape of them coming out of the darkness.

*00:08:37:24 - 00:08:41:08*

*Thomas Christensen*

And just sitting in our resting and ruminating.

*00:08:41:10 - 00:08:42:15*

*James Shooter*

A few young ones as.

00:08:42:15 - 00:09:00:07

Thomas Christensen

Well. We've got six calves this year. You see four of them now running. They formed these little youngster gangs. I see you have the five of them together now in a small group. Yeah.

00:09:00:09 - 00:09:03:01

*James Shooter*

Oh, that's so cool to see.

00:09:03:03 - 00:09:30:22

*James Shooter*

The bison have been brought in here to add another layer of disturbance to the forest. They damage the trees, which creates opportunities for fungi and insects to move in. They transport seeds in their fur and they open up niches in the ground by wallowing at up to a ton, even the hoof prints have an effect. These four legged giants can munch around 30 to 40 kilos of grass a day, subduing the monoculture effect it often has, and allowing other vegetation a chance.

00:09:30:24 - 00:09:54:01

*James Shooter*

What a team and an absolute privilege to see up close. It's hard to leave, but there's much more to see. We drive out of the forest and towards the middle section. Here, the scars of peat mines stripe across the land. The flatness of this landscape means that to really take it in, you need height. And as Thomas hasn't offered to get me on his shoulders, it's up the ten meter firewatch tower.

00:09:54:01 - 00:10:02:04

*James Shooter*

Instead.

00:10:02:06 - 00:10:04:04

*James Shooter*

Yeah, very cool.

00:10:04:06 - 00:10:05:10

*Thomas Christensen*

You to see the old.

00:10:05:16 - 00:10:17:03

*James Shooter*

Snipe going over are they. Yeah. Yeah. I think it's. Oh, so these are all the kind of peat furrows.

00:10:17:05 - 00:10:26:07

*Thomas Christensen*

If you make the direct translation, we refer to them as digging lines.

*00:10:26:07 - 00:10:27:24*

*James Shooter*

Okay. I mean, yeah, that makes sense.

*00:10:27:24 - 00:10:53:23*

*Thomas Christensen*

Yeah. So here you we've had a peat layer of 3 to 4 meters and this has all been mined so that to actually top down more or less to the bottom of off of the peat layer to the old seabed beneath. What you can actually see here is that if you look in that direction, those hills over there, well we are in Denmark.

*00:10:54:00 - 00:11:19:05*

*Thomas Christensen*

So, we call the mountains. Yeah, but these are Mulbjerg and Angulo, but they are sort of the Moraine Hills for back from the last Ice Age and they form sort of a barrier towards the sea. You have to see just on the other side of right and but water could enter to the north and to the south.

*00:11:19:07 - 00:12:02:08*

*Thomas Christensen*

So, this area in here became sort of a lagoon. And as this the the ice disappeared from the area and the old seabed started raising again after losing the weight of the ice, then you've had this shallow lagoon forming and then reeds started developing in here, became more or less a mire after that. And then to two and a half thousand years ago, now that the raised bog started forming with the growth of the sphagnum mosses and so a raised bog like this, it grows by two, two and a half, maybe even three millimeters per year.

*00:12:02:10 - 00:12:03:14*

*James Shooter*

So its not a quick process.

*00:12:03:16 - 00:12:04:20*

*Thomas Christensen*

No it is.

*00:12:04:22 - 00:12:26:14*

*James Shooter*

This unique habitat is reliant on sphagnum mosses both in life and in death. On the top layer is life green, red and yellow. Mossy sponges capable of holding around 20 times their dry weight in water. They're described by some as habitat manipulators as the water they retain could influence the composition of habitats around them.

*00:12:26:16 - 00:12:54:00*

*Thomas Christensen*

You need it to be protected so it doesn't get infected. You could almost say by nutrients. It's it's a very acid type of natural area. And it's so it has to receive only rainwater. And what we trying to do when we when we conserve it is that we try and protect the loss of water from the from the raised bog itself.

*00:12:54:02 - 00:13:21:17*

*James Shooter*

Below the surface is death as the vegetation at the bottom of the pile starts to die off. It doesn't decompose thanks to the waterlogged anaerobic conditions. Essentially the lack of oxygen stops microbial life breaking it down. What it does start to do is compress. Over many, many years and more and more layers of vegetation above the plant matter get squished and smooshed together and eventually forms peat.

*00:13:21:19 - 00:13:37:17*

*James Shooter*

Those aren't technical terms by the way. A fantastic carbon store, whilst it remains undisturbed and wet. Unfortunately, the natural value of this bleak looking landscape has been overlooked in the past and instead manipulated for use by humans. Standard.

*00:13:37:19 - 00:14:04:06*

*Thomas Christensen*

Well, it started, the drainage started. We have we had a development in Denmark. We lost some of our land to the Germans back in the 1800s. And some people say that what we lost to the outside world we should gain in our inside world. And so we've started to draining and farming areas that have otherwise been left untouched before.

*00:14:04:08 - 00:14:26:01*

*Thomas Christensen*

And certainly, this was also part of it. There were big plans, government supported schemes to try and see if they could drain the whole entire bog area and start farming it. That would require a lot of lime. But you had lime in the hills just nearby, so it could have been done. Fortunately, it didn't succeed with it in time before we got why some started protecting it.

*00:14:26:03 - 00:14:33:11*

*James Shooter*

So, these digging tunnels, they're currently 3 to 4 meters deep of water.

*00:14:33:11 - 00:14:33:18*

*James Shooter*

Now.

*00:14:33:23 - 00:14:34:06*

*Thomas Christensen*

It would.

*00:14:34:06 - 00:14:35:18*

*James Shooter*  
Have been peat.

*00:14:35:20 - 00:15:04:23*

*Thomas Christensen*

So, and then you have these sort of the the ridges in between each of these lines. And they've now become overgrown with reeds, with birch, willow. And but you imagine if you were here 25 years ago, this was an open industrial landscape, It was brown and there was dust clouds everywhere. And the tower that we're standing in now is called the Fireman Watchtower.

*00:15:05:00 - 00:15:33:01*

*Thomas Christensen*

So here you've got a fireman sitting on watch, more or less 24 hours a day looking to see if there was any fire building up, because that would really be a disaster when you're in a peat area like this. And sometimes they did have fires. Yeah, but they managed to extinguish them before that became really serious. And now, just 25 years later, we're looking at something that looks like a really beautiful natural area.

*00:15:33:01 - 00:15:33:21*

*James Shooter*

It does, yeah.

*00:15:33:21 - 00:15:45:12*

*Thomas Christensen*

And we have really big amounts of waterbirds, both breeding and just migrating birds coming through the year.

*00:15:45:14 - 00:16:03:20*

*James Shooter*

And so how do you how do you it's an interesting dynamic because I suppose this habitat as it is wouldn't be here if it wasn't for the, you know, the lakes and the small lagoons and things like that. Is the hope to turn this back into a more, well raised bog, essentially?

*00:16:03:20 - 00:16:27:20*

*James Shooter*

Yeah. Yeah. You'd be forgiven for thinking that trees coming into a bare landscape is a good thing, but that's not the case here. If trees are able to grow on a raised bog its a sign of poor condition. The bog has become too dry. Nutrients may have crept in or the acidity has neutralized. The trees, then further degrade that habitat by removing even more water from the ground below.

*00:16:27:22 - 00:16:34:06*

*James Shooter*

Draining the land started the degradation in here, but perhaps the most damaging activity has been the harvesting of peat.



*00:16:34:08 - 00:17:03:07*

*Thomas Christensen*

It was being harvested mainly for energy purposes in the beginning, and we had a big cement factory just nearby that required a lot of energy. And so they were they were certainly behind a lot of the industrial scale exploitation of the of the whole area. And they were using big machinery. So at that time and up until about 20 years ago, 25 years ago, the middle section of a Lille Vildmose looked like a huge mining area.

*00:17:03:09 - 00:17:08:08*

*Thomas Christensen*

It was just dark brown covered in dust and then and big machines.

*00:17:08:10 - 00:17:31:14*

*James Shooter*

Red deer and moose or European elk, as some of you may know them as have been brought into this section to help control the tree growth. They are free rein to munch, nibble, chomp and chew as much willow and birch as they can manage. It's a deer's dream. Livestock are also used in some areas, but their hope is for their numbers to be reduced over time as their wild counterparts grow in number.

*00:17:31:16 - 00:17:56:18*

*James Shooter*

It's important to note here that rewilding at this stage, in this location has some trade offs to think about. The three sections, whilst thousands of hectares in size are fenced. This is to allow the reintroduction of the large herbivores and make sure that browsing and grazing work is utilized in the key areas. These barriers bring their own issues, not least the inability of larger animals to move in or out of those areas freely.

*00:17:56:20 - 00:18:05:16*

*James Shooter*

Thomas tells me that they believe the area in front of us can support around a thousand red deer before their positive disturbance starts tipping back towards a negative impact.

*00:18:05:20 - 00:18:39:23*

*Thomas Christensen*

If we don't have wolves, any other big predator coming into the area, we will have to do a lot of culling by that time. And it's difficult in an area like this. It's flat, it's hard to access it. And you've got visitors, many visitors in the middle area where we will have to do that culling. But then we have the Conservation Act for the area also specifies that we we have to look at ways how we can combine the existing tree fences into just one big fence of more than a 7000 hectares.

*00:18:40:00 - 00:18:47:00*

*Thomas Christensen*

So there's a lot of challenges ahead and I can't tell you exactly how we're going to do that when we're going to do it, but certainly we are going to do it.

00:18:47:02 - 00:19:06:13

*James Shooter*

Granted, the fences aren't ideal, but if it gets to the point where all three sections are combined, that's a huge area now functioning more naturally than it would be without them. Perhaps Danish legislation will change one day and even the full boundary fence will be able to come down, allowing the large herbivores to spread beyond Lille Vildemose.

00:19:06:15 - 00:19:16:18

*James Shooter*

I'm sure that's the dream. That said, not all animals have been respecting these manmade boundaries. In fact, the Reserve has recently been getting a fairly special visitor.

00:19:16:20 - 00:19:22:08

*Thomas Christensen*

We could have, for example, a family of wolves living in here that could probably help us along with that.

00:19:22:08 - 00:19:23:16

*James Shooter*

Would that ever be a possibility or?

00:19:23:17 - 00:19:40:23

*Thomas Christensen*

Yeah, at the moment, well, I can't promise you that I can show you a wolf. I've been here two years now, but we have a wolf living in the area to the south, just a single wolf who came here. He came here about two two and a half years ago. And he's been living there ever since. Inside that fence And.

00:19:41:00 - 00:19:41:21

*James Shooter*

Inside the fence?

00:19:41:21 - 00:19:43:20

*Thomas Christensen*

Inside the fence of 4000 hectares.

00:19:43:24 - 00:19:44:14

*James Shooter*

...how?

00:19:44:15 - 00:19:49:23

*Thomas Christensen*

Many? He just he preys on on the on the red deer and the wild boar that we have.

00:19:49:23 - 00:19:52:20

*James Shooter*

Stupid question how did he get inside the fence?

00:19:52:20 - 00:20:06:12

*Thomas Christensen*

The family jumped the fence. Oh, really? Yeah, the two and a half meter high fence. Well part of it was at that time was, was, was an old stretch of only only two meters. But he jumped that.

00:20:06:18 - 00:20:13:08

*James Shooter*

Wow brilliant. So if they want to get in, when they get closer to this area, they can get in. They can. And that would be an advantage to you guys. Yeah.

00:20:13:09 - 00:20:30:10

*Thomas Christensen*

Yeah. And well, as wolves are now spreading in Denmark as well, we have a population of more than 30 wolves in Denmark at the moment, creating a lot of debate as well. But we hope that we will have more wolves coming up our way. This is one of the places where we would be happy to see them.

00:20:30:12 - 00:20:30:22

*James Shooter*

Of course.

00:20:30:24 - 00:20:47:03

*James Shooter*

As we head back down the fire watchtower and further south towards the intact raised bog. Walking through a Beechwood parties of Siskin are up in the canopy twittering away, and woodpeckers seem to be calling from most directions. Thomas has something slightly more niche to show me, though.

00:20:47:05 - 00:21:10:15

*Thomas Christensen*

We just standing here now looking at one of these old beeches. It's a tree that half of the crown has fallen down in a storm recently. And we had this researchers coming out, Can we just have a peek because they wanted to see if they could find Stella's Moss Scorpion on it. It's one of the species that is very significant for this place.

00:21:10:17 - 00:21:41:02

*Thomas Christensen*

And they found it was living in there and normally they're found in the height between six and nine meters in these old hollows in broadleaf trees and where you have water penetrating, you have this sort of black tree mulch inside and that's where they like to live. And then at certain stage they become two too many. And like you do if you're

teenagers, assume you just kick some of them out or they maybe they just want to get away from their parents.

*00:21:41:04 - 00:21:44:00*

*Thomas Christensen*

Then they attach themselves to mosquitoes and fly out.

*00:21:44:02 - 00:21:47:16*

*James Shooter*

No, they don't! I don't believe that that's true.

*00:21:47:18 - 00:21:57:22*

*Thomas Christensen*

It's a one-way ticket. So, the insect airways won't provide a return ticket and then hopefully they'll find a new place to settle.

*00:21:57:24 - 00:22:02:21*

*James Shooter*

So, they literally cling onto the legs of mosquitoes to get a free ride into a new territory?

*00:22:02:21 - 00:22:03:17*

*Thomas Christensen*

Yeah, it does.

*00:22:03:18 - 00:22:10:24*

*James Shooter*

That's incredible. I mean, I question the value of mosquitoes sometimes, but that offers one thing I suppose.

*00:22:11:01 - 00:22:34:17*

*James Shooter*

I told you they were an important part of the ecosystem. Mind blown, though, right? Through the trunks, right at the edge of the wood is another tower. This one is 18 meters high. Six flights of stairs on the edge of forest and bog.

*00:22:34:19 - 00:22:37:21*

*Thomas Christensen*

And now it opens up, James.

*00:22:37:23 - 00:22:38:19*

*James Shooter*

What a reveal.

*00:22:38:21 - 00:22:50:15*

*Thomas Christensen*

Yeah. And now you come up to the real, really big pearl of this whole area. Wow.

00:22:50:17 - 00:22:56:21

*James Shooter*

That's some transition from. Yeah. Thick beech forest to this.

00:22:56:23 - 00:23:29:05

*James Shooter*

In front of us is a huge expanse of open bog. It's a stark contrast to the 180 degrees behind me. In the skies above seven or eight, whooper swans are passing through. And in the far distance, a golden eagle soaring. A rare and privileged site in Denmark. It's easy to look down below and consider it bleak. And in fairness, this habitat is fairly species poor, but it does support a range of specialist fauna and flora, and its real importance is what it stores carbon and water. Beyond the browsers

00:23:29:05 - 00:23:53:12

*James Shooter*

Amid Grazers, water is one of the main rewilding tools here. By rebalancing the water table, the team at Lille Vildmose have managed to restore bog lake and forest with just one main action; the blocking of ditches and drains. It stopped water escaping from the main raised bog. It's refilled three lakes that have been emptied, one of which I spotted an otter porpoise on, by the way.

00:23:53:14 - 00:24:18:04

*James Shooter*

And it's also opening up niches in the forest by killing and uprooting some of the larger trees. This is a great source of deadwood and has the added benefit of creating favourite wallowing spots for bison and boar in the shallow pits created by the only root plates. Instability brings stability to the wider ecosystem. Bringing water back is probably the easy part when compared to revegetating the bog with the plants that should be there.

00:24:18:06 - 00:24:53:13

*Thomas Christensen*

We've worked together with the Nature agency and even some of the other landowners in the area. We work to see if we could make small dams and support the basin section and introduce sphagnum mosses into those by collecting samples in the local area and putting them out in these areas. And this was done as part of an EU life project that was used to, to and restore a lot of the former depleted areas.

00:24:53:15 - 00:25:22:07

*Thomas Christensen*

And then just recently working with a researcher called Miter. So we we've tried to to see if we could do something that they've done in Canada. We only just take the top layer of the layer affected by farming, we scrape that off and, and then we have spread the sphagnum, fresh, pure sphagnum using a topper machine from a nearby golf course.

00:25:22:09 - 00:25:46:11

*Thomas Christensen*

And we put, we put out a thin layer and covered it by straw later on to protect it from drying out and to keep the moisture content. And that means that that's a less wet way of doing it. And then we need to see if that would be more successful. The first trials we did for at least four for the first ten years have not looked very successful.

*00:25:46:12 - 00:25:53:19*

*Thomas Christensen*

But it actually looks like now they are starting to prove that there would be some results. Just proves that time, time.

*00:25:53:24 - 00:25:56:05*

*James Shooter*

Time is the big thing for sure.

*00:25:56:07 - 00:26:20:09*

*James Shooter*

It's always exciting to see a landscape getting wilder, and even more thrilling is to hear of its potential to increase in size too. The word on the grapevine is that the Danish government is looking to see what they can do in terms of conserving or saving part of lowland areas with peaty soils. It sounds highly likely that they'll be buying neighbouring land here to preserve peatland and further raise the water table themselves.

*00:26:20:11 - 00:26:41:11*

*James Shooter*

Once that's done, restrictions will be put in place so these functions can't be reversed and they will then look to sell the land again at a discounted price. Thomas and his team will be very interested when that happens. Whilst preparing for my visit, I came across the website for the Lille Vildmose Centre, an NGO which acts as the main visitor hub for the site.

*00:26:41:13 - 00:26:53:23*

*James Shooter*

It looked amazing. I couldn't wait to explore it. So after a quick lunch of rye bread, boiled eggs and a few cups of coffee with Thomas, I was really looking forward to meeting Jakob, the chief Ranger and center manager.

*00:26:54:00 - 00:27:29:02*

*Jakob Konnerup*

This is an NGO, so it's not built to make money, it's built to make knowledge. So we want to have people getting knowledge about the nature we want to get people to have and really interest in visiting the area after they visit the center. And then we've said that if you know about the nature, you'll protect it. You know, if you have the knowledge, the people of Denmark are moving more and more into bigger cities, and that means that they kind of they're losing their connection to nature.

*00:27:29:04 - 00:27:53:03*

*Jakob Konnerup*

And also, if we wanted to regain that connection, we have to make it we have to make it special to visit the nature. We have to make it easy to visit the nature. And also we have to make the knowledge about the nature. And we have to give that to the Danish population in a way they understand.

*00:27:53:03 - 00:27:55:12*

*Jakob Konnerup*

And it's easy to understand.

*00:27:55:14 - 00:28:20:12*

*James Shooter*

Every detail of this visitor center has been thought about so that even when you're inside, you connected to the outside. The building is shaped like a long brown peat brick, a nod to the cultural importance to people of the past. Guarding the entrance is a stunning five meter high rusted metal sculpture of a big bull moose, something that I think would look pretty neat in my front garden, too.

*00:28:20:14 - 00:28:41:02*

*James Shooter*

Even the toilets are adorned with wildlife wallpaper. Plus, when you shut the doors, speakers are up to the corresponding sounds. As I curiously stepped in and out of each bathroom. I probably looked a bit odd to the lady at the front desk. I decided I liked the trumpeting crane toilet the best. You could also choose from bellowing stags or whooping whooper swans.

*00:28:41:04 - 00:28:57:07*

*James Shooter*

The center also has one of those very dangerous gift shops where they have a plethora of irresistible souvenirs for a wildlife lover. Naturally, I came away with three wildlife art posters a glass bullfinch sculpture, and a moose magnet. The lady probably warmed to me a little after that.

*00:28:57:09 - 00:29:35:11*

*Jakob Konnerup*

The protection of Lille Vildmose has been going on for years. But this certificate of now, it's protected the deal off it was in 2007. And that was probably because the Big Nature Foundation Aage V Nature Foundation make a big effort of buying up some of the land and wants to make out a nature area. Yes, but also Lille Vildmose was lying in a small municipality and the mayor of the municipality was actually the man who started up the center here because he wants his municipality to be known for something.

*00:29:35:13 - 00:29:41:11*

*Jakob Konnerup*

And what was the biggest thing he got? That was the nature. That was the special thing about the municipality.

00:29:41:13 - 00:29:54:21

*James Shooter*

As Jakob just about manages to pull me away from the gift shop, he's eager to show me the delights of the exhibition, half of which is inside and half outside. We walk through a corridor to the main hall.

00:29:54:23 - 00:30:02:03

*Jakob Konnerup*

Now you can try yourself to go on the raised bog.

00:30:02:05 - 00:30:11:19

*James Shooter*

It's so cool.

00:30:11:21 - 00:30:37:01

*James Shooter*

I love how everything is interactive. The floor wobbles beneath my feet to mimic a carpet of sphagnum and sound is obviously going to play a large role here. The multi-sensory approach is much more effective than relying on sight alone, which of course not everyone can rely on anyway. As we enter the main room, there's lots to take in: huge digital information boards with powerful pictures from the past, three interactive live cameras.

00:30:37:03 - 00:31:01:10

*James Shooter*

We can zoom in on the bird life with incredible detail, technology originally designed for the Danish prisons, I'm told. Hooves, horns and jawbones for the kids to pick up and feel there's even a simulator where you can soar like an eagle over the open bog. Technology is used incredibly well but for learning purposes, perhaps nothing beats a bit of old school taxidermy and a very enthusiastic guide.

00:31:01:12 - 00:31:10:07

*Jakob Konnerup*

Wild boars, we have them so we can tell that we have wild boars in the area, how big they are. And so and of course the moose.

00:31:10:09 - 00:31:14:13

*James Shooter*

Well yeah that's a size when the towering over you. Yeah.

00:31:14:15 - 00:31:48:18

*Jakob Konnerup*

Those are a lot of our guests actually ask how about the animals. How can they move on the raised bog because it's so wet. But when you see these legs on the moose, you can understand that this animal is actually built to walk in in wetland, swamp. It's built to walk in snow, ice. I also it's a bird that told people that the long head is actually also that



because of the length of the head, when the moose take in the cold air, it will kind of warm up through the nose and it will be warm air

*00:31:48:18 - 00:32:11:23*

*Jakob Konnerup*

that reach the brain. That means that the moose can detect a lot out of the air, even though the air is cold because it's warming up through the nose. And then when it reached the brain, it's it's easier to to recognize if there's anything in the air danger, hormones, anything that's incredible. And so that's that's something like a design for an animal that lives where it's cold.

*00:32:11:23 - 00:32:18:13*

*James Shooter*

Yeah. Yeah. And as you say, yeah, just looking at it, seeing the length of it way down it's yeah, the demonstration and.

*00:32:18:13 - 00:32:33:15*

*Jakob Konnerup*

This big feet from a moose here, actually, I tell a story about that this foot of this big moose is actually the, the weapon of the moose because it's, it's not attacking with the antlers. It's attacking by, by hitting you with the with the feet.

*00:32:33:15 - 00:32:34:18*

*James Shooter*

Is that what they do. Yeah.

*00:32:34:24 - 00:32:44:20*

*Jakob Konnerup*

Yes boxing. Yeah. Well, yeah. And instead of using the antlers instead, the red deer will use the antlers and fight with those. The moose will use its feet.

*00:32:44:21 - 00:32:46:02*

*James Shooter*

I'm not sure I'd like to be kicked by a moose.

*00:32:46:02 - 00:32:47:10*

*Jakob Konnerup*

No, no, no.

*00:32:47:12 - 00:32:56:08*

*James Shooter*

As we head into the outside courtyard, it's obvious the focus here is learning through play. It's probably designed for kids that I can't wait to get stuck in either.

*00:32:56:10 - 00:33:32:04*

*Jakob Konnerup*

And then our newest thing is our water playground. And from here, it just looked like four places where you can have fun. Yeah, but let's try to go into the first one here. And when we move into this area, we are actually going on top of a big map. And when I take school classes up here, they can actually on their own, fill up the lakes, empty them, fill them up again.

*00:33:32:09 - 00:33:36:13*

*Jakob Konnerup*

And then they actually made the story of Lille Vildmose. so cool.

*00:33:36:15 - 00:33:41:07*

*James Shooter*

Well, great to get the kids right into the mix of restoration.

*00:33:41:07 - 00:34:06:14*

*Jakob Konnerup*

Yeah. So? So we can fill it up, drain it, fill it up again, and they can learn how we have been done, what we have been doing out here. When we want the farmland and now we want to the farmland to be flooded. So it will contain and and restore the carbon dioxide.

*00:34:06:16 - 00:34:18:23*

*James Shooter*

It's such a great concept. It's all all about experiencing it for yourself. And then you can talk about these things showing you that the restoration of the lake and things like that. But to actually see it on a miniature scale is so much more effective.

*00:34:19:00 - 00:34:44:01*

*Jakob Konnerup*

And then we have put in a little extra thing we put in pumps so that the water we pump it up and let it run back. And that that is why you can hear now we've got the sound of the water because we make the the little creek so that we have areas where the water is running fast. We have area where we have water almost standing still.

*00:34:44:03 - 00:35:13:00*

*Jakob Konnerup*

So we had can see different types of insects living here and school class can come here and have education in what kind of animals due to what kind of environment. Yeah, yeah. The whole system here is one closed system. So when, when people are finished playing with the water, we collect it and then we send it round here.

*00:35:13:00 - 00:35:28:16*

*Jakob Konnerup*

So it is kind of tap water there, they are kind of playing with it. And then we also collect all the rainwater. Yeah. So, so we tried to do it as, as green as possible.

*00:35:28:16 - 00:35:34:01*

*James Shooter*

Yeah. Yeah. Definitely. Yeah. So yeah. And that in itself is a good message to, to send out there.

*00:35:34:02 - 00:35:44:07*

*Jakob Konnerup*

Exactly. Exactly. Yeah. So and it will be running here and the pumps are running on, on electricity by our solar panels.

*00:35:44:09 - 00:36:06:19*

*James Shooter*

Beyond the immediate courtyard of educational entertainment there's a wilder section for people to walk out into. It's amazing how fast the naturalness swallows you up and you soon then forget you're just a stone's throw from the Playpark Visitor Center and school groups. And even amongst the scrubby vegetation, the interacting elements don't fizzle out. They just become more surprising.

*00:36:06:21 - 00:36:19:02*

*Jakob Konnerup*

Right here we can actually sound off the animals in the area, and when I press the button, you will have the speaker here, but the sound will be coming from the whole area.

*00:36:19:04 - 00:36:28:21*

*Speaker 5*

*Danish narration*

*00:36:28:18 - 00:36:31:24*

*Jakob Konnerup*

He's saying that the bird will make noise when it's flying.

*00:36:32:01 - 00:36:33:00*

*James Shooter*

Forward.

*00:36:33:02 - 00:36:41:11*

*Speaker 5*

*Danish narration.*

*00:36:41:13 - 00:36:45:00*

*James Shooter*

I feel myself looking in the sky ready for them.

*00:36:45:02 - 00:36:45:17*

*Thomas Christensen*

RAM.

*00:36:45:19 - 00:36:57:21*

*Speaker 5*  
*Danish narration.*

*00:37:00:03 - 00:37:00:24*  
*Jakob Konnerup*  
It's a rut season.

*00:37:01:03 - 00:37:04:15*  
*Speaker 5*  
You can shorten the bench. I'm sure.

*00:37:04:17 - 00:37:06:01*  
*James Shooter*  
It's brilliant.

*00:37:06:03 - 00:37:26:02*  
*James Shooter*  
Surround sound wildlife. Again I feel like I might want this for my garden. Hidden speakers echo the sounds of nature amongst the trees and bushes surrounding us. The quality really does make you feel like these animals are right beside you. On the face of it, bogs probably aren't the easiest ecosystem to get people fired up about yet

*00:37:26:02 - 00:37:45:09*  
*James Shooter*  
If they were to take one step into this visitor center, I guarantee they'll leave feeling educated and inspired. Guests aren't solely restricted to the confines of the visitor center either. The great team here offer guided tours into the wilder Lille Vildmose area, and that'll cement anyone's enthusiasm for this awe inspiring sight.

*00:37:45:11 - 00:38:11:21*  
*Jakob Konnerup*  
I think that is because our guides out here are that they are they're kind of that they like it. You can see you can see it in their eyes that they love this area, their passion when they tell the story. So so if you get on a guided tour, that's no problem. You can feel it. And even though you don't see the animals, you will still have a great tour because you can feel that the guide is there for you and want to tell the story.

*00:38:11:22 - 00:38:45:00*  
*Jakob Konnerup*  
We can focus on more than just the big animals we have been focusing a lot about the the big five, the moose, the European bison, the boars, the red deers. But there is a lot of knowledge about the insects, about the plants, about the construction of the of the raised bog. It is amazing but if you kind of branding the area to say come and see how the mosses are growing, people are not going to come here.

*00:38:45:00 - 00:39:02:23*  
*Jakob Konnerup*

Yeah. People are going to come here when you have a moose. We have big animals. But when they get here, some of them actually think that the big animals are nice and great, but it is amazing how many people that will go deeper and learn about the small things where they are great stories as well.

*00:39:03:04 - 00:39:24:20*

*James Shooter*

The team here have obviously put a lot of work into making it a great space for young people to learn. And you don't need me to tell you how important that is. The movers and shakers of tomorrow. The Visitor Center team have many school tours coming in from nearby municipalities - an incredible chance for young folk to learn outside of the classroom and spend time in nature.

*00:39:24:22 - 00:39:29:11*

*James Shooter*

11-year-old me would have loved this. Heck, 33-year-old me loves this.

*00:39:29:13 - 00:39:54:12*

*Jakob Konnerup*

But what we tried to do is actually we want to get two or three generations out here. So Granpop is telling the children about how he has been digging for peat, and maybe the parents can say they are working in a factory making solar panels and the children, they know how much energy they need to to load up them, cell phones and and whatever.

*00:39:54:12 - 00:39:56:23*

*Jakob Konnerup*

So, we want the generation to learn from each other.

*00:39:57:02 - 00:40:09:08*

*James Shooter*

That transfer of knowledge down there exactly is always been important. Right. So yeah, in this new age of trying to get carbon down and and yeah protect biodiversity, it is important that people recognize that journey.

*00:40:09:12 - 00:40:34:10*

*James Shooter*

It's fair to say that bogs are often overlooked as an ecosystem. I mean, even the name doesn't inspire much: bog. Our indifference has allowed for their exploitation, whether it be draining water for farmland, harvesting sphagnum for planters or mining peat for burning and compost. Thankfully, we finally started realizing that this stuff is best left in the ground. The team here are inspiring that change in mindset.

*00:40:34:12 - 00:40:54:00*

*James Shooter*

So whilst you might not have paid much attention to bogs before, I hope you are starting to see them in a new light now and wishing the four legged tree trimming team every success in their important work and perhaps one day soon the Lonely Wolf will even be

joined by a mate. Wouldn't it be fantastic if one day the Lille Vildmose team achieve that dream of a fenceless landscape

00:40:54:00 - 00:41:20:15

*James Shooter*

allowing more interactivity between species and habitat? It'll be great if the Danish government acquires more land surrounding this important area to potentially making northwestern Europe's largest bog even bigger and even bigger.

00:41:20:17 - 00:41:44:09

*James Shooter*

Thanks for joining me for episode nine of The Rewild podcast. If you're enjoying the series, it's always lovely to hear your comments and reviews from whichever platform you're listening to us from. So please do consider giving us a rating or leaving behind some thoughts. It does make a big difference in reaching new people. It's great to hear of an organization doing some really ambitious work whilst navigating the mazes of government legislation.

00:41:44:11 - 00:42:04:08

*James Shooter*

At the very least, perhaps you'll look at a mosquito in a new light and you never know, there might just be some tiny pseudo scorpions clinging to the legs for a free ride. Huge appreciation to Thomas and Jakob for their time in showing me around. I have a real affinity for Northern landscapes, so it's nice to see some familiar species along the way.

00:42:04:10 - 00:42:27:07

*James Shooter*

And thanks, as always to Andrew O'Donnell of Beluga Lagoon for the tunes and to Gemma Shooter for the inspiring artwork. Lille Vildmose is a member of the European Rewilding Network, a collection of groundbreaking initiatives across the continent brought together by Rewilding Europe as part of a broader rewilding movement. This is an organization making rewilding happen through positive action on the ground.

00:42:27:09 - 00:42:32:10

*James Shooter*

Do join us next month as we travel to the Velebit Mountains in Croatia. Catch you next time.