



Episode 115: Spreading Rewilding Awareness And Advocacy Via Journeys With Purpose

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Duncan Grossart, Journeys With Purpose

Duncan Grossart

Duncan Grossart: [00:00:00] So I'm British, I'm based here in the UK, talking to you now. And I'm a country boy at heart. I grew up in the countryside in the south of England surrounded by a sort of an array of animals and so on. And also a diet of David Attenborough and Jack Cousteau. That's what I, that's what I saw as I was growing up through the TV.

And that really imbibed me with a sense of the wonder of the natural world and the value, of it. So I experienced that as I was growing up. I studied zoology at university in the UK, in London. And then I did a master's degree in Ireland studying equine science and management. So horses were also part of my life as I was growing up amongst the animals I was with.

And also I began to travel in my teens as well, which sort of leads us on to where I'm at with my business journeys with purpose. My career is really being split into two halves. So after I finished my graduate degrees, I had a commercial career.

I had a a media and photography agency that became reasonably successful [00:01:00] with offices in the UK and Germany and America and international partners around the world. And that taught me a lot about

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organizational design, commerce I suppose value and the contrast in, in creating businesses and some of The sort of the challenges or issues that obviously businesses caused as well.

So I hugely enjoyed that, but I always had that pull and tug inside that I wanted to get back to my roots around my concerns, my, joy of the natural world. So I sold out of my business about 12 or so years ago. And I've been involved in environmental sustainability initiatives ever since.

And most particularly around this theme of rewilding in the past five, six, seven years. And that's what I've dedicated my time to. And that really originated out of some of these remarkable stories that I was I began to hear myself. Probably beginning actually with the great work of Doug and Christine Tompkins, which you and your listeners and readers will know very well.

I've become [00:02:00] absolutely absorbed with, learning and engaging with rewilding.

And this is across the globe as well. And initially, it was about how I could contribute with perhaps fundraisings or media or events or so on. But as I said earlier on. I've been lucky enough to travel throughout my life, and I really thought where could I play my best role. And that was in looking at how we could create direct engagement experiences in the wild, where people could learn and better understand how they can contribute to rewilding on the land and in the seas.

And so in 2019 I set up Journeys with Purpose just to do this. with the great support of, I think one of, I always describe as our founding partner Tompkins Conservation and Fundacion Rewilding Argentina, where we created a trip with Christina with her team. Where we would go and visit the work in one of the parks that Doug and Chris and the teams have created.

And this was Ibra in Northeastern Argentina. What a great start. What a [00:03:00] wonderful starting point. Jack, this is the stuff of legend and I. And I still pinch myself to think how lucky I am and the guests are words to go and visit that project work where, as it's the creation of a brand new national park of almost 2 million acres in the northeast of Argentina, remarkable wetland.

The Doug and Chris had the vision to see and create with the local Argentinian partners, and of course the iconic aspect of the reintroduction of the Jaguar which was reintroduced after 70 years of absence, which very, you know, mirrors very much the reintroduction of Wolves to Yellowstone, and the success in it and learning about what made that a success and it was fascinating sitting there with Sophia and the team and she really boiled it down to three things was, it was about, local communications with people, the cultures, the communities, the municipality the provincial government and the national government, [00:04:00] first and foremost, and then it was secondly about, I think marketing that message that what they wanted to achieve over and over again.

And then thirdly, about the economics of looking at how rewilding can bring people back into nature can foster and create economic vitality within regions. It's an example of what we look to do. with Journeys with Purpose is to create these rewilding experiences with what I describe as the known heroes like Chris and her teams and so on, and also the hidden heroes.

I think there are some amazing stories out there that, that really deserve a light to be shone on them. And that's what we do. We work with projects in South America. We liaise with organizations such as American Prairie Reserve in North America and some of the work that the Turner Properties and Ranchers are doing.

We work with an organization called Carpathia in Romania. In Europe, [00:05:00] which is about creating what they call the Yellowstone of Europe basically Europe's last large scale remaining virgin forests, which contain the largest concentrations of wolves and bears and lynx and so on. And then we have partners in East Africa, Southern Africa, and just recently embarking on conversations in West Africa as well.

And then looking to Asia, Australasia, and then perhaps, I hope one day we can put together a climate science experience in Antarctica. So we're very much looking on a global scale. We're looking across the seven continents. We create these flagship experiences which people can join. And then we're also increasingly doing bespoke journeys as well with requests that are coming in.

And I think it's down to being very rigorous with our messaging about restoring our relationship with the natural world and, the rising clarion call behind rewilding and what it can do to [00:06:00] restore our ecosystems. And also, it's a message that people really want to hear now.

It's how can people engage more, particularly the younger generation.

Jack Humphrey: What does this look like for participants?

Duncan Grossart: So the mantra we have for this in terms of our design and bear in mind I'm you know, so we sit in if you like the travel bucket.

We're a travel company But I always like to reiterate to people that we're a mission business first and foremost where travelers are medium And we are a business. I've in huge admiration. The gold standard is Patagonia. I don't want to, I don't want to have a business and then have a foundation on the side.

We want to be doing it within one organization or one enterprise. We're a mission based business where travelers are medium and I think from coming outside of the travel industry and looking at it with fresh eyes, we've really taken the approach where we want to make this people centric.

So our mantra is remarkable [00:07:00] people, projects, and places, all with remarkable purpose. And so that people, projects, and places that's how we look at how we design itinerary. In that priority order. So as I said earlier, it's about bringing people back into nature, rather than, keeping them out of it, back into wild nature.

And so we're always looking at how we can create a story and a narrative. As we travel through a landscape meeting people. And again, both the known heroes and the hidden heroes because everybody or so many people that we meet in these remarkable places has a wonderful story to tell. And that is part of the learning experience.

Of course, we're going to see some remarkable landscapes and so on, but it's a really about trying to tell a story and a woven narrative across and through a landscape and also to make it really good fun as well. That's what we're about. It's the joy of being [00:08:00] with kindred spirits and like minded souls and being in wild places.

Jack Humphrey: So what's a favorite project that pops to mind? And I know I'm asking the impossible to pick but just something that sticks out, maybe something recent or something, the epic iconic way that you got started in Ibarra.

What were some of the experiences both for the people who did the journey but also the work that was done on the ground, how was that project enhanced by the participation?

Duncan Grossart: Okay, so we are, our outlook is we want to be a contributor to the success and a support to the success of these projects.

We're going to start with the 1 that we've already discussed visiting Ibarra National Park in northeastern Argentina. That is just a remarkable goal. Story of not just about securing a landscape, but also reintroducing species back into the landscape.

And as Chris has said, a wilderness without animals is like a stage without actors. And I'm slightly paraphrasing here, but that's the meaning of it. [00:09:00] And how difficult reintroducing species can be from the red and green winged macaw through to anteaters through to the jaguar.

So it's about learning along the way, all the challenges that go with that and whether it relates to, bringing in the people that support those types of species reintroductions, raising funds, whatever it may be. These are the learnings that we take along the way and also emphasizing community engagement as well.

So I'm trying to recall the saying, I think it's got to enter as well that say Corrientes, which is one of the the sort of the phrases that the Fundación Rewilding team really used to bring in the local communities into the success of the project to give them ownership, to give them if you like, Identity back with the Jaguar.

So I think to me That is a remarkable project to visit and see and [00:10:00] understand the biome of a vast freshwater landscape. And in terms of, the guest contribution for our flagship trips, we always include a percentage of our trip price that goes directly to the foundation that we visit.

It's typically 20%. So there's a direct financial contribution that goes into the the project. And also we're working on how we can encourage people then to follow up from there. And it can be a philanthropic contribution, or it can be some form of other advocacy.

So the target group that we like to work with are people who have financial means that can make. Further contributions to the project that we visit, or some other form of advocacy that they can bring, it can be a powerful voice in business or in some other fashion, they could be a media, they could be in sports, but everyone that's adding to the the message of the Foundation we, we visit and also the theme of rewilding to bring it more and more into the mainstream and again, restore our relationship with wild [00:11:00] places.

So that's Iwura. And, yeah. The icon there is, as Sebas the conservation director welcomed us into the central part of what they do there is welcome to Jurassic Park and there's a 75 acre cage an enclosure there where they begin to habituate the jaguars back into the wild.

But I think at the latest count beginning of the 13 now, I think in the wild and at the beginning of last year, there were none. And that's a remarkable achievement over a short period of time.

They make it seem so

Jack Humphrey: easy when you are following them on social media. It's a lot of activity and they really do make it look like, wow, you can just pop some jaguars out there and some macaws and anteaters.

It just feels like they have such a great relationship with the municipalities, the local and larger government that it just doesn't seem it doesn't appear to be as big of an issue there as it has been for the rest of us around the world.

And I just love that because it makes I think it gives me hope. [00:12:00] That we can eventually be this productive elsewhere, even though I know what a lofty goal I've just put out there.

Duncan Grossart: That's a key word there is hope. I think you, you've, you are saying there as to how well they do their marketing and their comms.

And I'll repeat what I said earlier about those three aspects of success. That Sofia Aynan and the executive director of Fundaci3n Rewiring Argentina so well said so well to us as a group, it's about politics. It's about the local politics with the communities and municipalities, the provincial government, the national government and then it's secondly about marketing and then thirdly about economics and that's brought the success of the park.

to bear. But I think, you also know, you know the teams there. This, they're 30 years into the project work in South America, Tompkins Conservation, and the enormous obstacles that they've had to overcome to get where they've [00:13:00] got to. As the saying goes, it's a funny thing about overnight success, it takes 20 years to get there.

I love the story of Tompkins conservation so much because it's just, it's so remarkable and it's done on such a large scale. And for me, as somebody who's come from a natural sciences background that then went into business that then come back into my kind of really first and true love is that story of taking.

Amazing corporate entrepreneurship in the North Face, in Esprit, in Patagonia, and then turning it into amazing conservation entrepreneurship and rewilding entrepreneurship. That is that's just the gold standard. And I think to listeners, to readers. People in business who don't think they can do this, who don't think they can make a contribution, they can absolutely pivot business skills, corporate skills.

Organizational leadership skills to rewilding and bring a [00:14:00] great deal of success to it. Because in a way you're often applying the same principles, good old fashioned marketing, good old fashioned communications, and it does work. It's just a case of persisting really hard and fast at it.

So there was a project that we support and we had a journey and in June of this year to visit Foundation Conservation Carpathia in the Southeast Carpathian Mountains in Romania. And as I said earlier, remarkable landscapes and mountains and populations of bears, wolves and lynx and so on.

And this was a journey that was through temperate landscapes and forested areas so it's a different biome, of course. And it's got, again, a really remarkable story of a young German couple, Christoph and Barbara Promberger, who are wolf scientists by background. Who went to starting with Christophe, who went to Romania in the early 90s after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of [00:15:00] the Cold War, and discovered this amazing landscape and fell in love with it, and continued with his early scientific work, but with the integration of Romania into a capitalist system, there then became a very rapid and in many cases illegal log in going on and this grew and grew and he realized that, he needs to take action and start to figure out, okay, how can we prevent this?

And, Romania is and the sort of the illegal logging and the logging mafia there is very dangerous. People in ranges have been killed. So they took on a big task, but they brought a very good and strong crew around them and an executive board. One of the board members there is Hans Jörg Wies of the Wies Foundation and does tremendous conservation support and work around the world and other conservation luminaries, particularly from the European sphere and European background.

And so we had this journey [00:16:00] with them and we were lucky enough to have another couple join us at the beginning of the journey. Charlie Burrell and his wife, Isabella Tree, who are really the pioneers from the UK in rewilding, where they've taken their own three and a half thousand acre estate here in the UK that was farmland and they've rewilded it.

Now on, on rewilding scales, that's not necessarily a great deal, but I can tell you it's a big deal of, there's a big chunk of land in the southeast of England and how they've transformed that landscape. Over 20 years into something very special, they joined us. So that was part of the special experience that guests had and the guest spent the week with Christophe and Barbara Plumberger and learning about their experiences of building this foundation over the past decade or so, and how they're trying to weave together private land.

Hunting licenses overland and also state land as well. So again, another amazing project at scale about 600,000 acres.

That's

Jack Humphrey: [00:17:00] incredible. I'm thinking as a as an organization now that has its own projects. One of which is in the Mogollon area of southwest in the U. S., Mexico, Arizona, from the Gila Wilderness up to the Grand Canyon a, an arc of really wild land.

And if a jaguar or a wolf wants to go north from the Wolf Reintroduction Zone or a Jaguar from Mexico, this would be generally the path they take along the Mogollon Rim, and we just did some work there this spring mostly just organization, volunteers and staff. And to set up for that storytelling part of this to raise awareness and raise funds and to raise volunteers and things going forward, it would be really cool to one day get a visit from a bunch of people who would certainly fall in love.

With this place[00:18:00] and become advocates in the way that you're doing it.

Duncan Grossart: We absolutely love meeting new partners on the ground and journeys that we can create.

We, we also place a great deal of emphasis on female, youth and diversity leadership and representation, both in the projects that we visit, but also the guests that we want to bring into these projects. And that leads me on to. Another project, another journey that we've just launched in Kenya, in East Africa which is in collaboration with an organization called Daughters for Earth, which is about female empowerment, female leadership in several project areas that they run across the world.

And Daughters for Earth was originated by an amazing lady called Zainab Salbi. Who is Middle Eastern, is Iraqi by origin and had to leave her country at a fairly early age, I think, and had that experience. And she co founded Daughters for Earth with Jodie Allen, Paul Allen's sister.

And it's got a very powerful platform and [00:19:00] advocacy, but the one, the great wonder of that is, is that it's really promoting female leadership and empowerment in local communities, in in East Africa in Kenya and how they can contribute to again, restoring our relationship with wild places and that there are various stats about how women are underrepresented and when they can have a voice in the community, they can basically help foster, if you like, better biodiversity resilience, better relationship with the natural world.

Again, that's a slightly different approach to perhaps how we've partnered with Carpathia in Romania and so on. But there's always this strong theme running through the trips that we do around rewilding and impact advocacy and also how we look at. The project partners that we look, we want, we would like to work with and also the guests that we would love to bring in as well.

Jack, yeah, I'd [00:20:00] love to do something in North America. As I said, we, we do have relationships with American prairie reserve and the Turner properties and let's look at some of these projects that we could perhaps bring people into to help with advocacy because at its core, the reason why Okay.

journeys with purpose exists is to create a community of people who can better understand through engagement experiences in the field, how they can contribute to positive action on the ground and in the seas.

Jack Humphrey: I keep thinking of one of my most favorite Attenborough films, A Life on Our Planet.

And his whole punchline to the entire thing was rewilding, which just, it surprised me. I didn't know that was coming and nobody in our organization knew that was coming and it just hit. Really hard and it's, it wasn't rewilding and he just ended with rewilding and as [00:21:00] a shared hero of ours and practically everybody who's ever seen an Attenborough film, I keep thinking as you're talking about, Just what this is like for you personally, just you've seen that film, I'm sure.

And you followed his career very closely and now you're doing what you're doing. Is there any parallels you draw with that? Do you ever stop and think? at a place that Attenborough certainly had visited and now you're there that you're carrying on some spirit of his work and just imagining what it was like when he was there in, say, the 70s as opposed to now.

It feels like that would parallel everything you're doing pretty much.

Duncan Grossart: You've really got me there, Jack. You've hit the bullseye really. For many years it was a burn inside that I held subconsciously.

And that's why I talk about youth is that, we are shaped by what we experience as younger people in particular, [00:22:00] but of course, as we go through life and, one of my early experiences as a 15 year old was visiting East Africa myself and just seeing the marvel of the world. And what you say about David Attenborough certainly affected my life, it affected my life in the power of his media, in the power of the experiences in the wild.

Very much in, my own experience, I had a media and photography company, I understood the power of strong visuals, strong communications. And then experiences in the field. So as you say his recent book and program about his life on, on, on planet earth and how it's divided into three aspects is really his life to date and the changes that he's seen in the natural world over that period, firstly, secondly, then saying, if we continue for another 90 years, this is, yeah.

The completely likely outcome, which is catastrophic. And then thirdly, what we can [00:23:00] do about it. And as you say, he ends with, we must rewire the world, which, I don't think many people were expecting, but to come from that voice is so powerful. So he's definitely shaped my life and others have Jacques Cousteau and so on.

And. This is what I'm trying to do with my contribution, is how can we bring more people into the wild, who can fall in love with the place, who can get emotionally engaged and make their contribution. Because on that point is that I'm a big believer is that we are out of tune between our head and our hearts.

And. Modern society is very left brain driven. It's very rational driven and often say is we're running the planet like we're running on a spreadsheet, we can't do this. We've got to be more in, in tune with our intuition and our heart not just what is tangibly right, but what feels right.

And again, I think this is coming through in the sort of the younger people, the next gen is. [00:24:00] They're just not, it's just not feeling right what we're doing with our natural resources and with our planet and how can we tune back in to what is the right thing to do. Doesn't necessarily mean there's a financial gain out of it, but it's never, nevertheless the right thing to do.

I want to try to, if you like, play my role in helping other people. Find the wonder of the natural world and our engagement with it.

Our founder,

Jack Humphrey: Dave Forman's, one of his biggest goals was to get people to understand how important it is that people can only love a place if they know a place.

And they're only going to really buckle down and fight for a place that they love. Not that. Not even that they may have just been through. A lot of people can say they've been to Kenya, but not experienced it truly. And and for the length of time that it might've made that level of an impact where they would fight for it for life because of something that happened on the ground.

And you're just right [00:25:00] in the mix of all of that. And I know Dave would really love this episode because that's what you're doing and that's what he advocated for. So often, but when we talk about this, we're typically talking about it in light of generating a volunteer on the ground pick and shovel kind of response.

We're not usually talking about, and what makes this conversation different, bringing other people the same with the same love but with means. To two places that matter and then begin to matter to them. And one of the major aspects of what we're going to need to do going forward is raise an enormous amount of money just on a level that's never been done before.

for conservation. Now, of course, this is not going to fall on any one of us. But it's going to fall on governments primarily for the really huge amounts of money for all the protection if people are going to be, living up to goals like 50 by [00:26:00] 50. And what does that mean? But you in your way in your organization and what you're doing to support this, it's very important that you're focusing on people who can do that part of this very important work, which is okay.

They need to fall in love with it. And then if so, and they choose to do so bring their resources to bear different resources. Maybe they're older. They usually typically are and are not doing the back breaking work that I had people doing in the Sky Islands on their in their 20s with ripping up old forest service roads, but they're important.

Very vital to the work going forward. And you must be very proud of that. I'm very proud of

Duncan Grossart: them. I think people who Want to spend their time and effort and energy and means bring them to bear that's fantastic. That's walking the walk and making a difference and making a change.

And yes, I try and be practical about this is I call it, I talk [00:27:00] about, bringing people on board who can pull big levers, whether it be through again, through their financial means or through some other powerful voice for advocacy. And I agree that, generally wealth comes with an older demographic, but I would also say that, family office wealth, the younger generation the, what they call the next gen or the rising gen they're going to be decision makers.

Pretty soon, if not now on where private philanthropic funds may be dedicated or or, a different context, maybe, the corporate world, whatever it may be. So I do hear and see a real change in attitude towards giving to the natural world. I think there are various stats given out that.

3 percent of global giving is for the environment and of that 3% 10%. 0. 3 percent is actually dedicated to conservation and that's just got to change because if we don't have a home [00:28:00] and this, we're not gonna have to worry about anything else. And yeah so there is a change and that's exciting and it comes back to this, the storytelling that we do on the ground is not it's always about looking at the successes and the positivity and the hope aspect as well, because that's what I think brings.

brings excitement and brings people alive and understanding. Yes, we can make a difference. And we want to do that.

Jack Humphrey: One aspect of this is yes, people I've heard stories and I try to follow this as closely as I can of more spending more attention being paid. By companies, individuals, private philanthropists toward it toward these issues in general, without guidance, and certainly without having gone maybe on one of your journeys to meet the wildlife and the wild lands and the people doing the work firsthand.

A lot of the money is misguided the spreadsheet analogy that you used before when somebody came out and said, [00:29:00] we need 3 trillion more trees. And some of the companies that jumped on that and said we need to hide some of our carbon emissions. And so let's do let's go plant a million trees in, in rows in a farm kind of environment and in a monoculture.

And then go back and tell everybody how great we are doing environmentally. And of course they're not. And if, and they're learning that, that has slowed down. That the person who started that, I can't remember his name, but he. regretted putting it the way that he did because it went viral and the companies glommed onto it and he had to come back and retract or redirect what he meant by what he said because he felt really bad that all these tree farms are starting to pop up in places that should have been re, rewilded instead of just re treed, re canopied.

So that you're taking people out and showing them really these important this important work I would imagine helps fine tune the way people think they should be helping in these conservation efforts and where the money really should be directed.

Duncan Grossart: Definitely. I think [00:30:00] that's a very good point about.

What do we want of our natural world? We don't want a monoculture plantations. And I think it's the learning experience really is about the principles of rewilding, which is a dynamic is dynamic in itself, but, about natural regeneration, about ecosystem engineers, about apex.

predators and keystone species and so on, and how it has to work together. It's not just about carbon, it's about the whole, it's about, the ecosystem integrity. And it's learning those lessons, that I've learned myself, I'm a zoology graduate, but I've, I'm learning something new every day.

And that's so exciting. And I think that's

It's so fascinating and rewarding as well in of itself to be learning about these things from people on in the field.

I've talked about the audience that we like to bring into the field, but I'm also a very strong believer in [00:31:00] social equity and social justice, and we are always working on how we can think about how we can bring these messages to a broad audience.

Talking about this with you now, we have other initiatives as well with our own communications and our own webinars and podcasts about how we can. Tell these stories, bring these known hidden heroes to light through other forms of communication as well. So I'm, I'm trying to, I'm trying to make sure that we hit it on as many levels as we possibly can whilst always building a community that can make the biggest impacts that they possibly can.

Jack Humphrey: We talked a little bit about scale. How many more of your organizations do we need to solve all the world's problems? Let's just get that number out there. And I think we're done for the

Duncan Grossart: day. As I said, I'm not a great fan of spreadsheets. I think it's about giving everyone a feeling of empowerment that everyone can make a difference.

[00:32:00] To bringing nature back into their lives. Your question to me is how many more organizations do we need? It's we can all contribute in our own way. I like sport. I like sport analogies. I as a sports team, I have my place in the team. But I can't, without all the other members in the team, I can't, we can't succeed.

And. Everyone has different roles to play, so it might be a direct learning experience through Journeys with Purpose or another organization like us, or, another mechanism. Rewilding starts, for me, inside one's head. We've got to, we've got to rewild our brains to think about what we want to...

Look at when we're, in terms of our surroundings and so on and be happier with a what is conventional is traditionally called a messy environment at least from a UK perspective. So everyone has a role to play and everyone is empowered. [00:33:00] To make a difference, whether it's from somebody working in a 2 million acre National Park to someone who has a window box in an urban environment and an urban environments are important.

This generally urban environments. Are not sprayed with glyphosates and so on, like large parts of our rural environments are, we haven't spoken about agriculture. We won't have time today but, how we look at our urban environments, how we look at our agricultural environments with topics such as regenerative agriculture.

Everyone can make a contribution. If we all lean on this, if we all talk on the theme about rewilding, Thank you. Restoring our relationship with wilder nature and having those trophic systems in place around us. That's where we need to be aiming. And it's part of education, put it in schools as well.

Jack Humphrey: Where can people interested in journeys? I'll have your link of course, and the extra credit, but where can people learn more? What would you like to direct people's attention [00:34:00] to as part of your, our chat here today? Thank you.

Duncan Grossart: The best place to start is to go to journeys with purpose.org.

Dot org. And you can see there the project partners that we work with get into more detail about the sort of the approach we take and so on and so forth. And from there it's easy to reach out to me to reach out to our team members and begin a conversation and a dialogue, and then look out for our social media posts as well and any help.

that we can do. We absolutely happily will.

Jack Humphrey: Duncan, thank you so much for coming on the show. I've been wanting to learn about, more about your organization for years, actually. And I didn't even know it, but I started to recall the furthest back I could remember seeing you pop up here and there.

And we crossed paths several times unbeknownst to you in social media. And so I'm glad that you we were finally able to talk to you and learn more about this. And thank you so much for taking the time for being on the Rewilding Earth podcast.

Duncan Grossart: Jack, [00:35:00] thank you. Likewise, we follow one another.

I love what you do. I'm a huge advocate for, the stories that you, you help share and tell. And so thank you.

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