

Lynx, bison, wolves and bears will all live wild at Alladale, above, in the Highlands AP

Bears set for UK's own 'Jurassic Park'

Plan for wild animal reserve upsets Highlanders

By Paul Kelble

SCOTLAND CORRESPONDENT

Streams of water cascade down treeless hillsides, hewing their way through granite bedrock. Small mammals scurry through the heather. Otherwise, there is silence in this stark, but stunning glen.

The tranquillity, though, is about to be shattered. For if the owner of Alladale Estate - 23,000 acres of Highland terrain 50 miles from Inverness - has his way, the cold, damp, grey sky will soon be filled with the sound of growling bears, shrieking lynx and howling wolves.

Paul Lister, a millionaire conservationist and son of the founder of the MFI furniture chain, wants Alladale to form the core of a 50,000-acre wildlife haven, modelled on the Shamwari Game Reserve near Cape Town in South Africa, where leopards, lions and buffalo roam.

The inhabitants of Britain's first ecological history zone will be

animals that once lived in Scotland, and he hopes tourists will pour in for guided jeep tours. Not everyone shares his excitement about turning the clock back 2,000 years, though, and locals are already sarcastically referring to Alladale as Jurassic Park.

The fear is that despite 8ft-high electric fences, electronic tagging for the animals and a giant gate at the park's entrance, some predators will escape from Alladale, mauling sheep and terrorising crofters.

A recent meeting in the village hall saw protests raised from a number of quarters, including ramblers' representatives, who are very worried about such a large area of land being declared off-limits.

But Mr Lister, who

bought the estate in Sutherland and Easter Ross for £3.2m two years ago, is determined to press on. He said that he "always had this vision for bringing

back lost species", and that he is "absolutely passionate about education and conservation". He told *The Independent on Sunday*: "There will be more wilderness than there is at the moment and there will be no stalking or shooting."

Next year, he will introduce a trial enclosure filled with elk and wild boar, along with some roe and seeka deer. He aims to bring back wolves (hunted to extinction in 1743), bears (driven out 900 years ago), lynx and European bison within four years. He is also keen to plant more Caledonian pine, juniper, hazel and round birch, and wants to reintroduce lichen and grasses.

Alladale is a haven for red deer, seeka deer, golden eagles, peregrine falcons, kestrels, merlins, ravens, hooded crows, otters, badgers and pine martens. Only five people live on the estate permanently, catering for about 100 hunters and 300 walkers a year.

Dave Morris, of the Ramblers' Association in Scotland, is concerned that the plans will set a dangerous precedent. He said: "We'd be very unhappy with such a large tract of land being excluded from the statutory right of access."

But Innes MacNeill, from nearby Ardgay, said he was coming round to the idea. "People should give the guy a chance," he said.

