

Meaningful Nature Experiences

The ultimate catalyst for reconnecting to biodiversity?

"Science can help ensure that decisions are made with the best available information, but ultimately the future of biodiversity will be determined by society"

Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 2005

"As we have become rational we have lost touch with our primitive nature, and as a result have lost touch with our sense of being and of belonging. This divide has meant a loss of meaning in our hearts and minds. This is where we stand today...a crisis of meaning in the modern world."

~ Sir Laurens Van der Post (Diaries of the Wilderness Leadership School, 1987)

"He hungers for messages and when he ceases to seek and interpret them he will be no longer Man." ~ Loren Eiseley

"Have you ever experienced a meaningful moment in nature?"

If so, then we would love to hear about it....

Have you ever had that kind of electric encounter when you felt – at least for moment – 'connected' or 'in unity' with your environment? Did that change the way you perceived nature?

This theme is central to the eyes4earth initiative and focuses on meaningful nature experience. 'Meaningful' can naturally be interpreted by individuals in many different ways and it's important we respect that. However, as a guide, such experiences may be understood as those moments in nature where one feels a rich sense of 'connectedness', 'oneness' or 'wholeness' with their environment. People may invariably label these experiences as, e.g. 'synchronicity', (meaningful coincidence), 'serendipity', 'peak', 'flow' or 'divine' moments. For some, these may even reveal a feeling of 'revelation' and be accompanied by a perceived profound message which resonates with a personal meaning. Whatever the event, anecdotal evidence suggests that such moments may facilitate a 'collapsing of boundaries' between an individual and their natural environment. However, the effects of such experiences in shaping one's perceptions toward sustainability and a lifelong respect for nature requires further study.

In a world where we are witnessing a growing separation between people and their environment, it is vital we give serious consideration to any experience which can act as a bridge or catalyst in reconnecting 'Human'-'Nature'. And in this International Year of Biodiversity, there is an urgent call for humanity to open up and explore the deeper meanings and sensory experiences of our daily interactions with the living world around us.

Share your experiences with us at <http://eyes4earth.org>



"Science cannot solve the ultimate mystery of nature. And that is because, in the last analysis, we ourselves are...part of the mystery that we are trying to solve."

~ Max Planck (1859-1947, physicist)

What is the role of wilderness in meaningful experience?

It appears that meaningful encounters with nature are more frequently experienced during intense interactions with largely unmodified natural zones – especially in 'wilderness' areas. The role of wilderness in being central to "the preservation of the world" (Henry Thoreau) has long been recognised. The founders of major religions such as Buddhism, Christianity and Islam all spent prolonged periods in the wilderness. The 'rights of passage' or 'initiations' in indigenous cultures (e.g. Aboriginal 'walkabout') are also inked to the wild.

"What wilderness does is present us with a blueprint, as it were, of what creation was about in the beginning when all the plants and trees and animals were magnetic, fresh from the hands of whatever created them. This blueprint is still there, and those of us who see it find an incredible nostalgia rising in us, an impulse to return and discover it again. It is as if we are obeying that one great voice which resounds and resounds through the Upanishads of India: "O Man, Remember"." ~ Sir Laurens Van der Post (Diaries of the Wilderness Leadership School, 1987)

Wilderness is under threat around the world through urban development expansion and complex issues such as the spread of exotic and invasive weeds/pests, landscape degradation and climatic changes. This has implications for our ability to reconnect with nature in deep and meaningful ways. We must therefore seek to address this with 'head', 'heart' and 'hands' :

"I can say now that I believe science and law alone will never save wild lands from de-proclamation or over-development. It is the spiritual connection and the energy that comes from it that will motivate people to higher ideals of conservation. Wilderness areas are critical in this regard." ~ Dr. Ian Player (Speech given at 40th Anniversary of Game Rangers Association 2nd Mar. 2010)



About eyes4earth:

information - innovation – inspiration - integration

The eyes4earth initiative acts as a public communication and outreach portal for transdisciplinary research currently being carried out on the subject of 'meaningful nature experience' and its implications for sustainability and environmental education. A core component is to also gain insight into how issues such as exotic weeds/pests (i.e. invasive species), landscape degradation and climatic changes may affect the integrity, frequency and richness of these meaningful nature and wilderness experiences. Research and educational activities within the eyes4earth framework focus on a variety of target groups including previously disadvantaged youth, tertiary students, local community and decision-makers.

Whilst the research seeks to learn about global perspectives on this topic, the core focus area of the experimental research is located in South Africa and specifically in and around the Baviaanskloof Mega-Reserve (BMR). The BMR contains the World Heritage-listed Baviaanskloof Wilderness Area which is managed by Eastern Cape Parks and is an area of major cultural, environmental and spiritual significance.

This eyes4earth website facilitates the sharing of experiences through mapping and a survey. It also acts as a forum for dialogue as well as providing regular updates of research activities, insights, progress, results & publications. It aims to shape collective learning for sustainability.

This research is being led by Matthew Zylstra and based at Stellenbosch University (Department of Conservation Ecology & Entomology and Department of Education) and housed in the TsamaHUB's transdisciplinary doctoral programme. The research is funded through the Centre for Invasion Biology and supported by EarthCollective, Living Lands, FSD and researchers based at Wageningen University. The initiative collaborates with Eastern Cape Parks (BMR) and TerraPi.

Questions or feedback are welcome at info@eyes4earth.org.

Contact? Contribute?

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eyes4earth is an initiative of the EarthCollective network:

www.earthcollective.net



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