



Natural High

822 words

I'm sitting in a field. I wholeheartedly recommend that you do the same as soon as you next get the chance. Being around nature is one of the great pleasures in life, and provides us with a range of benefits for our well-being.

First, there is very little in this world to match the simple pleasure of sitting quietly in a field and observing the world around you – the bees on the flowers, the birds swooping and the trees moving gently in the breeze. The enjoyment we gain from this experience may be partly due to our appreciation of natural beauty and the wonder of the world around us, but ultimately, at a personal level, I cannot describe this feeling as anything other than a profound sense of joy and pleasure - at its most basic level it cannot be analysed or broken down any further.

Secondly, in nature one finds a sense of peace away from the noise of modern life. Sitting in a location free from the sound of human beings and their inventions can be a very therapeutic experience!

Another pleasure of being within nature is the one that comes from removing oneself from the complexity and extraneous garnish of modern life – for example, buildings, advertising and roads. By escaping this clutter, one's mind becomes clearer and less confused. This can provide us with a wonderful and refreshing sense of perspective on our own lives – a realisation that much of the complexity of modern society is human-created and that we do each have some control over how much (if any) of this complexity we want to let into our lives.

Exposure to nature can also free us of conceptual clutter – for example, the expectations of others, social conventions and the arbitrary thoughts that can blight and trouble our lives.

We can also emerge from immersion in nature with a different way of looking at the scale of the world around us. Relative to other living things on our planet, human beings are medium sized creatures. We therefore see the world from a particular viewpoint – we judge everything in relation to our own scale. Whilst this is seems to be a perfectly natural thing to do, it can also blind us to the different worlds that exist at other levels of scale. For example, next time you are in the countryside, lie on your belly in the grass, part the grass and look into it. A whole new world of scale is revealed, both on the meadow floor and in the earth below it. Insects fly around the grass, walk up the stems of plants and move around in the earth beneath them. Even as an adult, time spent in the grass, in the trees or elsewhere investigating the world at different scales never ceases to be a great learning experience. It is of course a wonderful adventure for children too.

But perhaps the most profound pleasure of all that results from a trip into natural surroundings is the simple experience of just living, and sitting quietly within an environment where hundreds of other creatures and plants are doing the same – going through the various physical processes that constitute being alive. The recognition that we share this most basic (yet, of course, complex) of states with much of our external world can provide us

with a powerful sense of connectedness to other parts of nature – the realisation that we as human beings are not separate from grasses, insects or birds but are as much a part of the natural world as any of them. Aside from providing us with a much-needed dose of ‘species modesty’, these simple insights provide us with another useful form of perspective on our individual lives – a realisation that, whatever worries, complexities or troubles exist in our hectic human lives and the modern world, ultimately our lives (both as individuals and as a species) are just another part of this natural show playing out around us as we sit in the countryside. When we see ourselves like this, life really becomes quite simple. And wonderful too – a brief window of opportunity to exist. These realisations are surely also calming and refreshing for us – giving us the energy to carry on and continue to enjoy our experience in this window of opportunity.

The experience of nature can also lead to a profound sense of calm and a reduction in feelings of stress. This sense of calm comes from a combination of the factors I’ve already discussed, including the peace, our escape from day-to-day worries of modern life and our realisation of our simple status as just another part of nature’s ebb and flow.

Can you really get all this from exposure to nature, such as sitting in a forest, a field in the countryside or on a quiet beach? I regularly do, and many others have. Get your boots on, get out there and see for yourself...

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