capacity to take in and process information. Perspective, the way we see something, make sense of an experience or an object, is largely based on our perception, how we intuitively interpret things.

Survival, what to move close to and include and what to move away from and dispel, is, however, not the full story, we are told. Biologist Richard Prum has been researching birds, and in the process he has exposed the survival instinct myth. The myth that sees competition as the most instinctive characteristic of life is only half of what Charles Darwin wrote and spoke about with regard to the origin of species. The other half is an aesthetic instinct, a perception of preference, an instinct for beauty. The taste for the beautiful is as distinctive as the need to survive. One of the attributes of the beauty instinct is an inbuilt sense of respect for others.

Safety lies at our very core and in many cases inhibits connection and prevents engagement with beauty

All creatures have an aesthetic instinct towards mating. In some animals, including birds, this instinct is very complex. The bowerbird will go to a great deal of effort to create beautiful aesthetic structures to attract a mate. Other beings, such as the garden snail, will merely choose whom to mate with and whom to reject by preference based on an inherent sensory choice.

So it is our natural instinct to gravitate towards both survival and beauty. And this is where Nature Forest Therapy comes in.

Nature Forest Therapy, or Forest Bathing, originated in Japan in 1982 as a therapeutic response to *karōshi*, meaning 'death due to overwork'. *Shinrin-yoku* – from the Japanese *shinrin*, meaning 'forest', and *yoku*, meaning 'bathing', has now become a worldwide movement. Amos Clifford has brought *Shinrin-yoku* to the world with accredited Nature Forest Therapy Guides across the globe who offer guided walks in Nature.

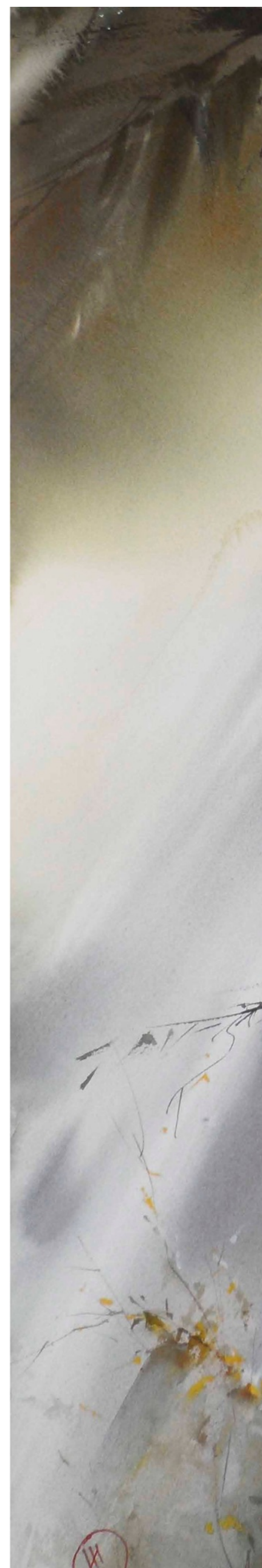
Leaving behind the virtual technical world of connection, on a Nature Forest Therapy walk you will discover real connectedness to Nature that is distancing itself from us more and more in our ever-urbanising world. Richard Louv coined the term "Nature-deficit disorder" to describe the impact that being separate from Nature is having on people, especially children, all over the world. It is so easy now to wake up to an alarm, eat food from packets and tins, move around in vehicles on roads, and communicate with others through technological means. It is not healthy when for children playing means getting lost in technology rather than getting lost in time using their imagination.

On a Nature Forest Therapy walk you actually pick up where your ancestors, who were born, raised and lived every day in Nature, left off, whether you remember it with your thinking brain or not. Accessing cellular memory takes some adjustment, and this is the role of the guide. Without a guide it is difficult for many of us to tap into the awareness of what Nature has to offer. The philosopher, cultural ecologist and author David Abram says: "Encountering other species only as outsiders, we lack the sensorial attunement and insight necessary to perceive the nuanced differentiations that are likely evident to those on the inside." With a Nature Forest Therapy Guide we are invited into the inner realm of sensitivity, a world of soft fascination that the more-than-human-world includes.

So what is happening inside our brains on a Nature walk? Stephen Porges, a researcher and professor in behavioural neuroscience, created the term 'neuroception' to better explain the biological reality that instinctively draws us close or shifts our gaze from one moment to the next. Neuroception is an inbuilt sensory system that, unlike perception, which includes thought processes, is wholly a body reaction.

Through this we see that life is wired for connection, through survival and through beauty. All of life is included here, though many animals, insects, fish, minerals and plants use much simpler growth and connection pathways. "Neuroception sends us messages of safety; that we are where we belong, that we are home," writes clinical psychologist Deb Dana in her book *The Polyvagal Theory in Therapy: Engaging the Rhythm of Regulation* (W.W. Norton, 2018).

Dana uses the metaphor of a ladder to show how this 'surveillance system' works. At the top of the ladder (the ventral vagal state) is connection, social engagement, the sense of beauty in being. Here we connect to beauty, to calm, to safety. More common to most of us in the city is our mobilised middle range of activation, our sympathetic 'fight or flight' protection mode of operating. At this step on the ladder our body, without any direction from our thinking brain, disconnects from safety to protection and defence. We move into



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