

# Biophilia: Man's Innate Love for Nature

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To love nature is a natural human instinct. Oceans and forests, with their rich biodiversity, not only calm his mind but also normalise his metabolic activities, ensuring a healthy, long life. Many scientists believe that such a relationship is evolutionary, which has been imprinted in his genes.

**M**AN'S inherent love for nature, now termed as biophilia, was first coined as a scientific hypothesis by a German-born American psychologist, Erich Fromm, in his work *"The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness"* in 1973. In it, he pointed out that man has an innate tendency to attach to nature and its diversity which is essential for his healthy living and wellbeing. Then in 1984, Harvard University evolutionary biologist Edward O Wilson expanded the idea in his book *"Biophilia: The Human Bond with Other Species"*. In it, he suggested that our positive emotional responses to the natural world reflect an inborn and universal component of human psychology.

The meaning of the Greek word "philia" is "love of", while "bio" stands for living things. Therefore, "biophilia" refers to "love of the living things" i.e., nature as a whole. Many scientists are of the opinion that humans have a deeply engrained love of nature and that intuition has been imprinted into their DNA. That has helped them to locate the most fertile land, cultivate food and nurture new life to thrive as a species. They have observed that most people feel relaxed and calm in natural surroundings, which contributes to their physical as well as mental wellbeing.

The divergence of man from the natural world began centuries ago, when he moved to modern houses and their relationship ruptured faster in parallel with technological developments during the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Its most significant impact fundamentally changed human interaction with nature. The separation was accelerated by rapid industrialisation and urbanisation, expansion of agriculture to feed the growing population and various modern ways of life.

So far the genes that are said to be influencing biophilia have not been identified. However, it is suspected that most individuals have it in various degrees and the increased dependence of the human species on technology has led to attenuation in the human drive to connect with nature. According to Wilson, it is resulting in a decreased appreciation for the diversity of life forms contributing to environmental and ecological destruction leading to the rapid rate of species extinction, which is also threatening the very survival of

human beings. So in biophilia, he introduced a conservation ethic based on the innate relationship of man with nature as a prevention of the trend, which according to the researchers is beneficial to man in many ways. For example, it has been observed that regardless of the extent to which individuals perceive biophilia, spending time in nature is beneficial for human health.

According to a study, persons who spend at least two hours per week interacting with nature have greater satisfaction and better health than those who do not do it at all. Among adults, it is associated with improved mental and spiritual health, while for children, it encourages physical activities, including playing. Besides, studies have shown positive benefits of human interaction with nature, such as improved productivity, lower levels of stress, enhanced learning and even improved recovery rates following illness.

Wilson's theory suggesting biophilia as an instinct imprinted in our genes has its critics. Vanessa Woods and Melina Knuth of Duke University have pointed out in the *Journal of Bio-economics* (Nov-Dec 2023) that if hard-wired

