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**WENDY HAY**  
CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST

**Email:** mwhay@mweb.co.za

**Practice No. 0053945**

**Contact Number:** 011 465 1646

011 465 1622

**Physical Address:** The Gantry Shopping Centre,  
Cnr of Witkoppen & the Straight,  
Pineslopes  
Fourways  
2125

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## Proposal for an eco-psychology course in the Kruger National Park

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### **The essence of nature**

Since the first human became aware, nature has been the greatest teacher. Our ancestors, all the great religions, scientists and poets, have tried to unlock the secrets of nature in order to understand themselves.

The essence of nature can be seen in three dynamic ways:

#### **1. Nature is One**

Nature does not operate mechanically, but rather as an organic system, much like the human body. Damage done to one system, damages the whole.

As humans, we cannot live as isolated individuals. Like the primates, such as monkeys and baboons seek troops; we as humans seek tribal unity. A primate expelled from the troop faces death. We too wither without our emotional family, tribal or cultural roots.

Nature teaches us about this connection. Unfortunately, our mechanistic world is disconnected. It does not show that the destruction of one area, eventually leads to the destruction of everything. In this regard, our ancestors had a better awareness of the essence life.

#### **2. Nature is wisdom**

There is an innate intelligence in nature that seeks to survive in a harsh world. This constant struggle demands constant adaptation. The need for adaptation means that understanding needs to grow. The inability to adapt means death.

There is a focus on book knowledge in schools, but nature teaches wisdom. The observation of nature allows us to understand ourselves more deeply. We are not separate, not above, but a unified part of the whole.

### **3. Nature is creative**

Nature seeks to reproduce itself. Each moment of life is filled with creation and regeneration at every level. At a micro level, organisms are dividing and multiplying to secure their survival. Life begets new life.

Creativity also includes the creation of new ideas and art. The creative connection comes out in song, poetry, striving for greatness.

At a human level we also experience creativity as loving, and expressing this love in family life. The greatest creative essence of our human nature is love.

Because we are always creating new life, new ideas and new connections; nothing is static, nothing remains the same.

## **Principles of nature**

### **1. All things are in a constant state of change**

The illusion of stability gives us a sense of security. The problem with this illusion is that it is unrealistic and we are left with false expectations. From the moment of our conception, we are destined to change, to live in a world that is constantly changing.

The elders, the prophets, the wise all used nature to find patterns and to learn. It is an ability that we have lost. Supermarket shelves take us away from the reality of production. Our deep connection to the earth has become alien. We have in essence become nature illiterates. This also makes us survival illiterates, as it takes us away from the abiding laws of nature.

Profit has become the bench mark of decisions in government and the corporate. This has far reaching consequences both to the human psyche and to the world around us.

### **2. Change is essential for the renewal of life**

When we live with an illusion of stability, we also forget that all life seeks renewal. It is its essence. There cannot be an eternal summer and there cannot be an endless winter. All things function to support life and regenerate life.

As human beings this is most apparent in our emotional fluxes and changes. In western materialism, this has become another illusion. We believe that we can live in a world of the eternal summer.

Winter, times of bleakness, are essential for the growth of wisdom. All things need competition. All growth thrives on challenge. The psyche is no different to anything else in nature. Seeking the easy way out, the lie of the eternal summer, sows the seed of our own destruction.

### **3. Everything on earth has a purpose**

Nothing in nature exists without a purpose. The purpose of each element in nature is to be found in its biological structure. Sometimes when there is outside interference, it is possible to see how plants or animals can die due to being outside of their survival zone. It is also possible to see how removal of any species has a negative effect on a number of species that formed an interdependent relationship.

As human being, we seek to discover our purpose in life. Without it we are lost. Just like animals, or plants, we might find ourselves in the wrong environment. This can result in alienation, depression, or anxiety.

Too often the pressure to conform creates a false sense of self. Discovering our purpose is one of the most fundamental tasks an individual is called to undertake.

### **4. In nature, small is beautiful**

The materialistic paradigm is one of rising hierarchies. This can be seen through centuries of history.

Our status-based culture rewards those who seem to wield the most power and looks down on those who carry out seemingly menial jobs. Nature teaches us that small is beautiful. It is the health of the soil, the vibrancy of micro organisms that lead to healthy grasses and trees. The plant world would survive very well without us, yet we would die within days without adequate vegetation.

In the animal world, the lion is dependant on the antelope. The antelope can survive very well without the lion. In fact, all predators were regarded as vermin in the early days of Kruger, and an attempt was made to exterminate them as their hunting decimated populations of smaller creatures.

Small is beautiful helps to understand the value of each human life. It shifts away from status towards each person's intrinsic worth and value.

### **5. There is no death, only transference of energy**

The quantum world is telling us that all life is energy. Energy cannot be destroyed.

This is clearly visible in nature where nothing is wasted. A hunted animal quickly feeds many predators and birds. It nurtures the ground where it dies. The digested body of the animals passes through a process where it is once more returned to the soil, to feed nurture and enrich.

We sit uncomfortably with death, for it is the great unknown. Yet parts of us are constantly dying so that other parts may live.

At a psychological level, it is important to allow certain beliefs to die, so that wisdom can grow. Wisdom can only grow in the bowels of digested thoughts, the human compost of disappointment, loss and failure.

## **6. Every action has a consequence, negative or positive**

Nature teaches us that every action has a consequence. This consequence can have a ripple effect and be felt kilometres away. The consequence might only be realised many years later when the suffering becomes destructive.

Understanding consequences in our country is sadly lacking. The consequence of breaking up of families for the sake of mining. The destructive consequences of apartheid on goodwill. The resounding consequences of crime on a fragile society.

Becoming aware of consequences, both positive and negative, is vital to our individual and community growth. We all have within us the power to heal or destroy, to lift up, or break down.

We cannot work intelligently with these consequences unless we find ways to evaluate and understand. This gives us the strength to be truly liberated.

The value in understanding consequences can be seen very clearly in 'the ripple effect'. A stone thrown into water creates a disturbance, a change. There is the superficial disturbance that filters out, forming wider and wider circles. There is also a disturbance at the micro level, forming smaller atomic movements.

## Outline of course

The course will take place in Kruger National Park, where each day holds the potential for a different learning experience.

The camps chosen for the course offer a unique bush experience.

- **Day 1: Pretorius Kop**

Pretorius Kop is the ideal stay over for the first night. It is close to the southern most gate and is the first southern camp to start building visitor's facilities.

- **Day 2-3: Tambotie**

The next two nights will be spent in Tambotie, possibly the most rustic camp in Kruger. The drive from Pretorius Kop to Tambotie will give ample opportunity to take in the special atmosphere of being back in nature.

- **Day 4: Skukuza**

The final night will be spent at Skukuza, the capital of Kruger. Although this is a large camp, its natural beauty opens it up for personal work and a memorable experience. The final night we will hold a bush braai in the middle of the bush. This will be a fitting end to what I hope will be a life-changing experience.

## Course convenor

Wendy Hay is both a Clinical Psychologist and a SANParks honorary ranger.

Wendy's clinical experience includes working with teenagers, addiction, and community driven projects. She helps out regularly with workshops and training for a 'not for profit organisation', "Equip for life". This is a volunteer based group that works in schools with issues of feelings and sexuality.