

# Can't tell a **hemlock** from an **oak**?



Photo: Clifford Mervil



## Here's how tech can help

Think of how your grandparents could identify any tree, and you're a bit fuzzy on the differences. What about your children? Lucy Jones, author of *Losing Eden* and mother of two young children, writes about our nature knowledge loss and how to fix it.

**Our disconnection from the natural world is at an unprecedented level.** We spend between one to five per cent of our time outside. Three-quarters of children (aged 5-12) spend less leisure time outdoors than prison inmates. Fewer than one in ten children regularly play in wild spaces now and children don't walk to school as much or as freely as they did in previous generations.

This alienation from the rest of the living world means that we are losing knowledge that has been part of the human experience for millennia. Almost four in five children can't recognise a bumblebee or an oak leaf. Many of us can see

this pattern of the 'extinction of experience' in our families. My grandmothers had an inherent lexicon of the natural world and how it operates. My parents knew about birds, flowers and plants; names, timings and behaviours. I know maybe ten per cent of what they know, although I'm trying to rectify this knowledge gap.

As natural environments are destroyed and species decline, the cycle is set to continue. As fewer children connect with nature, it will follow that if they become parents, their children will have an even more tenuous connection with the natural world.



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There are three key reasons why this is dangerous. First, there are a myriad of proven mental and physical health benefits of connecting and feeling engaged with nature. As children are enclosed indoors and given fewer opportunities to know the living world, their chances for stress recovery, restoration, cognitive development and simply experiencing the awe of the earth are also constrained. From the iridescent shells of a beetle to the fun of blowing a dandelion clock, the wonder of an acorn turning into an oak tree to the excitement of finding frog spawn nature gives countless opportunities for joy and learning.

Second, research shows that a connection with nature in childhood leads to a connection with nature in adulthood. If a child is introduced to the natural world before the age of twelve, the chances are they'll continue the relationship and its benefits through life.

Third, and perhaps most importantly in a climate emergency, if our children don't know or can't name the living

beings around us – the plants that sustain us, the processes that form our living support systems – how will they protect and restore the natural world?

The good news? It's never too late to head out for a walk and start a relationship with the living world. It's free, you don't need any specialist kit, and the more you look, the more you will find.



## HERE ARE SOME WAYS THAT TECH CAN ASSIST IN REVERSING NATURE KNOWLEDGE LOSS:

### Night Sky

Allows users to point their phone and the stars and identify constellations. Find in your app store.

### Leafsnap UK

Identifies tree types at the click of the camera. Find in your app store.

### PictureThis

([picturethisai.com](http://picturethisai.com))

Identifies plants and gives interesting tidbits such as folkloric names and herbal uses.

### Go Jauntly

([gojauntly.com](http://gojauntly.com)) Helps you find local walks and has a handy Nature Notes feature to journal findings designed to boost mental wellbeing.

### iNaturalist

([inaturalist.org](http://inaturalist.org)) Lets you record your observations from nature, learn about biodiversity and connect with other naturalists.



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## Digital Family Pledge

To help your family set some house rules on using tech and behaving online



## Parent controls and filtering advice

So you can manage what your kids see and do online for better peace of mind



# For further help and support

## Digital Parenting website

→ [vodafone.co.uk/digitalparenting](https://vodafone.co.uk/digitalparenting)

## Internet Matters

→ [internetmatters.org](https://internetmatters.org)

## The Mix

→ [themix.org.uk](https://themix.org.uk)

## Digital Awareness UK

→ [digitalawarenessuk.com](https://digitalawarenessuk.com)

## Think U Know

→ [thinkuknow.co.uk](https://thinkuknow.co.uk)

## Child Net

→ [childnet.com](https://childnet.com)

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