

IN THE SPOTLIGHT: RICHARD LOUV

By Stephen Camelio
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Few books not about vampires or wizards have had the type of impact that Richard Louv's *Last Child in the Woods* has had since its publication in 2005. A *New York Times* best seller that led to Louv winning the prestigious Audubon Medal in 2008, the book in which the author coined the phrase "nature-deficit disorder" helped inspire an international movement to reconnect children with nature. Now with the publication of *The Nature Principle*, Louv expands his premise to explore the positive effects the natural world can have on the health and happiness of adults as well as society as a whole. From his home in San Diego, Louv spoke to *Discovery* about his new book and the importance of national parks.

What do you think of the recent upsurge in visitors to the national parks?

I find it very hopeful. The press coverage on the increase in attendance focuses on the recession, but there has been an international explosion of families trying to connect kids to nature and that deserves some of the credit. The superintendent of Yellowstone was one of the first people to call for a "No Child Left Inside" movement, so some of the up-turn has to do with the parks themselves. If this increase is only linked to the recession then it may not be sustainable, but if it is truly a change in values, then that is truly significant and will outlast any economic up-turn.

Doesn't your story in *The Nature Principle* about "Singing for Bears" relate to hiking in Yellowstone?

In that chapter about fishing in Alaska with my younger son, we learn how to smell Alaska brown bears as a protection. We usually don't fully recognize all our senses. Yellowstone and other places are important because when we

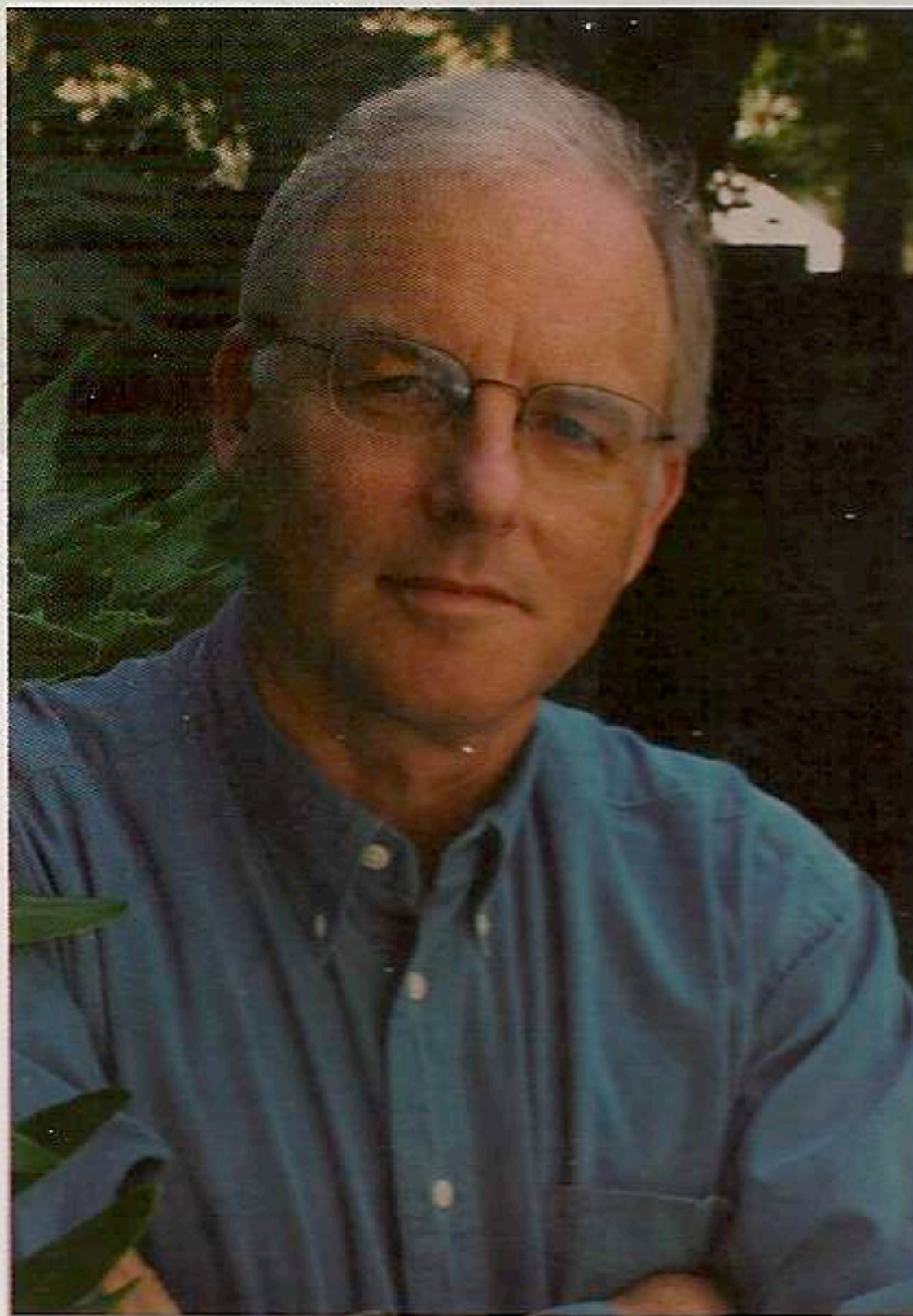


Photo: © Robert Burroughs

are in nature, particularly in an area where you encounter large animals, we often make full use of our senses. Also, places like Yellowstone give us a sense of humility, and that is a good sense to have.

Why are we now starting to realize the importance of the natural world?

It's not a new view, but it was lost. It is coming back now because in the last dozen years researchers are paying attention to the impact of the natural world on human health and wellbeing. There are thousands of studies on how certain pharmaceuticals affect the symptoms of Attention Deficit Disorder; there have been probably 10 that look at how the natural world affects those symptoms. That's not because of the relevant worth of those two arenas but because of where the research money comes from.

What's the first thing people have to do to change their perception of nature?

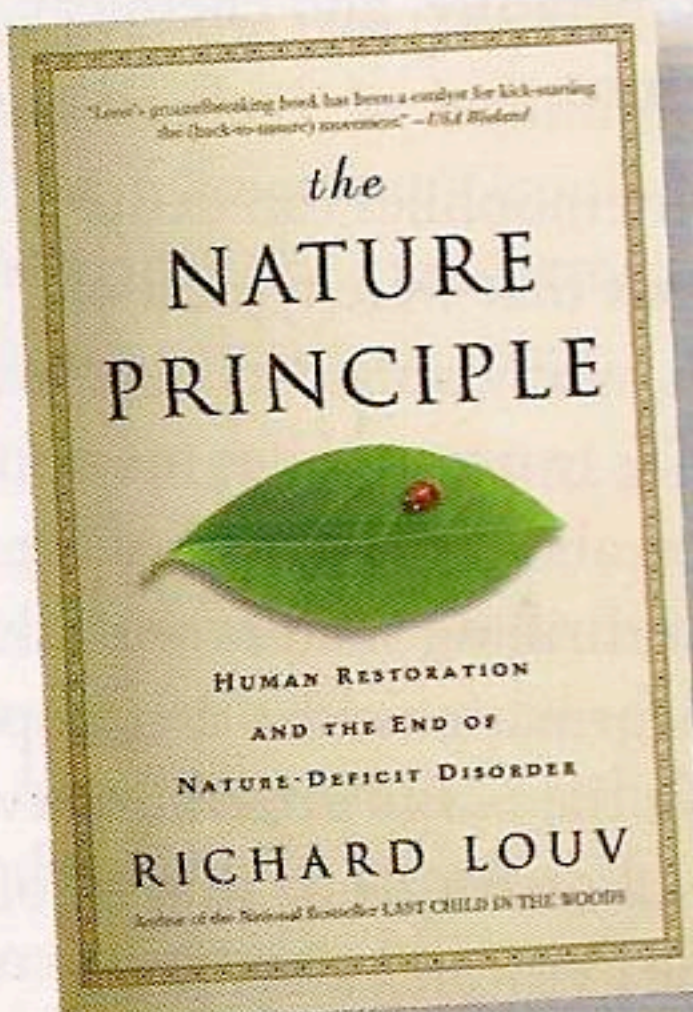
They need to recognize the natural world and that our experience in it is fundamental to our humanity as individuals and as a species. The more high tech our lives become, the more nature we need. Our hunger for authenticity is going to grow as our lives become more virtual or interchangeable. As that happens, nature may become one of the last places where we can find a sense of authenticity. All this raises the value of places like Yellowstone. We are now only truly coming to understand how important they are, not only for the conservation of species, but also for the preservation of our own humanity.

How can we apply the lessons of the parks to other parts of the country?

National parks have taught us that natural history is extraordinarily important to learn about. Other places can learn from that. I believe natural history should or will become as important as human history to regional and personal identity. This will make our lives richer by bringing alive where we live and giving a greater sense of personal meaning to our lives.

Why else are national parks important?

I think national parks have been instructive to us about human nature/social capital. Our connections to others, which gives us a reason for being alive, has to be defined to extend beyond human beings to other species. I sit here often and watch lizards run through my yard. They don't know that they are a part of my social life, but they are. When we are in nature we feel more alive. That's why going to a national park or reshaping where we live, work, and play to be near nature is important.



THE NATURE PRINCIPLE

By Richard Louv.

Supported by groundbreaking research, anecdotal evidence, and compelling personal stories, Louv shows us how tapping into the restorative powers of the natural world can boost mental acuity and creativity; promote health and wellness; build smarter and more sustainable businesses, communities, and economies; and ultimately strengthen human bonds. Richard Louv makes a convincing case that through a nature-balanced existence—driven by sound economic, social, and environmental solutions—the human race can and will thrive. This timely, inspiring, and important work will give readers renewed hope, while challenging them to rethink the way we live. 2011. Softcover. 303 pages. 6" x 9"

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