

Nature and Mental Health—Birding is a Proven Solution

Dear Editor,

Recently, the increasing trend of mental disorders among researchers has been observed, and scientific associations connect mental health problems with the (dis-) comfort of academic work.¹ The risk factors described during the COVID-19 are rapidly supplemented by a new list of threats. This strongly affects the comfort of life, causes adaptation difficulties, worsens sleep and functioning during the day, and may lead to the formation of anxiety disorders and long-term lowering of mood.

Recommendations for improving mental health include reduction of negative stimuli, improving reflection and awareness, and focusing on building internal flexibility. However, we see that relatively simple methods to improve mental health are lost. Researchers, especially in ecology, should benefit more from contact with nature. Fieldwork can be not only sampling but also a delight in the beauty and a time for reflection. In the case of young adepts, preparations for academic life cannot be concerned only with advanced statistics, laboratory equipment, sampling regime, and creative writing of articles but must include a bit of time to know the flora and fauna around.

Usually, being in nature is associated with physical activity, greenery, forest scents, and increased vitamin D synthesis. However, in depression, poor weather, and poor health, a suggestion to be in nature is often unattractive and requires an additional motivation, a positive stimulus. Such an argument favouring going outside is birding.² People bond with birds emotionally, learn their diagnostic features, and take the time to see new species. A surprise effect is visible during birdwatching, affecting the secretion of oxytocin and the more efficient human brain activity. We do not know which species have special therapeutic functions, but the diversity of bird species in terms of colours and behaviour is enormous. Among 11 000 species, everyone can find their favourites depending on their own emotional needs, gender, age, and life experience. Trips with binoculars, keeping at the birdfeeder, and listening to bird songs positively affect mindfulness, microbiome, improvement of well-being in depression, and even offer faster re-convalescence after cardiological and oncological procedures.³

To help people, also in academia, we need physicians correctly make diagnoses and dispense therapies, rested, without job burnout and other problems. *Doctor, heal yourself first!* Then, some treatments were proposed to improve well-being, including nature-based interventions,^{2,3} with birding among them, which will enhance physicians' health, e.g., psychiatrists⁴ and dermatologists,⁵ and called it *therapeutic ornithology*.³

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