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Wildlife: Nature therapy cures anxiety

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By Scott Shalaway

Ten years ago, in the aftermath of 9/11, I wrote about nature's September highlights. I touched on fall colors, shorter days, cooler nights and the migration of birds and monarch butterflies. I concluded, "When I find myself struggling for sanity in an insane world, I turn to the outdoors. A crisp, clear September day is often the ideal prescription for a world gone mad."

Many readers agreed, as I learned from notes such as these.

- "During the recent tragedies, I found myself heading outdoors with the dogs more frequently. I have always been an avid hunter, spending most of my free time in the wilderness, yet this past week I have been outdoors even more. There is an unsurpassed tranquility there -- peace and quiet in a world so cruel and fast."
- "I closed my eyes and imagined the events and creatures you described. Thanks for a column that let me relax and reminded me of the wonders of nature."
- "Yesterday, while working in the shop, I found myself taking more breaks than usual. It was nice to get out and visit those creatures that don't have a clue about the ugly world we sometimes live in."

As the notes piled up, I came to understand the therapeutic value of nature. It soothes the soul.

I think everyone has a psychic need to connect with nature, whether it's in the backyard, a wilderness area or the mind's eye.

For a few days after 9/11, air traffic came to a halt. The sky was peaceful and quiet. I heard only insects, birds and the breeze rustling through the trees. The absence of man-made sounds was remarkable. Despite the horror of that terrible day, I felt better. I felt rejuvenated.

The appreciation of nature, whether it's through hunting, fishing, birding, hiking or other forms, has intrinsic psychic value. It helps insure our sanity.

The tragedy of Sept. 11, 2001, is an unpleasant memory that will never be forgotten. But it taught me an important lesson. The value of nature goes far beyond the aesthetics and economics of appreciation and consumption. It carries an even greater intrinsic value that guarantees our humanity.