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Why I . . . photograph nature

Consultant psychiatrist Mihaela Bucur talks to **Kathy Oxtoby** about how photographing nature has transformed her life

Kathy Oxtoby

When Mihaela Bucur took a simple smartphone snapshot of a woodland scene she little imagined that it would lead to a long term pursuit of capturing beauty in nature. Nor did she envisage that her love of photographing nature would be shared by her family, friends, and colleagues and would ultimately bring a much needed boost to people's wellbeing—including her own—during a global pandemic.

That inspiring snapshot was taken four years ago when Bucur was recovering from a period of emotional and physical exhaustion at work.

She loves her role as a consultant general adult psychiatrist and values the chance to support patients in getting better. Four years ago, however, she found she was no longer able to maintain her work-life balance. "I couldn't switch off from work, and was tired all the time, so I had a period of leave."

Finding it difficult to relax and to boost her energy levels, she decided to take her dog Max for regular woodland walks. "Day by day I became more mindful of its exquisite beauty and uniqueness as the transition from spring to summer saw everything come into bloom. When a view touched my heart I wanted to take a photo of it."

Taking nature photos was not something she had done before, but she began taking pictures of flowers, birds, trees, and the sky with her smartphone. "Taking these pictures was more like taking a souvenir of my joy," she says.

Soon nature photography was something she enjoyed every day, not only during her walks but "whenever I saw something beautiful," she says.

It was some time before she started to share her pictures with family and friends. "I didn't think taking photos of a tree or a leaf was something important. But then I started to share them and my husband, my three teenage children, and my friends, they all loved them," she says.

Eventually she felt confident enough to share her photos on social media. Now she posts daily and receives "lovely messages, including from colleagues who also send me their photos."

Wanting to share her hobby, Bucur encouraged her clinical team to go on half hour wellbeing walks together in the park near their work every week. "I told the team that I found nature photography helpful when I was experiencing burnout. These regular walks where we would take pictures of nature strengthened us as a team."

When the pandemic hit, the team was unable to continue these outings, but they had already transformed the team dynamic, Bucur believes. "We became more attentive to nature and it brought our humanity to the fore, creating positive and powerful relationships in the team. I'm very grateful for that," she says.

Bucur has continued her walks throughout the pandemic, "and when I see something beautiful, I take a photo and enjoy the moment," she says.

As well as improving her fitness, nature photography has also boosted Bucur's confidence. "When I started this hobby I'd no idea that it would help me connect with so many people and have such a positive impact on my work relationships," she says.

It has also helped her to relax, leaving her more revitalised and better able to focus on work. "I'm more focused on interactions with patients and how I can best support them by encouraging them to go back to the things they enjoy as part of their recovery," she says.

She now encourages others to take up this interest. "Nature photography is so simple, effective, and easy to do," Bucur says. "And yet it has so much more impact than just a photo on a phone. For me, it's transformed my way of life."

How to make the change

- No preparation is needed—as long as you have a mobile phone that takes photos you can start today
- Allow time every day to immerse yourself in the uniqueness of nature even if it's only for a few minutes
- High tech camera equipment is not essential, but hiking boots are advisable for nature walks
- Share your photos and moments with your family and friends—it's great to get feedback and may even encourage them to take up photography too