# Exploring psychedelics as a bridge between mental health and nature connectedness



In an era marked by escalating ecological damage and a surge in mental health issues, researchers are exploring the possible intersections between these crises and the human relationship with the natural world. Macey Webb, Co-Chair of the Drug Science Student Society Network, discusses in a recent article for Drug Science the importance of nature connectedness for mental well-being and environmental behaviour, as well as the emerging research into psychedelics as potential facilitators of this connection.

Globally, mental disorders have become the leading cause of disability, affecting one in eight people, according to data cited by Webb. Concurrently, climate change continues to produce extreme weather events and rising temperatures, with projections estimating up to 250,000 deaths annually by 2030 from heat stress and malnutrition alone. This double burden has provoked inquiry into whether a fundamental cause might underpin both trends: a disconnection between humans and nature.

Throughout human history, nature has served as a source of inspiration, meaning, and belonging in various cultural expressions. Modern scientific studies corroborate this, showing that exposure to natural environments reduces depression, anxiety, and stress, while enhancing life’s perceived meaning. One explanatory framework, the Attention Restoration Theory, suggests nature offers a restorative break from the constant sensory bombardment typical of urban, technology-driven life. Furthermore, nature fosters a sense of being part of a larger whole, which can alleviate personal worries.

However, the modern era has witnessed a pronounced decline in direct contact with nature. Urbanisation and technological advances have increased time spent indoors and engaged with screens, correlating with reduced nature connectedness globally. This psychological separation not only impacts individual health but may also diminish motivation to engage in environmentally sustainable behaviours such as recycling, water conservation, and sustainable travel, posing a challenge for ecological preservation efforts.

Against this backdrop, psychedelics have emerged as a subject of study for their potential to enhance feelings of connectedness with both people and the natural world. Research over the past two decades has shown promising results in mental health treatments using psychedelics, and recent studies specifically investigate their capacity to increase nature relatedness. A notable study involving 654 participants measured increases in connectedness to nature up to two weeks — and even two years — after psychedelic use. These effects were linked to experiences described as ‘ego dissolution,’ a state where people feel a diminished boundary between themselves and the world.

Three main mechanisms have been proposed to explain how psychedelics might foster this connection:

1. **Ego-Dissolution:** Psychedelics appear to act on serotonin receptors in brain regions responsible for self-identity, disrupting normal processing. This leads to a profound sense of unity with nature, illustrated by participant reports of feeling indistinguishable from the environment, such as the wind moving through leaves being felt as a personal sensation.

2. **Enhanced Empathy and Positive Emotions:** Psychedelic experiences often include intense feelings of love, interconnectedness, and meaning, which may extend to a deep appreciation of every living entity. One user described a “deep love for every living thing,” underscoring how emotional amplification may strengthen bonds with nature.

3. **Changes in Beliefs About Nature:** Psychedelics increase neural integration and cognitive flexibility, enabling individuals to re-evaluate long-standing perceptions. This can lead to insights recognising ecological interdependence, such as the notion that “we’re all part of the same ecosystem,” potentially motivating greater pro-environmental behaviour.

It is crucial to note that much of this research is correlational and often derived from self-selected participants, who may already hold favourable views towards psychedelics and nature. Furthermore, many participants have been predominantly male and from highly educated backgrounds, limiting broader applicability.

Webb also highlights the significance of indigenous perspectives, pointing out that many Indigenous communities have long-standing traditions of using psychedelic plants within their spiritual and cultural practices. For these communities, psychedelics are not new medicines but sacred entities that embody life’s animating spirit. Scholars such as Yuli Celdiwan stress the need to acknowledge and respect these knowledge systems, warning against cultural appropriation and epistemic injustice that can arise when Western frameworks dominate discourse.

While the psychedelic renaissance represents a paradigm shift in Western approaches to mental health and nature connection, Webb urges caution due to the early stage of research and inherent limitations. The article emphasises the complex relationship between nature connectedness, mental well-being, and ecological behaviour and suggests that further study of psychedelics may offer valuable insights or interventions to address concurrent environmental and mental health challenges.

Webb concludes by expressing enthusiasm for ongoing research in this field, welcoming future findings that may elucidate the potential role of psychedelics in fostering deeper connections with nature and improving overall well-being.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

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