

# Psychiatric drugs and pharmacogenomics

by Dr James Alexander,  
Psychologist

In the 1950s the American Psychiatric Association was facing an existential crisis. Faith in psychiatry had diminished, poor outcomes were increasingly evident, and the rise of applied psychology was threatening the dominance that psychiatry had enjoyed for many decades.

Staring down the barrel of oblivion, American psychiatry chose to hitch its wagon to the pharmaceutical industry in a desperate bid for survival. The marketing branches of 'Big Pharma' (note: not the scientific research branches) came to the rescue by literally inventing various chemical imbalance theories to explain forms of human distress, such as 'clinical depression', 'schizophrenia', 'bi-polar disorder', which had remained perplexing at best, and poorly explained by rudimentary psychoanalytic theories at worst.

The American psychiatric dream of treating all of life's vicissitudes with pharmaceutical drugs began in earnest, and the social-psychological-political realities which are well known to cause human distress were sidelined, ignored and denied. A massive marketing exercise was undertaken by biological psychiatry/Big Pharma to convince firstly all prescribers (psychiatrists and GPs) that depression was caused by not enough serotonin; schizophrenia was the result of aberrant levels of dopamine; bi-polar was presumably caused by not enough lithium- and of course, all such problems in living were set in motion by faulty genes.

All of these serious problems in living (now defined as 'mental illnesses') could be treated with one psychiatric magic bullet or another. The most persistent psychiatric marketing push, which has been intensively pursued over the last 30 years, is the notion that depression is caused by inadequate serotonin levels, treatable with Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitor drugs, or SSRIs. Prozac was simply the first of these released in the late 1980s, but there are now many more on the market.

Both research and disciplined observation over the last 30 years reveals some very significant problems with SSRIs, as well as the serotonin deficiency theory on which they are based (most notably, the lack of supporting evidence, and the existence of contradicting evidence). British Professor of Psychiatry, Dr David Healy presents research which indicates that the risk of suicide increases as a result of the drugs, with probably 10 suicide attempts for every completed suicide – these are suicides and attempts that would not be happening were the person merely



depressed rather than being depressed and on an SSRI.

Around half of the people on SSRIs report to feeling emotionally dulled, while the other half report to feeling more anxious since going on the drug. Around 60% of people find the effects so uncomfortable that they take themselves off it within the first few weeks. Of those who remain on the drug, a significant proportion experience an intense form of physical and psychological agitation, referred to as akathisia. It is this agitation, when combined with the hopelessness which usually accompanies depressed mood which increases the risk of suicide. Mild to moderate depression is not associated with an increased risk of suicide.

Most SSRIs are prescribed to people who suffer mild to moderate depression, despite the fact that there is no research evidence that SSRIs are effective in treating mild to moderate depression. Regardless of how intense the depression is, people remain just as vulnerable to the adverse side effects of akathisia. Those who were at no risk of suicide, ie. most people who are prescribed SSRIs, become at risk of suicide simply because they are more likely to experience akathisia due to the SSRI.

But surely it is a risk worth taking, as the drugs are known to effectively treat depression? Well, actually, no. American Professor of Psychology, Dr Irving Kirsch extensively researched the strength of placebo effects with SSRIs. He reports that double blind controlled studies show that SSRIs perform only slightly better than placebo tablets (the differences are statistically significant, but not clinically significant, ie not different enough to make a felt difference to a person's suffering).

Further research reveals that the slight advantage of SSRIs over placebos can be explained by the 'boosted placebo effect', which results from subjects in the study being able to tell most of the time, because of the adverse effects, that they are on the real drug and not on the placebo.

As such, the 'blind' is broken and the placebo effect again becomes very powerful. Apparent therapeutic effects of the SSRIs disappear when the enhanced placebo effect is taken into account.

But the drugs do 'work' for some people, even if only because of a placebo effect. Some people honestly report that SSRIs, or other psychiatric drugs such as benzodiazepines, lithium, anti-psychotics, are helpful for them, perhaps because the emotional dulling impact is welcome relief. Other people honestly report that the drugs nearly killed them, either psychologically or physically, or both. Neither groups of people are lying. How can the same drug result in such wildly different responses?

The answer lies in the study of pharmacogenomics (aka pharmacogenetics). This is the scientific study of the inherited capacity to break down (metabolise) and expel various chemicals. When applied to psychiatric drugs, pharmacogenetics explains the role of a specific group of liver enzymes (the CYP450s, the amounts of which we inherit from both parents) in the expulsion of drug chemicals. We all differ in our loading of these specific liver enzymes, whose only role is to metabolise and expel drugs which affect the functioning of the brain (psychoactive substances).

This includes all psychiatric drugs such as SSRIs, as well as nicotine, caffeine, cannabis, alcohol, amphetamines, psychedelics, opiates, etc. The evidence of this can be seen in some people who appear to be hardly affected by a particular drug, while another person appears to have no tolerance of it at all.

Within the small collection of CYP450 liver enzymes, we can be either: poor metabolisers (with virtually none of the required enzymes); intermediate metabolisers (a semi loading of the enzymes); adequate metabolisers (a full loading of the enzymes); or ultra-rapid metabolisers (more than the full loading). In regards to any particular

drug, the poor or intermediate metabolisers can be expected to experience adverse side effects (either quickly or over time), while the adequate and ultra-rapid metabolisers can be expected to not suffer these. That 60% of people take themselves off SSRI antidepressants within the first few weeks suggests that the inability to break down and expel the chemicals in the drug is a relatively common experience.

When not being well metabolised and expelled, the chemicals build up to a high concentration in the blood supply and adversely affect the brain. The results can be worsening depression, anxiety and panic; intense agitation; urges to self-harm; increased suicidal feelings, ideation, and behaviour; hypomania and mania; and even psychosis.

Where prescribers are not aware of pharmacogenomics and the reality of adverse effects of the drugs, they can often be tempted to increase the dosage level; add different psychiatric drugs to the cocktail, eg valium, mood stabilisers, even anti-psychotics; and to misdiagnose the increased distress and confusion as being evidence of more and more psychiatric disorders, such as bi-polar disorder, generalised anxiety disorder, personality disorders, and sometimes psychosis.

The typical response to each of the new diagnoses is – you guessed it – more psychiatric drugs. It is no wonder that some people simply spiral downwards as a result of their engagement with the mental health system.

When one in every five Americans is on a psychiatric drug, it is fair to call the mass drugging of the citizenry an American cultural phenomenon. Australia seems to be in a frenzy to embrace all things American. Some of this is welcome – is there anyone who does not enjoy at least some American music, literature, or movies? But a mature culture is able to selectively choose what imports work for us, and reject those which are simply toxic.

It is evident that America is not a very well-adjusted culture. A heady

mix of the pursuit of happiness with free market capitalism in the form of Big Pharma has resulted in one in ten Americans being on an antidepressant drug. I suggest that the desire to drug nearly every human problem out of existence, while obscuring the causes with phoney theories is a toxic cultural import which we need less of, not more.

Following the American example, our prescribers have been 'educated' by drug company reps to view human problems in living, human reactions to adverse life events, as 'symptoms' of 'illnesses' which require 'treatment' with 'medications'. These terms are all euphemisms, words which legitimately belong in medicine but which have dubious validity in the realms of human emotional and psychological suffering.

Decades of research have long ago solved the mystery regarding human distress and puzzling behaviour- in a word, trauma. Adverse life events (childhood abuse, neglect; violence; poverty; insecure housing; sexism, racism, ageism, homophobia, etc) are the common causal factor underlying the vast bulk of psychological distress and disturbance.

My advice for anyone considering going onto a psychiatric drug, such as an antidepressant, is to undertake the relevant pharmacogenetic test first. The test (MyDNA) is relatively inexpensive – details can be found on the Net. The test reveals your inherited loading of the CYP450 liver enzymes, and can suggest which drugs your body can cope with, as opposed to those it can't. No one is able to determine your genetic capacity to metabolise and expel drugs by just talking with you. As such, prescribing in the absence of pharmacogenetic data is more akin to Russian roulette than any scientific enterprise. The MyDNA test is able to provide a rational basis to prescribing choices, if your preference is for psychiatric drugs.

If you are currently on psychiatric drugs and would like to not be, don't panic! There are a range of withdrawal protocols available in credible books (e.g by American psychiatrist Dr. Peter Breggin: *Your Drug May be Your Problem*, and *The Antidepressant Fact Book*), and more credible sources on the Net. Most withdrawal protocols emphasise the need to withdraw slowly, taking months if necessary – not weeks.

Where people are suffering from adverse life events, either historical trauma or current stressors, finding support and addressing those issues are most likely to be helpful.

*Disclaimer: You should not rely on this information as an alternative to seeking medical advice from your doctor or other professional healthcare provider.*

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# Cannabis Cup brings out the best buds, hash and extracts



The winning bud: Jack Harer

by our raving reporter

The 2018 Cannabis Cup attracted 32 entries of high-THC heads to be judged by the judging panel of over 50 high-THC heads.

The winner by a healthy margin on 38 points, was grown from Yantra seeds. Second place went to G13xHaze, with Sweet Lemon Haze taking out third place.

There were eight entries in the Extract section, with the product made by Arthur Dent from G13xHaze the clear winner on 69 points, 40 points ahead of second-placed Grave Digger. Another large margin separated the two entries in the Oil section.

Grave Digger won the Hashish Dish over the other four entries, with a product made from HazexAfghani cannabis.

After a brief presentation ceremony, the winners took home their trophies, hand-crafted from selected seasoned timber, which will no doubt take pride of place on their mantelpieces.

Congratulations to all who participated in the quest to strive for excellence.



## Amazing stories at Medican Workshop

by Michael Balderstone

Two thirds of the audience at the latest Medican Workshop in the Bush Theatre had never been to Nimbin before, but nothing could have prepared them for the photos of Michael Stoopman's horrid neck cancer.

Jaws dropped and gasps were audible, and that was after he warned them. His story is extraordinary and you can watch it for yourself on Youtube with all the other talks, just type in "medican".

Michael was born in Singapore and went to school in Asia and the West and has a PhD in Ontology. He lectures in Ki, holds an 8th Dan in Aikido and a 6th Dan in Shodo, and has conducted many mind power seminars and lectured at UQ on the politics of non-violent change.

He had two near-death experiences, one where he was electrocuted and dead for 20 minutes. From these he gained lots of spiritual understandings and he has been helping people overcome cancer and other serious illness for over 35 years.

Diagnosed with a common form of skin cancer in 2014, a squamous cell carcinoma, that progressed into his carotid artery which started to bleed out in May 2016, he was given minutes to hours to live. He was put on 520mg of morphine to ease his passing. However, after nearly a month in hospital he was discharged, but then had an opioid addiction.

He researched medicinal cannabis which fixed his cancer in five months and it then took seven months to get rid of his morphine addiction. Since then he's been helping people get over serious illness with his basic knowledge of the endocannabinoid system.

He said that as soon as a sample was taken from his skin cancer it immediately spread. Like dropping spores! Not the first time I've heard

that. He also thought that cancer really is part of the body trying to salvage itself, growing over dead cells which largely occur through a lack of oxygen in areas of acidic toxic build up.

Amongst the slides in his presentation was his 'Suggested Cancer Protocols'— in order of importance:

1. Get the mind right (4 agreements daily).
2. Get the best quality CBD and THC.
3. Fix your gut health (water, kefir etc).
4. Alkalinising diet, no refined sugar, cheese, meat, cancer loves these things.
5. Detox, get into a FIR Sauna each day.

Everyone has different ideas, but there is a lot of agreement on the troubles caused by refined sugar, in fact all processed foods are better replaced by organic whole foods, say the majority of healers. Which is just what science is discovering with mediweed. Isolating one cannabinoid takes away much of its healing power.

This is why Big Pharma has not succeeded in putting pot into a pill. It's like it needs the whole family, the other cannabinoids, to work properly, the entourage effect it's called. Whole plant extraction is the vernacular, just like whole food, same principle. Or if you like, Nature knows best!

There are two more Medican Workshop weekends planned at the Bush Theatre. One on 20th-21st October and the other 19th-20th January next year. This is Nimbin at its pioneering best, and it was marvellous to see so many visitors have a weekend they will never forget. Juicing raw leaves, crushing fresh locally grown organic hemp seed oil, extracting the essence of herbs was all demonstrated.

And hearing healing stories from the horse's mouth is inspiring to the max.

My secret dispatch from North Korea failed to make it through last month but now I'm out I can talk freely.

Mountain side after mountain side covered in ten foot plants swaying in the breeze like they were dancing in unison. Unforgettable images that will never leave me. They call it "leaf tobacco" and pretty much everyone is choofing big cones of it, most often rolled in newspaper.

Now I'm a recognised International AAAME it looks like I'll get called up for all sorts of interesting jobs, like this one.

As soon as Trumpy seriously looked like doing the trip to see Kim I was on a plane with enough paperwork to get through any border anywhere it felt like. I needn't have worried. I was welcomed on red carpets with rows of smiling toothy faces. Not that I had any idea what they were thinking behind the smiles but my dreads and Bob Marley tee shirt probably helped.

The research papers I hurriedly read on the military plane said their leaf tobacco was especially popular amongst young soldiers in the military. Rather than getting hooked on tar and nicotine like servicemen in the West they unwind by lighting up whenever they get a chance. In fact, weed is not treated as a drug in North Korea and is in fact encouraged with real tabac hard to get and expensive.

Despite that I was officially told in Pyongyang that, "No one smokes this in our country. It's only used for making things."

I swear half an hour later I saw that

## STREET SHUFFLE

Journal of the North Coast's longest serving covert

very man who told me this sharing a huge blunt with his friends while they drank the dark rich sweet coffee only the rich there can afford.

And it was like our bush weed, full of cbd and not so high in thc. I had to smoke several big joints to get the job done but I soon saw how it was chilling out the whole nation. They may not have much food and cramped mud floor houses but who cares when you're stoned out of your mind?

Trumpy was fascinated. He told me he asked Kim about it but the little master was evasive. "We make rope and paper and stuff", he said. "And some use it for medicine. It keeps them happy."

"It keeps them happy!!" Trumpy's telling me the story and staring at me eyebrows raised to ridiculous levels.

"These people have only bark to eat off trees and they get stoned and it doesn't matter? That's what the mini with the haircut told me. Can you believe it?"

He wasn't really asking me, he was struggling to get his head around it.

"Why aren't we letting this happen at home? Why don't we just hand out cookies to the homeless?"

I suddenly realised he was serious.

"Because some pharmaceutical rep would probably shoot you the next day, or try to." The words just came out of me without thinking. He was

immediately on the front foot. "Well fuck them. Greedy bastards. They'll just have to bend over."

He has no idea of just how much big pharma stands to lose if weed gets loose but the seeds have germinated in his mind's garden and it isn't the last we'll hear of it, mark my words.

Of course I was sent ahead of the President's official visit to make sure he didn't get any mad ideas like that from their weed culture but hey, what could I do. Order entire mountainsides to be napalmed?

When Trumpy settled down he told me other extraordinary conversations he'd had with the haircut, as he kept calling Kim.

"I'm not sure if the translator wasn't pulling my leg but the haircut told me his father scored a perfect 300 the first time he tried bowling, and shot five holes-in-one the first time he played golf. And when he died the skies above some sacred mountain glowed red. Do you think the weed's confused him a little?"

Whatever's true the two haircuts actually enjoyed each other or was it the global stage feeling super important? Nor does it matter that every White House staff member flew home with suitcases stuffed full of leaf tobacco which cost a whole \$2.40 a kilo in the markets.





by Eric Smith

Winter has well and truly set in, and it is time for hearty, nourishing soups and stews packed with organic root vegetables, which are very high in minerals, greens for vitamins and legumes for protein, iron and potassium.

Add some broth of your choice plus garlic, onions and herbs to make a terrific investment in your own, and your family's winter health.

Every Saturday morning, from 8.30am to 12 noon, there is a small but vibrant Farmers' Market held at the Blue Knob Gallery and Cafe, just a few kilometres out of Nimbin on the Blue Knob Road.

Freshly harvested local organic vegetables, herbs, fruit and mushrooms with very low food miles are available.

There are many delicious preserves on offer, including Kimchi, pickles, chutneys, jams, marmalades and bush tucker treats. All seasonal, homemade and home-grown.

At Blue Knob Farmer's Market you can not only buy local organic produce; there is also a wide variety of prepared meals, vegan and otherwise, take away snacks, breads, condiments, tonics, homemade ice-cream, kombucha and even hot miso soup to warm you up on these winter mornings.

For the gardeners out there, Farmers Choice Seedlings have a great range of seedlings and good advice. Soil amendments are also available.

Sweet, crunchy apples from the Apple Isle are at Blue Knob every Saturday.

The Backyarders Table is available for you to sell

your excess produce and to offer variety to customers. Coffee, avocados, honey and a variety of fruits, plants and vegetables from local gardeners are welcomed and sold each week.

On the first and third Saturday of the month, live music is featured at Blue Knob Farmer's Market.

Saturday morning at lovely Blue Knob, with coffee and brunch, a browse through the wonderful Gallery, and a week's supply of organic local food... it doesn't get any better. Bring your smile and we will see you there.

For more information, or if you are interested in performing your live music, phone 0415-935-643 or contact: jamescreagh@hotmail.com

Check out our FaceBook page for photos and more information.

by Neil Amor

Jake Shedden knows his land intimately. Some 40 years ago he was born in a tent by the creek that runs through his property.

Thirty-odd years later his eldest son is born in the same backyard (this time in a yurt!)

Somewhere in between, Jake met Lanie, and four kids and a lot of elbow grease later, Hanging Rock Farm not only feeds their brood but the entire Nimbin Valley as well.

Surrounded by the Border Ranges, the family farm sits on about 100 acres. As a result of painstakingly replenishing the soil over the years, Jake and Lanie are able to provide for themselves and a grateful community from a mere two acres. Constantly rotating the crops is labor intensive but ultimately rewarding and produces high yields.

While growing for some years for their family needs, they branched out to supply local farmer's markets in 2013. It wasn't long before word of good, reliable produce got around and they now supply a range of 40 types of vegetables as well as a blooming business in cut flowers, with over 40 varieties. They finally acknowledged they

actually had a business when they recently purchased their first designated work shed.

Hanging Rock Farm can be found on Facebook, and their always fresh produce can be purchased at the Nimbin Organic Food Co-op... supporting local growers.

Here's one of the Shedden family favorites:

### Seed and spinach winter salad

Ingredients (serves 4) – 2 tbs pumpkin seeds/ 2 tbs sesame seeds/2 tbs hemp or poppy seeds/1 teaspoon fennel or cumin seeds/250gm young spinach leaves.

For the dressing: good squeeze lemon juice/a pinch each of sea salt, freshly ground black pepper and caster sugar/1 tbs of olive and 1 tbs sunflower oil.

Preparation: Combine all the seeds in a fry pan over a medium heat and cook until lightly browned and fragrant. Set aside to cool.

To make dressing: Combine juice and seasonings in a lidded jar and shake vigorously.

Put spinach leaves in a bowl, trickle over dressing and toss gently. Scatter over half the seeds, toss lightly again, then sprinkle remaining seeds over and serve.

Until next month, eat well.

## Manufacturing regime change

by Warwick Fry

Working in the media environment I like to think I am inured to disinformation, misinformation and spin. I tell my Mum it's no use her yelling at the TV set - although at times I have felt like hurling a brick through the thing myself.

A recent trip to Nicaragua left me gob-smacked at the blatantly perverse and malicious misrepresentation and distortions that have been emanating from that beleaguered country since the ultra-violence of last April - violence that is escalating even as I write.

What began on April 18th as a small (about 60 strong) student demonstration against social security reform (a saga of disinformation in its own right) was hijacked by armed violent elements who must have been preparing for a trigger event for months. Confrontations with the police were then reported as a 'massacre of unarmed students'.

Within days President Ortega had responded by withdrawing the police, cancelling the contentious social security reforms and calling for dialogue. By then, pension reform had been forgotten and demonstrators were calling for Ortega's resignation.

There were many outrageous claims made in the last weeks of April. Underpinning them was the initial reflexive assumption that it was another 'colour revolution' with police violence and a repressive authoritarian regime a given. It was textbook Gene Sharp.

Never mind that of the 200 injured in the first five days, 128 of them were police confronting home-made mortars (thousands of shells at \$3 a 'pop' - who paid for them?) and firearms. Never mind that Daniel Ortega won his second election with

72% of the vote. Never mind that Nicaragua had the best economic and social indices of the region. The Nicaraguan protests were tailored to fit the 'regime change' media template.

Central American and Mexican, not to mention other international media fell in with the 'official' narrative. On the ground it is another story. A long time English resident Stephen Sefton, has been working on educational and community projects (including a women's shelter and legal service) for twenty years. In an email he wrote: "Family after family have come forward denouncing opposition media lies and manipulation of their loved ones' deaths. The opposition media film attacks by their gangs and then publish that material as if it were attacks by Sandinistas.

These claims are corroborated by instances of police being kidnapped and stripped of their uniforms, and casualties allegedly caused by police violence turning up alive and indignant.

He goes on to write: "We sleep three or four hours a night because we are alert and prepared for attacks from the opposition gangs who have attacked and burnt or ransacked 23 schools across the country. Eventually, [President] Ortega will order the police to impose order, but everyone is getting very worn down while we wait for that to happen."

Another resident US citizen John Perry (not a personal fan of Ortega) describes how he participated in a peace march of around 1000 people in Masaya that was attacked by anti-Sandinista mobs, and a building burned down.

Over two months into the violence, (over 170 dead and 2100 injured) I am seeing belated, grudging acknowledgement that there are gaps in the 'official narrative'; that

it is contradicted by facts. That the majority of casualties are Sandinista supporters. That it would hardly make sense for the government to destroy public radio stations, its own government offices (over twenty), buses, 55 ambulances (stolen, damaged or destroyed) over twenty schools, an iconic craft market and hundreds of small businesses and supermarkets. Remaining undamaged supermarkets were empty for weeks before the road blocks were cleared that also prevented thousands of employees getting to work.

A part of the problem is that highly placed organisations accept the tainted opposition reports at face value. Amnesty International put out one such report titled *Shoot to Kill - Nicaragua's strategy to repress protest*.

A former prisoner of conscience sponsored by Amnesty International (Camilo Mejia Godoy, Nicaraguan born conscientious objector to the Iraqi War) wrote a scathing open letter cogently exposing the biases and false allegations of the report. His account has been slowly taken up in US independent media (mainly 'The Real News').

Despite the representation of the Ortega government as a repressive regime, most of the Nicaraguan media is owned by private interests. The majority are hostile. Initial reports alleged a non-existent "massacre" of peacefully protesting students on April 18th. In fact, one student may have died, but the government disputes that. No media reported the mob attacks on municipal buildings in several cities, including Granada, Masaya, Chinandega and Estelí, nor President Ortega's decision to withdraw the police from the streets, an opposition precondition for the dialogue proposed by the government on April 21st.



There is belated recognition by the OAS (Organisation of American States) of the gaps in the 'official narrative'; that the violence is not government instigated. Ortega has signalled a willingness to bring elections forward to next year. On June 4th and 5th at the OAS General Assembly there was a strongly worded exchange between OAS General Secretary Almagro (with a reputation for dodging controversy) and lobbyist for the opposition Mariadaga, after the OAS defeated a motion to condemn Ortega. Almagro accused Mariadaga of being 'deceitful and misleading'.

'Mediating' Catholic bishops who openly support the opposition (there are reports of priests encouraging violence at the road blocks, including one priest involved in the looting) have also been denounced by the Evangelical (Protestant) religious authorities.

Arrested gang leaders working inside one of the private Polytechnic University have provided direct proof that the violent gangs were armed and paid by organised crime networks with links to a Mexican arms trafficker. The ringleader is alleged to be connected with opposition lobbyist Mariadaga, now in the US lobbying

the OAS.

Two months later since writing the last two paragraphs the death toll has climbed close to 200. A Sandinista supporter was killed and burned in the street and on the same day a household of a Sandinista was burned down; four dead, two of them children. Other deaths and assassinations show a deliberate targeting of Sandinista identities and supporters.

It will be interesting to see how the mainstream media deals with this unravelling of the plot. Probably by just ignoring it - Nicaragua will simply disappear from the world news pages leaving a residual negative first impression.

Publications like community papers, and community radio provide a space and a platform for independence. While the Internet means anyone can blog, tweet or post to Facebook, the best blogs, the ones that serious people take seriously, are anchored ('branded' if you like) in trustworthy on line publications.

The (non-violent) 'bricks' that we hurl at the unconscionable.

Postscript. An informant tells me that the price of a mortar round has now dropped from US\$3 to below US\$1.

# Citrus matters

by Thom Culpeper

The citrus fruits have one thing in common, they ripen on the tree. Picked in an immature state, they will not ripen effectively.

Some ethylene 'forcing' is practised for 'big-box' retailers. This treatment brings about a poor form of fruit, lacking in juice and nutrients.

Many of the citrus family thrive brilliantly in the Northern Rivers, so much so that there is to be observed a significant waste of splendid fruit.

While American fruit is being imported and retailed, local citrus is superior to any other kind. Australia owes nothing to American state-subsidised agriculture. Home Ag-people owe it to themselves to harvest this beneficial bounty.

Pomelo, or Shaddock, shows at one end of the large size range of what diversity exists within the beautiful citrus family. The Blood Orange is another branch of this widely hybridised species, and is

considered by citrus pundits to be the current zenith of Orange forms.

The "Sangunelli" is a Spanish form, thought to be the nadir of the Blood Oranges. Incredibly coloured and intense, this is the common form on the Mediterranean. "Sanguinello Mostato", also called "Patereno", is a very aromatic form, ripening earlier than the preceding selection. "Tarocco" is an Italian selection, which has the highest level of vitamin C of all the varieties in culture, and "Moro" of Sicily and is said to have the deepest colouring in flesh and rind and makes a beautiful marmalade. Some research work indicates its usefulness in treating "fatty" liver complaints.

An important compound found in Blood Oranges is Chryanthemin (cyanadin 3-O-glucoside), a very powerful antioxidant.

As an acidifying agent, citrus juice is very useful in cooking poultry. The following is an example of this cooking form.



**Roast fowl 'blood orange'**  
with roast vegetables, fennel and sweet potato, dressed with marmalade and served with seasonal greens

#### Ingredients

A bird of choice, to suit the table needs

8 blood oranges, 4 juiced, 4 cut into 15mm slices (cross-section)

100 gms garlic, crushed

2 diced red onions

750 mls of a 5% saline brine

50 mls orange blossom water

100 mls harissa paste

1 stick fresh angelica (optional)

Handful dried fennel

1/2 jar marmalade

#### Method

Brine the fowl in salt solution/marinade, with the harissa, garlic and chopped onions. 24 hours at room

temperature (winter), otherwise fridge it.

Drain the bird and dry the skin with a hot source (hair dryers work).

Set up the roast in a shallow oiled baking tray. Adorn the fowl with the cut orange sections and fennel, and vegetables for baking.

Set oven high, cover the breast with foil, cook for 30 minutes, lower temp and roast until done.

Blend marinade with equal parts of marmalade. Cook and reduce on low heat, dress the fowl with this or serve as a sauce.

*Culpeper has a surplus randy goat buck to give away. He's on for a paddock full of nannies – a pure Saanen. Contact: svalbardist@planetmail.com*

# Organic abundance, with less effort

by Matt Downie

What is the true measure of efficiency when it comes to growing food organically?

Given that nature is the achiever of all yields and we rely entirely on natural processes in organic farming, we can gain deeper insights into efficient production from observing ecosystems that operate without any human intervention.

Many organic farming enthusiasts spend a lot of time and resources attempting to control unwanted plant growth through continued mowing, slashing or weeding.

A more efficient and enjoyable strategy would be to see yourself as a manager of vegetation communities and to provide nature with increasing opportunities to excel in the production of useful crops.

As we watch nature throughout the changing seasons, we can clearly notice variations in health, growth rates and indeed the overall productivity of plants within the same general vicinity.

These underlying variables can be termed 'The conditions that nature requires to thrive' and can be stated as follows:

- 1) Water availability throughout the year, particularly during summer and drought periods.
- 2) Soil that is rich in available nutrients and biological activity.
- 3) Adequate sun exposure (warmth and light), especially during winter months.
- 4) Diversity of complementary species in order to create an ecological symbiosis of beneficial relationships and resilience.
- 5) Freedom from unnatural processes that disrupt the ecological balance such as monocultural crop situations, use of synthetic chemicals or obsessive mowing and slashing that removes valuable flowers and seed heads that can in turn make rich habitat for



many beneficial organisms.

The ultimate state of organic production can be defined as the most efficient provision and layout of all these essential conditions.

We live in a time of maximum distribution of food producing plants from around the planet, and here in the subtropics we are blessed with the best climatic range to utilise a majority of these.

When it comes to planting out the farm and garden, a foundation of perennial plant species both emulates the stability and resilience of natural ecological systems and provides low effort yields for a vast range of fruits, nuts, vegetables, legumes, herbs and spices.

Many of these only need to be planted once into optimal conditions and then enjoyed with increasing harvests over the coming years.

Annual crops can be strategically incorporated along the sunny edges of permanent vegetation, used to cover any bare soil and also planted into cleared pockets of ground that have windbreaks and are orientated to capture plenty of direct sun.

The best annual seeds to use are heirloom and organically grown regional varieties as these are well adapted to thrive under organic conditions and have natural genetic diversity that allow them to adapt to changing environmental/climatic

conditions.

Maintaining fertility is vital for sustained productivity and is founded on the essential conditions for nature to thrive and an ongoing balance between returning nutrients back to the soil to offset those that are being extracted through harvesting.

The most efficient way to maintain natural fertility is via animal rotation systems set up in specific seasonal garden areas where their manure is incorporated directly.

Other more labour intensive methods are making and applying liquid fertiliser and compost, both consisting of the widest range of essential nutritional ingredients such as seaweed, animal manures, dynamic accumulator weeds, wood ash, rock minerals, fish and most organic wastes.

Our role as ecological designers, harvesters and stewards of our own life-sustaining habitat is very much founded upon the continual observation of the interactions in our garden and farm ecology.

From these ongoing insights, appropriate responses and actions can be identified and applied to working strategically with the prevailing weather conditions and to further promote nature's momentum throughout the seasons.

How well the essential conditions are provided, and how in-tune we are to further guide nature's momentum, directly represents the difference between random results and reliable year-round abundant harvests that come with natural ease.

*Matt Downie has a degree in horticultural science from UWS Hawkesbury and 25 years experience as a permaculture designer, natural farmer and nurseryman.*

*Achieving year-round food abundance with ease is his area of expertise. He can be contacted through his website at: [www.zen-farming.com](http://www.zen-farming.com) or phone 0497-568-335, email: [matt@zen-farming.com](mailto:matt@zen-farming.com)*

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# Opportunistic species

Some say camphor laurel is good at holding the creek banks. Others claim lantana is good for the soil. Maybe we should leave them? After all, a weed is only a plant that grows where we don't want it.

In a region of rich soil and high rainfall, there are ample opportunities for a luxuriance of vegetation to abound. Opportunistic species can and will appear anywhere. Should everything be left to grow how and where it will? While some use is made of naturalised plants by native wildlife, biomass should not be at the expense of biodiversity.

Living in the country comes with a responsibility to manage the land. While there are patches of pristine bush around, most of the landscape has been cleared at sometime or other since European arrival. Nature tries to restore balance to the ecosystem but the presence of exotic species creates challenges that require human intervention. Many introduced plants out-compete and overgrow native species. They may require removal if bush regeneration is your aim.

In the Northern Rivers the list of species that need management is long. Some of these are common and have been around a long time. Camphor laurel and lantana are ubiquitous. Introduced to Australia in the 1800s they have been spreading throughout Australia for over a hundred and fifty years. A familiar sight to many, these well-known plants appear to some to be part of the natural landscape. But these invasive species continue to increase their numbers and will dominate regenerating native



Miconia calvenscens, or velvet tree

## WEED WORDS

by Triny Roe

vegetation if not controlled.

Lantana covers four million hectares of Australia. This sprawling shrub/creeper is not especially good for the soil and only marginally better than nothing. Its allelopathic abilities prevent ground covers germinating so the soil beneath is bare. Remove the lantana and natural recruitment can take place. The seed bank could still be present. It just needs opportunity.

More recent botanical arrivals might not be found everywhere yet, but have potential to increase their range. Species like giant devil's fig are carried large distances by bird and bat. Groundsel bush is blown many kilometres on the wind. Fresh occurrences of these newer weeds can easily appear in areas that were previously clear.

There's always the threat of more

new species being introduced, maybe inadvertently, maybe on purpose. Popular with collectors, *Miconia calvenscens*, or velvet tree has the potential to be a serious invader of rainforest in the Northern Rivers. Known in Tahiti as the 'green cancer', it covers 70% of the island.

So far authorities have managed to prevent widespread infestation in this region with an education campaign and a stringent eradication program targeting nurseries and wild growing specimens. Mature *miconia* can produce five million seeds a year. These can be transported elsewhere by birds or in mud on shoes and vehicles.

Everyone has a general biosecurity obligation to prevent the spread of weeds. Inspect your property regularly. Know your plants, look for new arrivals and manage appropriately.

The recent discovery of yellow crazy ants, first in Lismore and now in Terania Creek, highlights the importance of bio-security for pest animals as well as pest plant species. These exotic ants hitchhiked with humans to their new locations. Check your gardens and farms to see if there are any strange ants present. Early detection can mean eradication.

Fire ants are only 40km from the Qld border and still on the march. They too can smuggle themselves in landscaping supplies or even stock feed to new areas. Observe all quarantine regulations if moving soil and plant material to protect our wildlife, the environment and our lifestyles.

Happy weeding.

# The temple of the Sikhs

by Simon Thomas

There are few places in the world which offer an assault to the senses akin to that experienced by the visitor to New Delhi.

This one city hosts a population equivalent to the entire continent of Australia, and it felt like I bumped into every one of them while taking the metro to Connaught Place one torrid afternoon in April.

As I emerged from the subterranean cool, the overwhelming odour of the chaotic city centre knocked me for six. Mind you, it is not all bad. Sure, there is every possible iteration of human stinkiness rolled into the brown cloud of toxic smog, but in there are also wildly fragrant odours of food, spices and incense.

I approached a main road with the usual trepidation of an Indian pedestrian. Although marked out for four lanes, the street boasted a barrage of traffic at least ten vehicles wide, all jockeying for a place in a real life dodgem car game. Trucks, taxis, busses, rickshaws, oxen carts and the ubiquitous holy cows roared past, cleansing my aura with a flush of acrid smoke.

Indian drivers pay little heed to the written rules of the road, however an informal system of horn beeping allows the diver to form a mind map



Photo: Simmar Ahluwalia

of the vehicles around them, much like a flock of bats using echo location, just a heck of a lot noisier.

Following the locals and without waiting for a break in the traffic I slowly crossed the thoroughfare as deliberately as possible, allowing the stream of traffic to pass by on either side. With my heart in my mouth, I shuffled across, then jumped thankfully onto the footpath.

I met my mate Simmar for a cool drink, then accepted his invitation to visit the temple of his Sikh fore-fathers, the 16th

century Gurudwara Bangla Sahib. Passing through the gate of the spacious complex was like entering a portal through space and time.

Although equally as crowded as anywhere else in the city, the site was imbued with a palpable calm. Devotional music echoed out across a holy pond the size of a football field, and the golden, onion-shaped dome which capped the white marble temple glowed crimson in the glare of the setting sun.

One of the great Sikh traditions is to provide free

meals to anybody who should visit their community kitchen, housed within the temple complex. The food is paid for by donations and much of the preparation and serving is done as devotional service by the Sikh population.

It was a special day in the religious calendar, and we lined up outside the community eating hall with an ever-increasing crowd. When the previous batch of diners had left, the security doors were opened, and we poured into a cavernous, brightly lit room constructed entirely from brilliant ivory marble.

The floor had been laid out with long rows of mats, on which we sat ourselves cross legged while we waited for the meal. Teams of volunteers fanned out among the group distributing stainless steel plates which were then filled by more helpers who served from buckets of rice, chapattis, dal and vegetable curry. I could scarcely believe that within five minutes, after a short prayer, all 2000 of us were enjoying this delicious food.

By the time 20 minutes had elapsed, we had all eaten and relinquished our plates to an energetic group of washer-uppers, already a new group were moving in for dinner. In all, they were expecting to welcome 20,000 people for a free meal on that one night alone, not including all those who turned up for lunch!

# Early rescue can give koalas new lease of life in the wild

**B**umper, a big six-year old male koala weighing 6.94 kg was hit by a car on Rileys Hill Road in Richmond Valley Council area on 25th February, and recovered to be released, which is rare for koalas hit by vehicles.

He was crossing the road, but unfortunately a local resident on his way to work didn't see him and the force of the impact was such that Bumper split the bumper bar on the car, hence his name. The local heard him clunk under the car and pulled over. He looked alright, just a little stunned and dazed, so he put him on the side of the road.

On his way home from work, Bumper was still on the side of the road, but this time when the local went to pick him up, he tried to bite and scratch him. Bumper was put on the ground and with a rush of adrenaline bolted up the nearest tree.

After receiving a call from the man's wife, I was there in 15 minutes and tried to flag him down, but Bumper just kept swatting at the flag. Through the binoculars I could see some blood on his nose, and knowing he would likely die if left, I put up a trap and, with the help of local residents, it was checked regularly through the night.

He was still in the tree in the morning, and although Friends of the Koala tried to organise a cherry picker, it wouldn't be available until the next day, probably too late for Bumper.

Later that afternoon, Susannah Keogh



Bumper at his release

(FOK Care Co-ordinator) and Marley Christian (FOK Rescue Co-ordinator) came down to give me a hand at trying to flag him again. Bumper just swatted the flag again. Other than keep everything crossed that he would come down into the trap, nothing more could be done.

At the 9.30pm trap check, there was Bumper, sitting in the trap, so I called Susannah, then took him straight up to the Friends of the Koala Triage Centre, where Susannah was waiting. After an initial assessment and some pain relief, Bumper was left until morning, when he was taken to Currumbin Wildlife Hospital.

His assessment revealed abrasions, swelling and heavy bruising on the right side of his

body, possible nerve damage, a facial fracture, internal bleeding and a sunken abdomen.

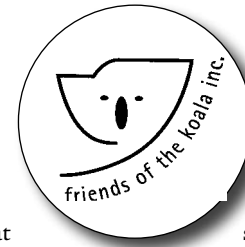
Surprisingly, just two weeks later, Bumper had a good appetite, adequate hydration, no Chlamydia, and was looking great. He needed to stay longer at the hospital for his facial fracture to heal and make sure he continued to eat well and maintained his weight.

After two months in hospital and rehabilitation, Bumper was ready to come back to the Lismore Care Centre for monitoring. Just over a week later, on 7th May, Bumper was ready for release back at his home.

When Marley called to say Bumper could go home, I collected him and took him back to Rileys Hill. Bumper sat in the cage, alert but not stressed, and as we rounded a corner on Rileys Hill Road, close to where he was hit, he sat up and started sniffing the air and moving around. He knew he was home!

Bumper's food trees are mostly on the roadside, but I picked a good tree in his home range away from the road, as we didn't want him hit again. This also allowed the local residents to keep an eye on him overnight.

We took him to the release tree, and as soon as the cage was opened, he jumped up the tree quickly, sniffed the air, sniffed the tree, sniffed the tree some more, rubbed his scent gland on the trunk, climbed around,



## Koala Kolumn

by Maria Matthes,  
Koala Watch project co-ordinator

ate some leaves, and sniffed and climbed some more before settling down. He moved on overnight, settling back into his habitat.

Friends of the Koala's recent Becoming a Koala Watcher workshop for Broadwater/Rileys Hill locals resulted in some newly trained Koala Watchers who live with and near Bumper. They made signs and posted on facebook pages so Rileys Hill locals would know Bumper was around and to be careful driving in that area.

Bumper has been seen on a few occasions since his release, and we hope to see him around the place for many more years.

Our thanks to Currumbin Wildlife Hospital for getting Bumper back where he belongs.

The Koala Watch project, assisted by the NSW Government through its Environmental Trust, has provided 115 people in local communities with koalas with the capacity to identify koalas in need of care, and we're now receiving koala sightings from people who attended the workshops.

Rescuing koalas in need of care early increases their chances of successful release to the wild, so please put the Friends of the Koala Rescue Hotline 6622-1233 in your phone right now.

## Plant of the month



**Kurrajong**  
*Brachycton populneus*

by Richard Burer

Kurrajong is a small to medium tree native to western parts of the Northern Rivers including the Border Ranges.

However many individuals, including the old tree pictured, can be found west of the village at Nimbin, particularly on the ridges, in drier forest types and ancient walking trails.

Kurrajong is an Aboriginal name that can refer to fibre, which is one of the many cultural uses for this tree.

Growing to up to 20m, this sometimes semi-deciduous tree is popular as a street tree west of the range, as its hardiness and value as a shade tree is well regarded.

As mentioned Kurrajong makes a useful fibre for Aboriginal people with other uses including: cutting roots for drinking water, the eating of the tuberous roots of young saplings and the roasting of the edible seeds for a coffee substitute.

I might add that the old wedding tree down Evans Head way is this species, where the written story describes the tree being gifted between clans, further enhancing its reputation as a highly significant tree.

## My message in a bottle

**I** once had a boyfriend I forced into a beer fast. Hear me out. It wasn't that bad.

We'd just started going out, and we were on our best behaviour. You know how it is. He was washing the dishes without being asked and turning up at all hours with bulk haloumi and kangaroo steaks as gifts. Having nothing to complain about, I was uncharacteristically uncomplaining.

And then we went to a festival for New Year's. This coincided with a visit from his best mate, who brought with him a carton of beer and proceeded to commandeer the ice from my esky (which was formerly ensuring the longevity of my children's festival rations). He then fell into a kind of blind stupor of drinking and ambling and talking loudly for the remainder of our holiday.

This was a Moment. My noble companion had been thrown a conundrum he was ill-equipped to navigate. Would he sink or swim? Would he show loyalty to his mate, and join in on the drinking and ambling and joking, or would his loyalties lie with me, and to our sauerkraut-saturated, tofu-steak imbibed, hemp-seed topped tee-totalling bliss?

He sank. At least in my eyes. His traitorous hands stole the ice faster than it melted. My celery became pale and flaccid. My tofu developed a funk. His every joke was louder and funnier (read: lamer) than the last.

The two men matched one another bottle for bottle,

and I retreated into a sullen disapproving silence, shocked that the insidious substance had so easily come between us. Needless to say, my boyfriend's mate thought the new girlfriend was boring and upright, and I was helpless to explain that I was actually a lot of fun, as long as your idea of "fun" is growing cabbages and soberly digging ditches.

You see, I do not drink. It is not because my father was an alcoholic (he wasn't) or my best friend drank herself to death (she didn't), or because I'm coeliac (I'm not). I don't drink the same way some people don't sky-dive, or don't like broccoli, or don't eat meat (they're called vegetarians).

And yet consumption of alcohol is such an entrenched part of our culture – our Nationhood, even – that I am constantly asked to justify my position as if it were some cultural *faux pas*; some deficiency in my character.

I've been known to fill a red wine bottle with non-alcoholic grape juice and pour liberal glasses of the stuff at parties just to avoid the incredulous "What? What's wrong with you?" or the effusive but well-meaning host vetoing my choice with a "Bullshit! Here, I'll pour you a glass."

A friend of mine, who also happens to be a well-known comedian, was unable to convince me to down the booze at a party he was hosting. Defeated, he said disapprovingly, "Oh. I've lost interest in you now." Which was funny. But it also stung. He *had* lost interest in me. He didn't invite me to his next party, I noticed.



by Anastasia Guise

I don't drink because alcohol is proven to increase the likelihood of the development of all lifestyle cancers, and yet this knowledge is buried under the enormous government revenue derived from its consumption. I don't drink because I'd rather spend my hard-earned money on something else. I don't drink because the sight of all of us, sprawled out along the beachfronts of coastlines we have obliterated with our ostentatious marble-topped bars and hipster jazz joints while the world is crying out for sobriety is a nausea I cannot take.

I don't drink because alcohol is largely responsible for our apathy and pacification in a time when nothing less than an uncompromising and intelligent revolution is required to rescue a planet gone to the dogs. (I can hear the after-work banter now: "What are you up to? Shall we Rise Up? Or go for a drink?")

I don't drink because I want to be emotionally present in my relationships, even when that presence is raw with clarity and truth. I don't drink because I know what is done to cereal crops – the cocktails of pesticides sprayed on barley and wheat, the fungicides on

hops, how they are fermented with a genetically-modified yeast cultured in a laboratory. Message in a bottle indeed.

If we must have a drinking culture, bring on the organic, wild-fermented beer, and the transcendental fireside dancing any day. Instead of this toxic indulgence on tap.

When we arrived home from that festival, my boyfriend submitted to a beer diary, marking out his days with 2's and 1.5's, curious as to what hold the drink really had on him. Sobered by the numbers, he then descended (or ascended, depending on your perspective) into a beer fast that lasted six months or more. He learned that the world can be a harder place without the drink, but it can also be one filled with profound teaching.

How did it end, you ask? Because of course it did. It ended with a bottle of Scotch Whisky in a tent pitched on a granite spur in the high country, and a long night spent trying to puzzle out the difference between two cryptic Peppermint Gums.

I know what you're thinking. Get this boring, uptight gal a stiff drink! But the next time you're at a party, singing out loud or howling at the moon, ask yourself this: was it wine the lovely lady just poured into your outstretched glass, or was it non-alcoholic grape juice? With the right state of mind, there really isn't much difference.

Anastasia Guise is an author and environmentalist, writing on ecology, science and humanity. Facebook: [anastasiaguiseauthor](#)

# Keys to mental healthiness

by David Ward

When it comes to the subject of managing our mental health, there are the easy methods and then there are the much less popular hard methods.

The best I could say about the easy methods is that they are easy, that they require very little effort. They seem quite convincing to begin with, but in the end they are full of negative side effects and health consequences and in a lot of cases they don't really work very well anyway.

Everything we consume on a daily basis other than our nutritional requirements, including non-nutritional food, has an element of medication, which in turn suggests a degree of dependence along with that range of negatives.

Most of my medicated life, which stretched from the age of 14 to 49, I primarily depended on cannabis. It seemed to be the obvious conscious and fun choice. Sugar, caffeine and tobacco were effective gap fillers.

My number one choice was often expensive and variable in quality and availability, and along with the tolerance that came with overuse, it wasn't always effective at overriding my depths of depression, anxiety and that dismal questioning of whether I really wanted to continue with this existence or not.

In sheer desperation I sometimes found myself in consultation with a GP. It was a lot to expect that they may have an answer to this mystery of human emotions, and it makes perfect sense that someone came up with the idea of a range of pills to do the job. Going by the reported rates of use in this country, it would seem that they were the perfect solution, but how desperate are we that we'll put up with all those

side effects, short and even more concerning long term. Is the easy method really that easy after all?

I have to admit here to having experimented with some of these drugs in the past, out of curiosity, hope and also out of trust. I have experience of at least five different substances here, Prozac, Effexor, Zoloft to name a few.

It's hard to say what they did for my depression, the side effects were so pronounced, they ranged from complete sexual dysfunction to manic delusions, to an extreme escalation of those thoughts of exiting this world, a nine month period of being absent from my life and more.

In every case it was such a relief to get off these substances and back to my normal old depression.

An individual's use of prescription depression medication is between themselves and their doctor, but given the rates of use maybe people could use a little more confidence to join in the discussion and a little more information about the alternatives, a few more choices.

After years of being cynical about the alternatives and never having been told just how well they really do work, rather than that they may help a little, my life was one day changed forever when I found myself opening to the possibility.

These are the much less popular hard methods, hard because they require commitment, they need to be applied, their principals must be worked into your life. In return they will do the job they are designed to do, they are the keys to mental healthiness and all their side effects are positive. I'll share my experience of them next month.

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## Animal Talk

by Donna Connolly

I have just returned from an epic pilgrimage. USA, New York, in fact.

Not somewhere I had ever wanted to go to. Or had on the bucket list.

I'm more of an intrepid adventures kinda gal. I do like to visit big cities for the energy and culture, even though I feel more at home in the bush or ocean surrounded by animals.

I do have an innate gypsy spirit, that loves a good adventure and travel. Especially meeting new people and animals...

So why the journey?

I went to a Power of Reiki Conference at the Omega Centre, which had presenters from across America covering multiple topics: Reiki and scientific research, different modalities, Shamanism, Crystals, and of course the clincher for me was Kathleen Prasad presenting on Animal Reiki.

I have read her books, completed her online courses and followed her social media for many years, and have witnessed the evolution of her practice.

The Omega Institute was amazing, I was there for three days. The place itself is energising, food is fresh and organic. I was greeted by squirrels, dragonflies and a turtle. I got to see groundhogs and chipmunks...

I was very excited to hear Kathleen speak in person, both at Omega,

# Animal Reiki insights

then, the next part of my adventure was to achieve my Reiki Masters in Animal Reiki, with Kathleen. This was hosted at an Animal Sanctuary in Catskills (upstate New York, in the mountains).

Two nights before I arrived, I had a vision of a sweet face, it was Christopher the Sheep welcoming me.

On the morning of Day One of the course, I was visited by a baby rabbit outside my glass hotel door (in the middle of a city).

By the time I got to the animal sanctuary, the first creature who greeted me, was gorgeous Christopher, in the flesh... Bless him.

Then over the next three days there were cats, pigs, sheep, goats, cows, chickens, turkeys, a lap duck raised in a New York apartment, and some amazing horses, two of which were Apoloson, with their eyes removed. They were well adjusted and happy. So in tune, they would walk over to us to receive Reiki.

## What did I learn?

I've been practising Reiki for twenty years. On animals, humans and anything else that gave me permission.

Being attuned to Reiki gives you the ability to practise on all living things (and on occasion, cars, situations and electrical equipment.) Actually the applications are endless, and I love to hear of new inventive ways to apply Reiki to our everyday lives.

Kathleen brought it back to basics, it was really pure energy, wonderful to see the animals soaking it up, as we all went about our daily practices.

All of the staff remarked at how peaceful the animals were.. And how we are the biggest and least invasive group that had ever visited the Sanctuary.

I saw the power of chanting the precepts, in Japanese and English, and how animals respond when we give each other treatments.

Simplicity is key: you don't have to touch an animal to be giving Reiki. In fact it is way more effective when you just Be Reiki. And most importantly let the animals lead. It's empowering for them and respectful too.

One of the biggest take-home lessons for me is to remind the animals of their beautiful inner light. Mirror it back to them. Especially when they are transitioning.

Too often we get caught up in the moment, feeling pity, and fear for the animal.

Or if they are a rescue animal, we let their back-story define who they are in this moment. That is not fair for them, and doesn't help them reach their fullest potential. They need us to be strong, compassionate and shower them in unconditional love.

They live in the moment, and we owe it to them. To honour the Now. Whatever that may be.

Then I was in New York City for the next three days. I got to stay with Tommy (Jack Russell) and his guardian in upper Manhattan. It was great to chill with him before I hit the subway and big smoke.

There was one particular night I was sitting in Times Square surrounded by thousands of people, eating dinner, when this gorgeous big dog bounded up to me full of hugs and licks.

That was my favourite moment of New York City. Just goes to show where my heart is.

Don't get me wrong, the museums, plays, live comedy and Central Park all had their charms too.

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by Cameron Storey

Each and every body can be viewed as having three Bandhas (locks). These three Bandhas maintain the integrity of the body and enable efficient functioning and the channelling of energy, blood and bodily fluids into certain areas of the body.

These bandhas are: 1) Jalandara Bandha (Chin Lock), 2) Uddiyana Bandha (Abdominal Lock) and 3) Mula Bandha (Root Lock).

The Chin Lock requires flexibility from the back of the neck to perform fully and many yoga practitioners can only partially apply this lock at best. Richard Freeman, Iyengar or Krishnamacharya are good examples of how it is applied fully.

Shoulderstand and plough, with all their numerous variations, facilitate preparing the neck muscles for Chin Lock. In these poses the blood is channelled into the upper

# The three Bandhas of the body

torso where it flushes the thyroid, parathyroids and the thymus glands keeping them vital and healthy while stimulating the parasympathetic nervous system and compressing the carotid sinuses.

In poses like downward-facing dog pose, the Chin Lock along with the narrowing of the glottis trigger the Abdominal Lock during inhalations. The effects of this lock are that all the internal organs, including large and small intestines, kidneys, adrenal glands, spleen, and bladder (hence no drinking in class) are massaged and the sympathetic nervous system is toned. This requires substantial practice and after which the Abdominal Lock can be applied to numerous other poses.

The abdominal lock can also be performed at the end of exhalation and held statically for periods of time or the abdomen can be oscillated back and forth 10 to 30 times after exhale. All of these variations have differing effects on physiological systems and beyond the scope of this article but the one effect of interest at this time is on the Root Lock.

The Abdominal Lock draws back and simultaneously draws the Root Lock toward the diaphragm. So the Chin Lock triggers the Abdominal Lock which in turn triggers the Root Lock. This three-part action is called

tri-bandha or Maha Bandha and is an essential part of using the internal energy body rather than just relying on the external physical body.

The Root Lock draws the energy upward, the abdominal lock draws energy inward and the chin lock draws energy downward, all of which increase the pressure internally have both a cleansing effect and a stimulating effect upon the body tissues and cells.

The Root Lock also stimulates and balances both the parasympathetic and more subtly the sympathetic and the hypothalamus. If the body is inverted and the internal organs move under the influence of gravity toward the upper torso AND Root Lock is inactive, the body can take in air into the vagina or the anus or both.

Although there are yogic cleansing techniques designed to do just this, the difference is in our intention.

If taking air inwards through the pelvic floor is our intention then fine; if not then we failed to apply the root lock when it was required. While the sounds of air entering and subsequently exiting our body may embarrass some people, the important issue is developing the awareness and strength around the Root Lock and pelvic floor.

The pelvic floor contains not

just the Root Lock but also the two accessory mudras (symbolic gestures): 1) Vajroli Mudra is related to the external muscles of the urethra preventing urination and 2) Ashwini Mudra relates to the external anal sphincter, preventing defecation.

The contraction or relaxation of either Vajroli Mudra or Ashwini Mudra are much easier to master, and can be practised initially, than the subtlety of the Root Lock.

The male Root Lock is a subtle upward contraction just above the perineum and not particularly deep. The female Root Lock is the subtle upward contraction at the area of where vaginal canal ends and around the cervix and much deeper internally.

The female Root Lock and pelvic floor, less so for males, are prone to numerous problems, pressure during pregnancy, prolapsed uterus, light bladder leakage, perineal tearing during birthing, lack of muscle tone and/or being overweight and so require more attention and training.

Differing poses, differing pranayamas and differing meditations require differing applications of the locks, some applications are for ease in poses, some for lightness, some for safety to prevent excess downward pressure



on the pelvic floor or deleterious upward pressure on the brain or to turn the awareness more inwards.

This has been a cursory overview of certain aspects of locks, not including chakras, vayus, sushumna or the awakening of kundalini.

*The Dharma Centre and Medicinal Gardens on Lillifield Community has three Yoga Classes and Friday 9.30am Yoga Class is at Birth and Beyond, Nimbin. Phone 02 6689-7120 or Facebook "Dharma Centre - Lillifield". We are closed during school holidays.*



by Suzy Maloney B.Eq.Sc.

# Anthropomorphism

Many studies into anthropomorphism are looking at apes or domesticated animals such as dogs and cats. These animals show a greater number of behaviours and traits similar to humans. But when the species is very different to us, such as with horses, the story can be quite different.

I hear people say things such as, "He was planning how to get back at me", or "She was doing it deliberately to upset me". When we start believing that our horses are out to get us, planning revenge and deliberately being difficult we start to fight them.

If we've experienced other humans doing such things to us we carry the old hurt and anger inside us and can then project this onto the horse.

Sometimes a horse can do a small thing 'wrong' but the human has an enormous emotional response because it triggers all the old stuff inside. This can result in the human becoming aggressive and angry toward the horse, creating fear in the horse and the whole situation escalates.

If we see the horse as a horse and realise they don't do these sorts of human things, then we are free to just deal with whatever is happening. Don't get me wrong, I am not saying horses don't feel emotions, what I am saying is they do not plan and plot like humans do.

A horse is in the moment, dealing with whatever is happening in the best way they know how to. If they can't do something, it is our job to learn how to

communicate with the horse in such a way that they can understand and also to help the horse to gain any skills they may need to complete the task.

Humans tend to bring way too many emotions and emotional baggage into the paddock. A horse does not hate you or dislike you they are just trying to deal with life. When you are with a horse the best thing you can do for both yourself and the horse is to not take it personally.

If something happens while you are with a horse and you don't take it personally you are able to stay calm, assess the situation and work out what happened, why, and how you can work on preventing it happening again.

If your response to a problem is 'oh, he doesn't like me' you are going to start feeling negative emotions. This will change the way you interact with the horse and build up a barrier between you. In the worst case scenario it can result in horse abuse.

So while it is important to always recognise that horses are sentient beings and have emotions, it is also just as important to recognise that they are a horse. Horses are beautiful because they are different. We like being with them because they're not humans, so embrace that difference and celebrate the fact that they are horses.

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# Biological worming for horses

by Les Rees, Equine Naturopath

As a horse owner, I have obvious concerns regarding the use of chemical products to control worm burdens in my horses.

In an ideal world, removing manure from paddocks, using a rotation paddock system and mixed grazing animals are all forms of worm control. However, in practice many of us fail miserably when it comes to practicing any of these principles, and as a result there is a dependence on the use of chemicals to control worm burdens.

Worm infestation has a cyclic nature which begins with the ingestion of pasture contaminated with the larvae. In the body, the larvae grow into worms and reproduce by laying eggs that are excreted out of the body in manure. This creates the perfect dispersal system that enables the continuance of the cycle as more of the pasture becomes contaminated.

I recently came across an article concerning a new biological wormer that piqued my curiosity, claiming that Australian horse owners will be the first in the world to access a new product that has just been approved by the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority.

"Bio-Worma has been dubbed a game changer in worm control." The article claims that we can now do away with the nasty chemical anthelmintics currently used for worm control by using a strain of nematophagous fungus that has the ability to trap the larvae of parasites common in horses. The spores have apparently been thoroughly tested and are considered safe, non-toxic and residue-free.

The *Duddingtonia flagrans* fungus has inert spores that travel through



the horse without causing damage to the digestive system. When excreted, the spores germinate in the manure and form a microscopic net that traps, paralyzes and consumes the larvae of parasitic nematodes. This reduces the numbers of infective worm larvae in the pasture and the chances of horses ingesting them.

According to Chris Lawlor, head of International Animal Health Products, developers of Bio-Worma, "It is using nature to fight nature, rather than chemicals to fight nature." Sounds fantastic, but although the fungus has been found to reduce the numbers of ingested larvae, there are no claims that it will have any impact on tapeworms or botflies!

The makers of Bio-Worma advise that it works better when livestock is moved to fresh pasture and the animals treated with a suitable chemical wormer, however the Australian company Evidence Based Worming (EBW) states that some anthelmintics have an inhibitory effect on *D. flagrans* and therefore EBW considers it would be inadvisable to administer Bio-Worma simultaneously with a chemical wormer.

EBW also points out that use of Bio-Worma is likely to be quite expensive per horse per year since a daily dose is

required, that larval development of parasitic horse nematodes ceases in any case below 6° Celsius, and that only long-term studies will show the true impact of billions of *D. flagrans* spores on our pastures that would not have occurred naturally.

My personal concerns are for the reduction in biomass, species density and diversity. I find it interesting how research often ignores the knock-on effects of the so called wisdom they are spruiking! You can deliver desired answers from research trials simply by not asking the right questions.

In this case, what happens when your paddocks are covered with the DF fungus? Will it cause problems that affect the biodiversity of the paddocks? Are there other fungal organisms that play an important role in the health of the soil microbiota that may be reduced by increased density of DF and how will it affect the animals that feed on the larvae affected by the excretion of the fungus?

It's up to each of us to make informed decisions before creating another disaster!

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