

GOOD NATURED MIKE CLARK



**GOOD
NATURED**
A PODCAST SERIES FROM
CONSERVATION OPTIMISM

Listen to the episode [here](#).

INTRO

Sofia: Hello and welcome to Good Natured, a podcast that shines a light on conservation successes and challenges. I'm Sofia!

Julia: And I'm Julia! We're thrilled to be back for a second season of the Good Natured Podcast.

Sofia: This year, we are going to be doing things slightly differently and we're starting with four weekly mini-episodes called Nature Notes, featuring nature related stories.

Julia: And we will then release our normal length episodes from mid-August so just make sure to keep an eye on your feed to find the latest episodes!

Sofia: This week's Nature Note was recorded by Mike Clark. He is a researcher at the University of Oxford's Nuffield Department of Population Health and he focuses on investigating the links between agriculture, environmental sustainability, and human health.

Julia: And he is also working to identify solutions on how to transition towards agricultural systems capable of nurturing people and the planet.

Sofia: He spent the summer of 2012 working in north-eastern Montana on a nature reserve in a sagebrush landscape and there he was helping to monitor prairie dog, owl, and bison populations. He also fought lightning fires, fixed fences and painted buildings.

Julia: This week's Nature Note is about how he began to appreciate small things in big landscapes. So let's hear from Mike!

MINI-EPISODE

Mike: This is a story on how I learned to appreciate small things in big places. I was in central Montana in the middle of a sagebrush prairie. There were gray green meter-high woody bushes, bunches of knee-high grasses and spots and vibrantly yellow mustards, all interspersed with dry dusty dirt as far as I could see.

The largest town within 200 kilometers had fewer than 2,000 people. The landscape was endless. It undoubtedly stretched far in every direction that I could not help but wonder what was just beyond the horizon, just over that hill, just beyond what I could see.

So I sat down, my world shrinks. I could not see any more than a few meters in any direction. And I saw, heard, smelled, felt, paid attention to the life that had been at my feet the whole time, but that I had been literally overlooking, whilst wondering what was far away.

The aromas in particular are unlike anything I'd experienced before. There is a prevailing smell of dust and dirt and dry, a bit like old books, musky, but not overpowering. Then came the reminder I was in a sagebrush prairie. This ecosystem has 10-15 species of sage. They vary from a meter and a half-tall woody bushes with leaves that look like duck feet and branches that puncture the tires of tractors.

Its knee high shrubs with silver green leaves reminiscent of the sage that you find in your garden to a species that grows horizontally across the ground. It has deep green leaves, the color of conifer forests IN the height of summer. Each species had its own smell and some of these smells only became apparent after you brushed against, stepped on or otherwise disturbed the plant.

The big sage bushes have the smell of dry, dusty, old books. The knee-high shrubs smelt a bit like cooking sage but with multitude of variations that ranged from earthy to sweet, to minty, depending on the species and the age of the plant. The sage that grew horizontally was my favorite. Smelling almost like how opening a fresh pot a pesto is immediately intensely reminiscent of basil.

I stood back up. My world grew. I remained acutely aware of the sights sounds and smells immediately around me. I began walking every step was an aromatic adventure containing the many aromas of sage punctuated by bursts of spice from pepperworts and the sweet floral smells of blooming prickly pear cacti.

OUTRO

Julia: We hope you enjoyed listening to Mike's story. If you have any comments or you want to get in touch you can reach us on Twitter at ConservOptimism or on email at podcast@conservationoptimism.org.

Sofia: The music for this episode is by Blue Dot Sessions and is available on the Free Music Archive. This mini episode was produced and edited by Julia Migné and Sofia Castelló y Tickell, myself.

Julia: Thank you very much to the Conservation Optimism micro interns, Elizabeth Brown, and Emma Felin for their help with the music.

Sofia: Our theme song was composed and produced by Matthew Kemp.

Julia: This season of Good Natured was funded by Synchronicity Earth, the Whitley Fund for Nature and the University of Oxford Departmental Public Engagement with Research Seed Fund.