

Julia Bradbury is a passionate advocate for wildlife and the countryside. **Chris Bond** talks to the TV presenter about why we need to appreciate nature and tackle environmental issues.

Scrolling through your social media posts can be a dispiriting exercise these days, which is one of the reasons why Julia Bradbury is using Twitter and Facebook to offer a note of optimism in these strange, unsettling times. "I don't think people want to be bombarded with bad news all the time right now, so I've been trying to keep things a bit light," she says.

The TV presenter has teamed up with psychotherapist Jonathan Hoban, whose pioneering "walking therapy" has helped numerous people, to highlight the simple, yet profound, benefits of being outdoors. "I think we're all different people when we're out walking whether that's in your local park, or halfway up a mountain, or in a woodland. Being out in nature changes you, it changes your outlook and the way you think and that's been proven by researchers all over the world," she says. "One of the positives, and there are so many negatives about coronavirus, is people have genuinely connected, or reconnected, with nature in a way they haven't in a long time."

"It's easy for someone like me who makes their living in the natural world to talk about this, but not everyone has easy access to woodlands or hills. Most of the population live in towns or cities and that's why parks and the trees on our streets are so important. It's rudimentary stuff, but for a lot of people that's their daily connection with nature."

"So Jonathan and I have been focusing on this and emphasising how important that connection is and saying even if you can't get out, if you're someone who is more vulnerable right now, it can be as simple as opening a window, or having a window box."

"We've been hearing birdsong more than ever before and you can get apps that tell you what different birdsongs are, or you can take a picture of a flower and an app can tell you what it is. So we can all connect more easily with nature now."

Bradbury is one of our most recognisable TV presenters. She presented *Countryfile* for six

years until 2014, fronted *Britain's Favourite Walks: Top 100* and most recently co-presented *Britain's Greatest National Treasures* alongside Sir Trevor McDonald, celebrating landmark buildings and feats of engineering.

Today, the mother-of-three lives with her partner and young family in north London, but her heart is in the North. She went to school in Sheffield (where her mother ran a clothing business) and it was in the Peak District where her love for the countryside was forged. "I enjoy city life but I've always had this ingrained passion for the outdoors because my dad and my mum introduced me to it as a little girl. I spent hours with my mum in the garden and many hours walking with my dad."

"My early waking experiences were with him in the Peak District because that's where he'd take me after school and on weekends. We'd explore Dovedale, Stanage Edge and places like that because these were the places he went to when he was a little boy."



"My connection with Yorkshire is through Sheffield and South Yorkshire, but I've filmed all over Yorkshire and there are parts of the county that are just incredible, like the Wolds and the limestone pavement in Malham."

This prompts a memory of working up in the Northern fringes of the Yorkshire Dales.

"I remember when I was filming the *Wainwright Walks: Coast to Coast* series years ago and the crew and I got stuck in this torrential downpour.

We had mud up to our knees, the cameraman and the sound lady couldn't move because they were quite literally stuck in the mud. Then over the brow of a hill came this bearded guy on his quad bike and it was Clive Owen, Amanda Owen's husband. He stopped and said: 'Ey up, do you want some help?' He took us down to his farm where Amanda was cooking at the Arga and she brought us scones and cups of hot tea. So between them they really did save us," she says, laughing.

She and Amanda have since become good friends. "She's such a charismatic woman, she's like the female James Herriot and the way she and Clive and their kids live their lives is brilliant, I'm full of admiration for them."

Bradbury has long been a champion of the

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INTO THE WILDS: Left, Julia Bradbury out and about in the countryside and, inset opposite, with her father in Edale in the Peak District. PICTURES: THE OUTDOOR GUIDE

British countryside (she's president of the Camping and Caravanning Club) and is well aware of the impact the pandemic is having on rural communities and businesses. "The whole economy, including rural tourism, has taken a massive body blow. The rural economy is hugely important to the whole country, but it will come back."

We are, though, going to have to adapt. "Coronavirus is going to be with us for a while, so we have to be realistic about our ambitions. That said, I think it's too easy to get pulled down by the negatives at a time when we need to be looking at the positives and how we can adapt our behaviour to the situation we're in."

Which brings her on to the subject of climate change. "I think the language surrounding it is off-putting for a lot of people because it can often seem very removed from their everyday lives, which is why we really need to localise the story."

Julia and her sister, Gina, run the Outdoor Guide – a free online resource for information about walks, where to go and where to stay – and she believes that rather than taking the emphasis away from environmental issues, the pandemic is more likely to push them to the front of people's minds.

"We're hearing about a drop in pollution because traffic has decreased and stories about the birdlife that's come back. And it's happening all over the world – there's been dolphins back in the canals of Venice and bears roaming in North America."

"I was having a conversation in central London recently with a friend social distancing from a doorstep and these blue tits started dipping right in front of us on the windowsill and we watched this little show in amazement, and it's little things like this that show how important nature is to us."

She hopes that lessons will be learned when we finally get through this pandemic. "I read some comments recently from a scientist who said in 30 years she'd never seen such co-operation within the scientific community as there has been in trying to tackle coronavirus. So if that can happen over this, can we have this same co-operation when it comes to environmental issues?"

"We've heard so much talk of 'green revolutions' over the years, isn't it now time we had a real green revolution? The UK is so brilliant and so diverse and I just think it's our duty to appreciate and preserve it."

Julia today launches a new podcast with the author Giles Paley-Phillips called *A Little Bit of Positive*.