

left: Murmuration fills the sky at Ham Wall National Nature Reserve in Somerset.

Photo: Ian Redding Getty

below: Julia Bradbury.

Photo David Venni



“And then, the sky exploded with starlings!”

JULIA BRADBURY chats with Rachel Mead about her new book and tells us about a very special moment in Somerset



left: *Walk Yourself Happy* is the title of Julia's new book.
Photo David Venni

Using nature to nourish me is something I've learned to do and taking moments for "nature snacks" gives me a boost, it's like having a sip of strong herbal tea or a shot of caffeine.' I'm chatting with Julia Bradbury who, in the wake of her cancer diagnosis and mastectomy of two years ago, has released her latest book, *Walk Yourself Happy*. 'I used footsteps as a measure of my recovery; short, tentative walks around my garden gave me faith and brought me back to myself, but my book is not about cancer, it's about walking yourself happy and healthy, wherever you find yourself in life.'

Regularly seen on our screens for prime TV shows such as *Countryfile*, *Watchdog* and countless hiking and walking programmes, Julia has become a natural advocate for getting out and about and exploring our footpaths. Similarly, together with her sister Gina, she formed The Outdoor Guide which is a website dedicated to building a collection of the UK's best walks.

'The great thing about walking is that you don't need fancy kit or lots of money. As adults, gyms can be daunting, some people will be scared of working out in front of other people when they exercise. Walking, for most people, is so accessible – you can do it anywhere or anytime. Even if you have mobility issues, I still encourage people to get outside if they can, after all Florence Nightingale knew that patients recovered faster if they got fresh air; she knew that instinctively

we are all better if we get outside and I'm a great believer in that. And for those people who want more from a walk – you can sexy it up if you want it to be hard core! You can load up a rucksack with weights and carry that up a hill, that's weight training and cardiovascular training together.'

Julia's book gives insights into how, since her cancer diagnosis, she examined her lifestyle and health from a wider viewpoint. 'I was introduced to the world of functional medicine. When my final diagnosis came in, I was questioning why I got cancer and when you look at your health in the round like that, there are massive markers and clues. And so, in this book, I share the knowledge I learnt from experts in their field.' The scientists and doctors who contribute to the book all give their advice in an accessible way, covering topics such as sleep hygiene, social fitness, breathing techniques, anxiety management, and from *Somerset Life's* very own columnist, Pauline Cox, a focus on nutrition. 'Speaking to these experts opened my eyes a lot,' says Julia. 'For example if we look at my diet, I definitely ate way too much sugar. I am naturally slim so I thought I could get away with it. Crumpets with honey, dunking biscuits in tea, eating chocolate bars on location when filming TV shows – I was consuming huge amounts of refined sugar on a daily basis. I had a busy life and even though I was filming these walking programmes I wasn't being healthy. So, I started analysing all of these things and thought, what do I need to change here?'

Julia set to making changes to her sleep, stress management, diet, and crucially, started spending more time in nature. 'Once you start exploring the worlds of functional medicine there's something very interesting that keeps coming up and that is that we human beings need to be outside, we need connection with nature, we need to grow things, we need to move our bodies, we need to look at the colour green and we need to look up more and observe. It may sound a little "woo woo" but it's not. We've evolved today to most of us spending our time looking at screens. We've lost the movement in our lives and we're suffering from a crisis in convenience, we don't even have to get up from the sofa to change the TV channel, and actually if we wanted to, we could stay in one place and not move – ever, and I genuinely believe that is what is making so many of us sick. In fact, there's a growing body of evidence that suggests that 'sitting still is the new smoking' – one day we'll look back on it and be astonished that we ever thought this way of life was normal.'



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Julia takes time out for 'nature snacks'.

Photo: Twofour



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Julia tells me how walking with friends and family is now her favourite way of spending time together: ‘We stomp through parks and amble around the city enjoying in-depth conversations. There’s strength and motivation to our shared experience and if it helps you get going why not have those nature snacks together?’ She highlights how there are life-changing experiences to be had in nature and seeing them with someone else just makes them even more special. ‘In fact, I talk about the importance of nature snacks, I once had a nature three-course cordon bleu meal in Somerset! It was absolutely incredible because I saw the murmurations.’ Julia had been filming for *Countryfile* at the Avalon Marshes and was eagerly awaiting the natural phenomenon with the RSPB Warden. ‘We were waiting and waiting, and I said, “Are you sure they’re coming?” And then the sky exploded with this scene of starlings, and they were twirling and

twisting – all those incredible formations that they do, and it was just the most magical, beautiful and mesmeric sight you can see and that, right there, is the nourishing magic of nature.’ ●

Julia Bradbury’s book, *Walk Yourself Happy* is available in Somerset’s bookshops.

