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Aliens in Creation — A Generation of Nature Know-Nothings

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A recent conversation brought a troubling development into focus. A man told me that he had bought a home with some measure of reluctance, fearing that the location of the house so near to a neighborhood playground would mean too much noise. As it turns out, he needn't have worried at all. Very few children visit the playground at all.

The troubling development is that many children never play outside. They prefer to play computer games, surf the Internet, or update their Facebook pages. Their parents are increasingly afraid to let them play outside, scared by the constant barrage of news stories about crimes against children. These children and teenagers are accustomed to air conditioning, sophisticated entertainments, and lack of physical activity. They are aliens in the outside world.

BBC Wildlife Magazine reports this month that only half of a sample of nine to eleven year old children in Britain could identify a daddy long-legs. A mere 62% rightly identified a frog. Less than half could recognize a tree as an oak.

The findings prompted Sir David Attenborough, the famous British naturalist, to lament the alienation of children from nature. "The wild world is becoming so remote to children that they miss out," he explained. It turns out that many children gain whatever minimal knowledge of nature they acquire through watching television — not by first-hand observation.

Attenborough went on to argue that this alienation of children from nature could lead to ecological disaster, since these children would grow to adulthood without developing a sense to wonder and appreciation for the natural world.

Other observers warned that excessive concern for ecological impact is also part of the problem. Some parents warn children not to go into the woods for fear of disturbing the natural environment. Other parents would just rather have the kids in the house, rather than in the woods or the park. Electronic pacification and digital entertainments seduce both parents and children.

The *BBC Wildlife Magazine* study also revealed that playing outside was the least valued pastime for the nine to eleven year olds. Twice as many children preferred time with the computer.

Author Richard Louv has described this phenomenon as "nature-deficit disorder." In his book, *Last Child in the Woods*, Louv told of a young boy in San Diego who explained that he preferred to play inside, rather than outdoors, because the electrical outlets are found indoors. Life temporarily apart from electrical devices was, to this boy, an unattractive (or unknown) thought.

I am thankful that I had parents who thought that children should play outdoors. I am also thankful for woods and fields and lakes and rivers in which I could play, swim, and plot adventures. This summer, our family has spent a good deal of our time outdoors — mostly on or in a lake. We have been surrounded by wildlife, and we were the observed as often as the observers.

We also had the opportunity to spend some time with a wonderful Christian family that has abandoned the suburbs for a farm. The three children are learning the natural world first-hand. One morning this summer the oldest child of the family — a thirteen-year-old boy — announced the birth of a brand new calf. He did not gain his knowledge of this great event through a documentary on television.

We shared a wonderful meal with this family, and a central part of the meal was a roast. The roast did not come from a grocery store in the suburbs or a big-box retailer. The roast had just recently been grazing in their pasture. There is little risk of alienation from nature when dinner comes from the land just outside the window.

Other reports indicate that traditional summer camps are making a big come-back as more and more parents are willing to pay thousands of dollars so that their children can have some experience in the great outdoors. Some of these children are discovering that life can go on outside the reach of a cellular phone. Actually, most of these children fall in love with nature, being outdoors, and experiencing something real rather than digitalized.

God reveals His glory in creation. How can we read the Psalms with insight if we never look and see that the heavens really are telling the glory of God? Something precious is lost when children — or adults — are alienated from the created world. This choice for alienation is a choice to cut ourselves off from what God has given us to enjoy and to appreciate.

Here's some good news. You don't have to spend thousands of dollars to provide your children with experiences in nature and outdoor play. Just open the door and point them into the back yard or take them to a local park. Take a walk in the woods or go fishing in the lake. Go where the light does not obscure and see the wonder of the night sky.

Who knows? Your children just might forget to look for the nearest electrical outlet.

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['Nature-Deficit Disorder' — Have Children Forgotten How to Play Outdoors?](#)

[Avoiding Nature-Deficit Disorder — It's About Theology, Not Therapy](#)

Archived edition of *The Albert Mohler Program* from August 26, 2005 with guest Richard Louv.

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