

Step 1

Remember Nature Speak, the First Language

Every plant and animal is speaking all the time. They are talking to you, and me, and all we have to do is listen. It's that simple, yet it's not that easy, and I will explain why shortly. First, let's get acquainted with animal language. It goes by many names: *mental telepathy, psychic ability, intuition, extrasensory perception, gut feeling, first impressions, nonverbal communication, animal talk, the primal language, interspecies communication*. Each term describes an aspect of animal language, yet not one of them fully captures what it is. I prefer *Nature Speak*, which refers to what it is, rather than trying to explain it.

Nature Speak is the First Language—it is the mother tongue of all life and the foundation of interspecies communication. It is the root from which our spoken and written languages grew. Yet even more than a way to speak and listen, it is the operating system for our minds and the basic lens through which we perceive our world.

Our ability to communicate in Nature Speak is inherent to being Human. Nature Speak, one of a bundle of core operating skills that include orienteering, tracking, and Envisioning, is imprinted in our DNA and our brain is wired for it.

Some people see the ability to talk with animals as women's intuition. Even though many well-known animal communicators are female, my experience shows that gender is not a relevant factor. Children of both genders prove to be equally adept, and the same is true with adults. The apparent gender difference arises from the cultural pressure on men, more than

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women, to be rational-mind centered (see step 3), so the proclivity for Nature Speak has atrophied more in men than in women. Yet before we get into that, let's get to know our First Language.

The Primary Characteristics of Nature Speak

- **Instantaneous** Little or no transmission or comprehension time is required.
- **Understandable** It does not require translating.
- **Universal** Not only Birds and mammals use it, but also Butterflies, Trees, and lakes.
- **Intuitive** It does not have to make rational sense—and it often doesn't.
- **Simultaneous** There is spontaneous two-way communication.
- **Communal** All beings in the area automatically participate.
- **Innate** There is no need to learn it or train for it.

All that considered, we can still set the stage for Nature Speak by entering our Animal Minds, sharpening our senses, and moving like a shadow, all of which we will achieve in upcoming steps. Here we'll get a visceral feel for Nature Speak by looking at what lies beneath the above-listed characteristics.

The Personality of Nature Speak

1. It's Unexplainable.

When someone first tunes into Nature Speak, she might say something like, "I don't know where that came from; I just know what it means." She is clear and resolute, yet when asked to explain why, she has nothing to offer. This is because with Nature Speak, the mind functions in a realm that goes beyond rationale.

2. There Are No Words.

To say Nature Speak comes from a different world is not an exaggeration, as the language used is not word-based, but rather it is comprised of ancient memories, impulses, and imaginings (as explained in step 3).

3. We Use It All the Time.

It lies at the base of all communication, conscious and unconscious. Here we will learn how use Nature Speak intentionally and effectively, as our typical approach to animal communication is to tell animals what to do, rather than having a conversation with them. Thus most of us have no idea what is possible in speaking with animals, much less how to engage in it.

4. There Is No Magic Involved.

We don't have to be leprechauns, psychics, or one of the last wild Aborigines to speak with animals. Once we get reconnected with our Animal Mind, we'll see that communicating nonverbally with a Squirrel or a Crow is as normal as talking with a friend.

5. There Is No Species Barrier.

Elephants talk to Lions, Ravens chat with Eagles, and we can speak with Trees, Snakes, or whomever else is around. Yes, I said Trees. In the Natural Realm, a mountain's memories are no less valid than those etched into the folds of our brains.

6. It Taps into Universal Wisdom.

Here is renowned Hollywood animal handler J. Allen Boone describing how his American Indian friends would use Nature Speak: "Their favorite method of acquiring fresh wisdom...especially immediately needed information, was not to seek it vocally from some other Indian, or even from printed words...each individually [would]...*listen for the good counsel from the silence as it gently speaks to each of us in the infinite language of all life.* This language

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is eloquent in its boundless expression and helpful in the fresh and needed facts that are always supplied. It is a language that was never difficult for my Indian friends and me to hear and understand, providing that we were ‘of one mind’ and listening ‘as one mind.’^{ci}

7. It Is Nature Reclaiming Us.

When we start speaking the First Language, it will feel like a homecoming: as though Nature is reaching out to connect with us, her long-lost children.

8. It Speaks to the Deepest Part of Us.

When you first picked up this book, I bet you thought you’d be learning how to connect better with Nature. It’s much more than that. Your inner sanctum: the deepest aspect of what makes you, you, is going to merge with the soul of Nature. For many of you, this could be an awakening, an act of communion with the cosmos.

Why We No Longer Talk with Animals

If Nature Speak comes naturally to us, along with it being our primary form of communication, why don’t we use it regularly?

How We Lost Touch with Nature Speak

- **We redefined ourselves as a rational species** early on in the civilized era. Other than body language, our ability to communicate nonverbally has lain largely dormant since.
- **Our perceptive abilities have atrophied**, and they are needed for Nature Speak.
- **Children keep reenacting our abandonment of Nature Speak.** It begins early—sometimes by age three—and it is usually concluded around the time they turn six. A fundamental part of early childhood development is the domestication process, which consists of connecting children with reality—that is, reality according to the rational

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mind. Through positive and negative reinforcement, children learn what to see/not see and what to say/not say. When they are not taken seriously, they eventually quit listening to the family pet and the Birds outside.

- **Regimentation and linear learning finish the job** if it is not completed by the time children start school. What's left of their conscious connection with the natural world and its language diminishes to the point that only faint memories remain, which surface for fleeting moments in fairytales and dreams. Nature's way has been largely replaced with a world where nearly everything has to be quantifiable and defined with words.

That hardly means, though, that our Nature-communication skills are nonfunctional. Even when they go unrecognized, we continue to rely on them to some degree. Whether or not we give nonverbal cues credence, we regularly pick up on them. We gauge a person's emotional state before she ever speaks a word, and we decide how to best broach a topic by impressions from facial expression, demeanor, posture, movement, and dress. Sometimes our cues are not directly related to sensory perception, such as when we feel that we are being watched or when we have a hunch about something.

Free-living animals, on the other hand, are always aware of nonverbal cues. They have to be, as at any moment their very survival could be at stake. It's not only about an individual's welfare, as the whole herd relies on each animal's sensory acuity. Something as basic as where an animal gets his next meal is based on his ability to tune into Nature Speak. For these reasons, we will be turning to the experts—wild animals—to teach us the lost skills that will allow Nature to reclaim us.

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Let us remember that we are all born wild. Those of us who spend time around young children know that they talk with animals and communicate with entities that are invisible to us. If we had been left to our own devices in a natural environment, we would have grown up as hunter-gatherers and would naturally be speaking with plants and animals. We'd be able to see and hear things that we can now only imagine.

With the techniques outlined in this book, we can soon be seeing, hearing, and speaking these things again.

How Nature Speak Works

First: it's like a movie in which we play all the roles.

Some people describe communicating with animals as an exchange of mental pictures. This is true to a degree; however, we think of a picture as a static image, and Nature Speak more resembles a movie which we view through each character's eyes, rather than from outside (see Envisioning in step 11).

Second: what we perceive runs through the animal's mind.

If I believed that Deer were less evolved and intelligent than me, it would color my perception of a Deer's thoughts and actions. However in Nature Speak, my attitudes fade away and I come to know the Deer and her life through her mind.

Third: we experience the animal as an integral part of ourselves.

The Wolf experiences the Deer as a functioning part of herself, in much the same way that I am connected to my arm. It's a deeply organic relationship that I can barely dance words around. My description of the feelings, impressions, and gut connections that constitute animal

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communication would give you such a woefully inadequate feel for it that it would be like me expecting you to know the depths of a stranger's heart by handing you one of his socks.

Fourth: it gives meaning to everything.

Yet the depths of that stranger's heart are not that far away. Even though I'm now using verbal language, you would only hear incoherent noise if it were not for the underpinning of Nature Speak. A word is nothing in and of itself: it's just a symbol for a memory or a feeling that we must connect with in order for the word to make sense. I can say *gwumpki*, and if you haven't had a meal of traditional Polish cabbage rolls, you might not have a clue as to what the term means. Still, you would probably pick up nonverbally some of what I wanted to communicate, thanks to Nature Speak.

Where We Get Stuck

One reason we get mired down in word-based communication is that we have learned to equate communication with words. There is nothing intrinsically Human about word-based communication—it is a learned skill, which we acquire in the same way that a Dog learns to sit or shake hands. Behind every word is a learned association that gives it meaning. *Even though it appears that people are communicating consciously via words, the actual communication process is occurring nonverbally, via Nature Speak.*

Think of word-based language as symbols collected and organized in a certain fashion. Actual communication occurs only if the symbols connect with an impulse, memory, or feeling—something that takes us into the realm of nonverbal communication.

The Two Major Drawbacks to Word-based Communication

1. **It is inefficient and imprecise.** The inaccuracy occurs during the translating from the word to what it symbolizes. If I say “fly,” you immediately go through a process of association to figure out what I mean. “Is he referring to the Insect?” you wonder, “or is he going to fly somewhere, or is he telling me to go fly a kite?”

I have to attach a number of qualifiers to *fly* in order to steer you toward what I am attempting to express, and you will then have to go through the same associative process with each of those qualifiers as you did with *fly*.

If instead I looked up and you knew I watched Birds, you’d know exactly what grabbed my attention without either of us having to say or associate anything. It is this impreciseness of verbal language that keeps us in our rational minds, continually chattering away in an effort to connect.

2. **Whenever we talk, we are not listening,** at least not very efficiently. Not only are we creating something that has to be heard over, but also our minds are preoccupied with selecting, arranging, and associating words, which keeps us from being fully present to listen.

With Nature Speak, it is impossible to *just* talk to animals, and it is impossible to *just* listen to what they say. *Nature Speak is spontaneous, with listening and speaking occurring simultaneously and indistinguishably from each other.* We are so accustomed to the back-and-forth of speak/listen, listen/speak that we have work to do before we can begin to communicate effectively with the Natural Realm. In essence, we need to return to our lost childhoods: to that

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time of naïveté and spontaneity when we had undying curiosity and everything was fair game.

We had no beliefs or prejudices, so we could not discriminate. Let us begin the journey back.

Relearning Nature Speak

Remember that Nature Speak is not a language that has to be learned—all we need to do is start listening. The process involves two phases, which we will explore in the next step.

Our Approach to Re-Attuning to Nature Speak

- **Awaken our innate abilities**, which we will do in steps 3 to 7.
- **Develop the following five awarenesses**, which we need to progress through in order, to keep from filtering out Nature Speak.

The most effective approach is to engage in these two phases concurrently. Bookmark this page and come back periodically to review the five awarenesses while practicing the exercises in steps 3 to 7, as the combination of exercises and awarenesses is very helpful in restoring Nature Speak as our First Language.

Awareness One: Being Beats Thinking

One day an Elder and his student were walking along a riverbank. The Elder commented, “Look at how the fish swim around in the pond weeds, going wherever they please. What a pleasurable afternoon they are having!”

“How would you know?” said the student. “You are not a fish.”

“And you are not me,” replied the Elder, “so how can you tell me that I do or don’t know what fish enjoy?”

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“That is true,” mused the student. “I could not know what you know. Yet does that not apply to you as well, for you are definitely not a fish.”

“That is a riddle of the mind,” said the Elder, “and feelings are a matter of the heart. Let’s go back to your question, which is how I would know what gives fish pleasure. You already know the answer—and you know that I know it—only you can’t find it because you are looking in your mind. We know what gives fish pleasure this afternoon because we are here, walking along the riverbank.”

The Benefits of Being Versus Thinking

- **We set aside our preconceived notions and agendas.** The story illustrates how Nature Speak is more about getting our conscious selves out of the way than literally talking with animals.
- **We become more dispassionate and empathetic** members of Nature’s family. By getting our minds out of the way, we grow in kinship, as did the Elder.
- **We come to know ourselves and others** in ways that words can barely begin to convey, as seen through the story.
- **Being breeds contentment:** a state of not only accepting, but cherishing, whatever the moment brings. We cease existing and begin living; we quit *thinking about* Nature and start *being* Nature.

I’ve found that the greatest enemies of *being* are reactive feelings such as anger and envy. Let’s take anger: when I look at someone with fury in my heart, she can usually feel it, even if I try to disguise it. She’ll pick up on subtle cues, or she may perceive it intuitively or

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psychically. Whatever the case, it is real, and as in the story above, it does not have to be rationally understood or verbally expressed.

The same holds in the Natural Realm. If we harbor reactive feelings or aggressive thoughts, the animals around us will pick them up and respond quickly. I remember one sunny day when I was wading through the shallows of a lake catching Turtles by hand. I was relaxed and didn't have any expectations other than what was happening right then. For some reason, I tabulated how many Turtles I had already caught, and then I figured how many more I could potentially catch. Making a game of it, I focused on the goal, and the Turtles largely disappeared. (To be clear, this wasn't typical hunting, in which projecting one's self through a weapon creates a unique dynamic. I was catching those Turtles by hand and making eye contact with most of them.)

I did the same thing many times over with fishing, trapping, catching Birds, and even Counting Coup on animals. It took a while for me to realize that if I wasn't in animal-mind consciousness, I wasn't going to enjoy any kind of meaningful relationship with wild animals.

Awareness Two: Fear Isolates

Fear is the greatest impediment to speaking with animals. It can be fear of anything: failure, the dark, and even the animals themselves. When we hang on to fear, we create a fear-based world that is disconnected from the realm in which the animals live. From our illusory world, we then try to bridge the gap, and we inevitably fail.

The reason is that fear constricts, and Nature is a realm of expansiveness. Animals are ever alert, and at the same time they remain relaxed. Staying calm and centered is the best

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strategy animals can take to be ready for anything. When we are possessed by fear, our state of being is quite the opposite of theirs.

How Fear Isolates Us

- **We become mistrustful and edgy**, which is caused by adrenaline coursing through our veins.
- **We tense up** and our eyes dart around, trying to find the cause of our fear.
- **We lose perspective.** Our fight-flight response has been triggered and nothing matters other than keeping safe.
- **We become deaf to the subtleties of Nature Speak** from losing our capacity for openness and empathy.

At the same time, I want to state that fear does not have to exile us from the world of Nature. When we embrace our fear, it ceases to be our nemesis and instead becomes our guide. Fear is nothing more than a lack of knowing: we fear the night because we do not know what lurks in the shadows or who is making those strange noises. Once we realize that the ghostly voice is just an Owl calling, and that the footsteps behind us are only Mice shuffling in the leaves, our fear subsides and we're able to open to the experience of the night. Now fear can help protect us by keeping us safe while we venture forth to satisfy our curiosities.

Awareness Three: Nature is Family

When we immerse ourselves in Nature on Nature's terms, we enter into relationship with the animals and plants. This is a true cause-and-effect relationship, as we have become a

functional part of Nature's family. What we do affects our family, and what our family does affects us, just as we experience with our Human family.

To Foster Family Ties

1. **Realize that whatever we think and feel affects the animals.** Personal responsibility for our actions is intrinsic to functional relationship, and this is especially true in Nature.
2. **Become humble and respectful.** When we hold animals in the same regard as our Human family members, they respond in kind. When we recognize that each and every plant and animal, each and every stream and mountain, has a unique and incomparable intelligence, we cross the spangled threshold into Nature's family.

And what an awesome family it is. I can't stand as tall as the eighty foot White Pine I'm sitting under while writing this, I'll never see as well as the Eagle soaring overhead, and my reflexes aren't as acute as those of the perfectly synchronized trio of Fish swimming by in the pond before me.

A big lesson in Nature-relationship responsibility came to me around forty five years ago. I had a fondness for Wolves, and at the same time I harbored negative feelings toward Wolf-Dog and Wolf-Coyote hybrids. I wanted to connect only with Wolves—real Wolves—not mongrels.

Wouldn't you know that I ended up caretaking a Wolf-Coyote pup. I extended myself to her as well as my prejudice allowed. I knew her mixed parentage wasn't her fault, and I wanted her to have a free and fulfilling life. Still, she wouldn't have anything to do with me.

At her first opportunity, she escaped and disappeared. Several friends and I combed the surroundings, yet we couldn't find a trace of her. The shame of it was that I had just made arrangements to partner her up with someone who appreciated her for who she was.

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I felt guilty and responsible, even though I wasn't surprised at her leaving. I could read the mistrust in her eyes, right along with her conflicting yearning for companionship. She was bottle-raised and accustomed to Humans, yet she would rather sulk alone in the back corner of her cage than give me the time of day.

Awareness Four: Comparisons Kill

When first attempting to listen to Nature Speak, many of us struggle because we try to apply our sense of perspective and proportion to other animals. This morning I watched a Grasshopper chew through a blade of Grass. To me, the Grass was no big deal; it was just something to walk over before I sat down in a sunny spot to write. Yet to that Grasshopper, it was both breakfast and a place to perch. This was brought to my attention—and to hers as well—when she took the final bite that severed the perch, causing her to descend quickly with it.

Earlier this morning, I walked by a meadow that lay along the trail I took to gather Blueberries. To me, the meadow was just one of several I passed. However, to the family of Ground Squirrels living there, it was their entire world.

I then passed a pond, where a Painted Turtle was sunning himself on a floating log. On a hot day, I seek shade, while the Turtle (like most Reptiles) finds a place to bake in the sun. Being cold-blooded, he needs the warmth to rev up his metabolism and help digest his food.

My intent here is not to compare for the sake of inherent worth, but rather to show how important it is to keep away from any form of ranking.

How to Avoid Comparisons

- **Take whatever we hear from the perspective of the speaker.** Otherwise we are likely to misinterpret it, if not render it entirely meaningless.

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- **Be careful about discounting what doesn't fit our reality.** The creature speaking is a sentient being just like us, living on the same planet and having the same essential wants and needs. We are all born of the same mother, so we are bound to have some resonance.
- **Avoid making the animals' reality more special than ours.** It's understandable that one would be so tempted, as life in the farther places can appear unique and fascinating, especially when we first discover it.
- **Listen without preference or prejudice,** which is essential to clearly understanding what an animal is saying. If we remember that his life is of no more or less importance than anyone else's—it just is—we'll be able to join him in his world and hear his story without the spin our subjectivity puts on it.

Awareness Five: It's Their World

The expanded state of awareness where we Become part of Nature Speak is our natural state of being.

What It's Like to Be in the Nature Speak World

- **We become conscious of ourselves in real space and time,** rather than in some artificially-based construct.
- **The world shrinks** to what we can directly connect with.
- **At the same time, the world expands** into everything that we are indirectly connected to and that lies beyond our conscious grasp.
- **It's a realm of richness and substance,** of instant gratification and instant consequence.

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- **We feel fulfilled and connected**, whether we are happy or sad, well-fed or hungry, relaxed or anxious.

Some of us believe that animals in the wild dwell in a peaceful state of being, and that we need to enter that state in order to find resonance with them. I know people who strive to tune into the same serene wavelength that they imagine the animals are attuned to. The trouble is that in the natural world, peace doesn't exist—it is merely an ideal-based Human construct. A natural-living animal may be relaxed, as mentioned earlier, but he is never at peace. He can't afford to be, as he needs to be ever alert and ready to spring into action.

“But look at how peaceful my Dog (Cat/Horse/Goat) is,” some people will reply. Yes, many domestic animals dwell in what could be called a state of peace. A Horse needs to be broken in order to remain peaceful enough for another animal to climb upon her back. She has to be trained to remain peaceful around loud noises and sudden movements that would normally alert her to danger. She must learn to not rear up and kick when she feels restrained. I see that the “state of peace” which allows the rapport between our domesticated animal friends and us is more a state of submission, which we share with them because we too are domesticated. We can only experience a state of peace with animals on this side of the wall that separates us from Nature.

On the other side of the wall, natural-living creatures dwell in a state of dynamic tension, where there is neither peace nor war, but simply a community of fully present, fully engaged plants and animals immersed in whatever the moment brings. It is this state that we want to enter.

When instead we go off looking for that wilderness Shangri-La where we believe all creatures live in harmony, Nature will spit us out and tell us to come back when we have

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regained some of the savvy we were born with. As young children, we were naturally attuned to shifting weather, changing seasons, eyes focused on our backs, and shadows that move against the wind. Nature Speak is heard when we tune in to that tension, and even more so when we Become one with it.

When we are immersed in Nature's dynamic, our thoughts and feelings are no longer just ours. Nor are the thoughts and feelings of the animals just theirs. Together we Become synchronously functioning organs in a great organism, which my Native Elders refer to as the *Hoop of Life*. Now much of what we think and feel is what the animals think and feel, and vice versa. It's like the heart pumping blood to the liver, which cleanses the blood on its way to the lungs to pick up oxygen for the other organs, and so on. All of the organs affect each other as they work for the whole. This is the type of relatedness we hear voiced in Nature Speak.

Nature Speak and Domestic Animals

When I was in college, I had a Dalmatian Dog named Shane. As with nearly all Dogs, he was domesticated—he learned my family's way of life, along with the protocols of urban existence.

At the same time, he was a Wolf. He had all the traits of a Wolf, albeit diminished or magnified by selective breeding. Yet the manipulation of his traits didn't seem to matter when his innate Wolf surfaced, as we were then able to communicate in Nature Speak.

Most of the time, though, our intuitive connection was either short-circuited or suppressed by the conflicts and contradictions our domestic overlays, which meant, "I have an urge to do this, yet I'm supposed to do that," or "I see and hear things that I would naturally respond to, yet I am conditioned not to."

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The following comic strip does a great job of illustrating—with a tad of overstatement—Wolf (wild) consciousness and Dog (domestic) consciousness. Where a Wolf is centered in himself and intrinsically connected with Nature’s rhythm, a Dog’s centeredness and attunement is reflective of his master’s.



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We have to be careful about drawing the same parallel between hunter-gatherer and urbanized Humans as between Wolves and Dogs. Unlike Dogs, all Humans are still genetically hunter-gatherers. No one has bred us to be more suited to domestic life than wild life, and our species has not yet lived domestically long enough for natural selection to do the job. Stone Age and modern Humans, then, are genetically and functionally the same.

This means that communicating in Nature Speak will come more naturally between Humans and wild animals than between Humans and domestic animals.

What to Expect from Nature Speak

Something we need to get used to right away with Nature Speak is that animals walk their talk—they say what they mean and they do what they say. There is no need to read between the lines or wonder whether they are telling the truth. Nature is an arena of instant action and reaction, where first impressions mean everything. There is no time to mull something over and relate it to the past, or to look for hidden meaning. An animal who dwells in the past quickly becomes a part of another animal's future.

It has to be that way, as those who are unable to get it right then and there cannot be allowed to pass the trait on to their offspring. Wild animals live so close to the means and ends of their existence that every thought, communication, and action counts. Imagine how difficult their lives would be if they were not able to trust in what they saw or heard.

The same is true for us regarding Nature Speak. So that we may be on the same communication wavelength as the animals and have the same sense of trust and immediacy, we'll learn the following, in the order given.

To Communicate in Nature Speak, We Must

- 1. Understand instantly what is being said.**
- 2. Take it at face value.**
- 3. Act accordingly.**

I wouldn't blame anyone for being excited about talking with animals and wanting to run out in the woods right now and try it out—he'd hardly be the first. I need to give warning, though, that most of us will end up standing out there asking, "Where's the action—where are all the voices I'm supposed to be hearing?" It'll seem as though the animals are hiding from us, and we won't have the foggiest as to where to look for them. If we did happen to find one or two, they'd probably flee anyway.

It might be hard to believe right now, but once we're again a fully functional Nature Speaker (I say "again" because we were as young children), we will experience the opposite problem: we'll be inundated with voices from all directions telling us where the animals are and what they're up to. Rather than striving to hear one voice, we'll be struggling to isolate just one voice from the chorus.

What we learn about nonverbal communication in the Natural Realm applies to the Human world as well. We'll be able to hear what people are thinking and feeling, even though they're not outwardly expressing it. We will learn about matters that are not intended for us, which could include things we don't want to know about.

However, it will be different than in the past, when we overheard gossip or saw something in writing that wasn't intended for our eyes. An aspect of Nature Speak is being accepting of whatever comes. The better we get at Nature Speak, the more we will find ourselves

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able to empathize with another person without taking on their thoughts and feelings. We'll find it easier to remain respectful of another's point of view and not get defensive.

As our skill with Nature Speak progresses, our Human relationships will likely become more functional and fulfilling than in the past. Rather than trying to maneuver through relationships riddled with control, rescuing, or enabling issues, we'll be able to draw upon the deep understanding and empathy that is intrinsic to Nature Speak.

Nature's way is to learn by doing, and right away in the next step we are going to begin communicating in Nature Speak. Anthropologists tell us that a culture is embedded in its language, and the same is true of the Nature's culture. Through the gateway of Nature Speak, we are going to reunite with our long-lost animal kin in a way that up until now most of us could only imagine.
