

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

---

Ecological and Environmental Anthropology  
(University of Georgia)

Wildlife Damage Management, Internet Center  
for

2006

## Review of *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children From Nature Deficit Disorder* by Richard Louv

Colleen Marie O'Brien

Department of Anthropology at the University of Georgia

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/icwdmeea>



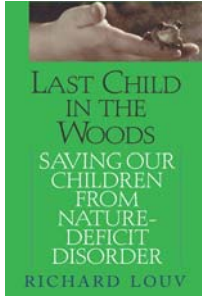
Part of the [Environmental Sciences Commons](#)

---

O'Brien, Colleen Marie, "Review of *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children From Nature Deficit Disorder* by Richard Louv" (2006). *Ecological and Environmental Anthropology (University of Georgia)*. 23. <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/icwdmeea/23>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Wildlife Damage Management, Internet Center for at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Ecological and Environmental Anthropology (University of Georgia) by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

---

**Reviews**
**Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children From Nature Deficit Disorder**


Richard Louv  
 Algonquin Books  
 ISBN: 1565123913  
 Year: 2005

Like many other children growing up in the suburban United States during the 1970s, my childhood memories include swinging from tree limbs, tromping through the woods, and constructing tree forts in the far stretches of our neighborhood. But what happens when an entire generation of children grows up without such memories? Richard Louv, a *New York Times* journalist and founder of Connect for Kids, an internet-based child advocacy organization, explores this question in *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children From Nature Deficit Disorder*. According to Louv, children today are more adept at naming cartoon characters than native species and overwhelmingly prefer indoor to outdoor play. Louv describes the physical, emotional, and cognitive effects of children's disconnect from the natural world as "nature deficit disorder". Although this is neither a medical term nor condition, Louv supports his theory with narratives drawn from his own childhood in Nebraska and from some of today's foremost child development researchers and environmental writers. Louv also reaches beyond anecdotal evidence by providing recent research to support his claims.

Our societal view of nature has moved from utilitarian to romantic and now to a hyperintellectualized perception of plants and animals based in science rather than myth or religion. Louv describes this as the "third frontier," characterized by a separation from our food origins and a replacement of wildness with synthetic nature in suburban developments. Fear of litigation, strangers, traffic, and wilderness have all led to a generalized social anxiety, exacerbating the absence of unstructured activities in children's lives. According to Louv, children's disconnect from nature is evident in the spiking increase in childhood obesity, attention deficit disorder, and depression. Using Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences, Louv presents numerous studies contending that nature play stimulates creativity, wisdom, and wonder. Even failures that occur during the process of constructing a tree fort teach children a deeper understanding of "how things work". While Louv falls short of exploring cultural or urban / rural differences in nature contact, he nonetheless outlines a convincing argument for increasing children's unstructured learning and play environments. The last section of the book, devoted to the "fourth frontier," is a bit slow, yet he succeeds in leaving the reader with a relatively optimistic view of the opportunities for change which include urban wildland revitalization and "greening" school areas.

Louv is not the first person to write about the effect of nature exposure on the human psyche. *Last Child in the Woods* builds on literature dating back to Henry David Thoreau and Aldo Leopold. Indeed, the founding fathers of our protected lands, Theodore Roosevelt and John Muir recognized the need to preserve wilderness for future generations. Louv's work also complements that of more contemporary nature writers, such as David Orr, Robert Michael Pyle, and Gary Nabhan, who have written about children's extinction of experience in the natural world. Louv's unique contribution is his synthesis of our changing cultural ideologies with this generation's growing disconnect from nature. *Last Child in the Woods* represents an intersection between environmental education, eco-psychology, child development, and American culture studies that may promote a new dialogue between researchers and practitioners. Louv successfully weaves processes of American culture change together with some of the foremost problems facing today's children, resulting in a poignant and honest look at the future of human-environment relationships in the next century.

---

Review by Colleen Marie O'Brien, Department of Anthropology at the University of Georgia.