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The Natural History Unit's documentary, *The Animal Communicator*, examines the inspirational work of ANNA BREYTENBACH. Environmental journalist Swati Thiyagarajan presents the film, which explores interspecies communication. Breytenbach enlightened JANE MAYNE on the value of bridging the gap.

HOW did a course in tracking facilitate dialogue with animals?

Whilst living in the US I decided to learn the art of tracking. However, having had a very ordinary suburban upbringing, I had no idea what North American species' footprints I was looking at even when they were sharp and clear in dried mud. Around 8am one morning of particular puzzlement, the instructor told me to close my eyes and hold my hand over the track. Immediately I experienced a brief flash of a mental image of a jackal-like face with less pointy ears than a fox and fur more grey than brown peering out from a hollowed-out sand bank. My eyes flew open in my shock. When I described what I'd seen in my mind's eye, the instructor said: "Yes, well done – that is a coyote's track." Moreover, when our group followed the trail, at 10am we came to exactly the place I had seen mentally. In this hollow were the same coyote's footprints, which were about two hours old according to the experienced trackers. This meant that I had been getting "real time information" directly from the coyote. I was amazed and perturbed, fancying that I had fallen prey to some hallucinatory disease. I did some research and discovered the field of interspecies telepathic communication. It intrigued me and called me to study further, which I did with the Assisi International Animal Institute. After a couple of years of using my vacation days to deepen this practice, I gave my corporate job the boot and stepped into this work full-time.

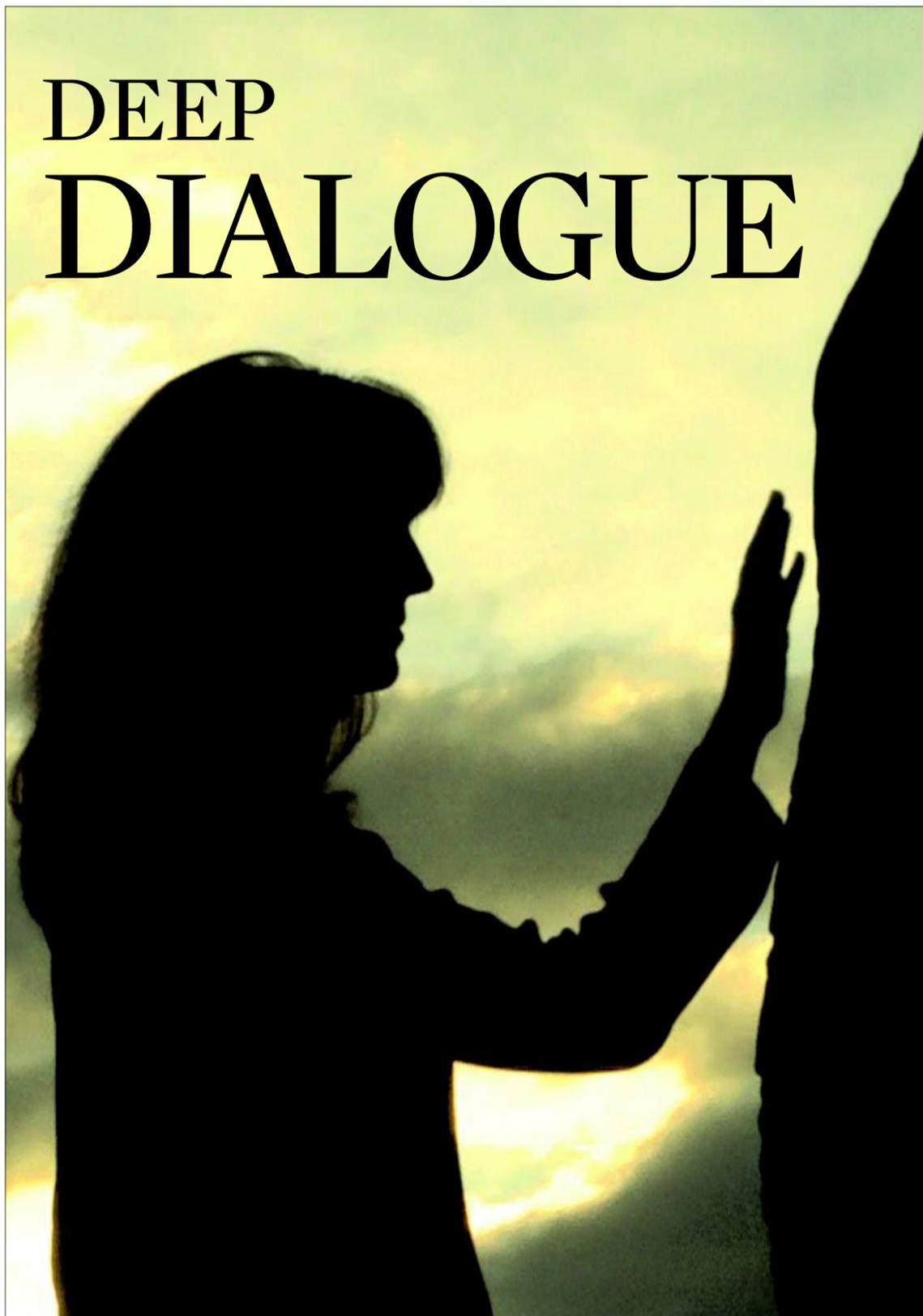
How did indigenous communities use their intuitive skills?

I've had the pleasure of tracking with Kalahari San men. When they are following an animal's trail their body begins to move like the animal's did when it passed that point. The man's body is in direct empathy with the animal and through the energetic connection, the man feels on his body exactly what the animal is feeling. This is intuitive communication embodied – quite literally.

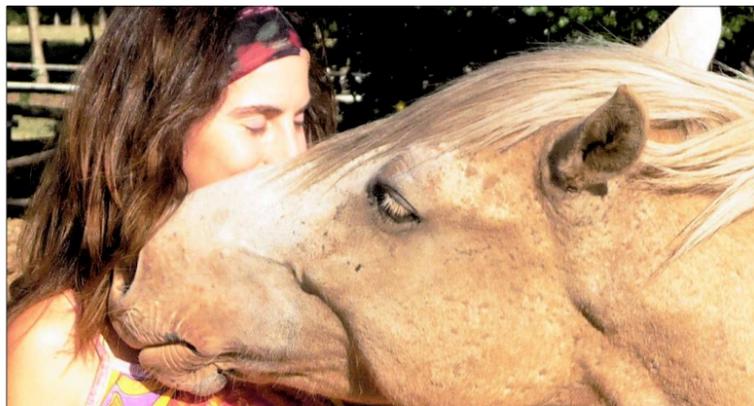
Native American trackers would engage in a group communication with the collective of a certain species before starting a hunt. Whether one calls it prayer or telepathic talking, it's the same thing. They would silently, in their minds, address the elk nation and humbly explain their request for meat for their human family. They'd ask that a member of the elk herd please show itself through its footprints the next day. When the new day dawned, the trackers would use their intuition to be guided across the landscape like a form of directional bonding – and they'd find elk tracks.

How can people learn to connect?

Close your eyes and relax your body from head to toe. Focus on your natural breathing rhythm. In your mind, set a silent intention for clarity in receiving information. Imagine opening your heart. Visualise connecting via a bridge or channel with the animal you have in mind and send an energetic greeting. Continue with the



ELECTROMAGNETISM: Exploring Consciousness screens *The Animal Communicator* at Labia on Orange.



BEING PRESENT: Imagine opening your heart.

communication; usually starting with one general question. Sit back and be still and calm, noticing what subtle impressions come your way. **Can you dialogue with most species?**

It's possible to communicate with all of life this way: all animal species from jellyfish to elephants; all plants from fungus to trees. Different species have different perspectives and priorities. But we humans receive messages from all life in the same inner ways.

What do animals think about?

Animals don't sit around and

ponder life – they are too busy being present and in the moment. Of course they do remember the past and may have concerns and concepts about the future. What animals think about humans varies. Most wild animals want nothing at all to do with us – and who can blame them? A lot of animals have endless compassion for us humans and how disconnected we've become. Sometimes, they think we're just plain silly for placing value on the things we do. Try explaining to a couch-scratching cat that you're upset at

having to spend a few thousand rand on new furniture! They really don't care about that. **What's the oddest information that's been relayed to you?**

One of the funniest domestic animal cases was being called in to ask a young cat to retract his claws when playing roughly, as he was hurting his human playmates. To my immense surprise, his retort was: "Why should I? You humans don't retract your claws!" I realised that from his feline perspective, human fingernails were the equivalent of claws, and he was

miffed that people weren't pulling them back into their fingers when touching him. When I explained our anatomical limitations, his mood shifted to one of pity for us mere mortals.

Compassion – yours is a journey of the mind and of the heart?

While it may seem that telepathic communication is all about using the mind, it's actually a matter of the heart. It only works in the spirit and practice of unconditional love. Only with reverence and openness towards the animal can two-way mutual seeing and hearing thrive.

Considering land, water and food appropriation, humans are a greedy, self-righteous species. Animals are the first to be sidelined. You must come across incredible levels of despair?

As a professional empath, I'm completely open to and, in fact, need to fully know the whole range of feelings of the one/s I'm communicating with – in the interests of getting the whole truth. There's often grief, hopelessness and other difficult emotions. The first thing is to distinguish between what is the animal's genuine feeling versus my own emotional response. The hardest part is being asked by an animal to change their dire situation and knowing that I cannot do anything practical. Nonetheless, they seem to take heart from just having someone witness them and care. They feel seen and heard, which often improves their emotional experience. Some days, it's difficult to cope with the enormity of the destruction and grief. What I do in those situations is internally engender a feeling of peace and calm and holding – without physically touching the animal, as that would distress them even more. If and when I am genuinely in a state of calm, I then imagine that I'm projecting that frequency to the animals – and it usually calms them down. After a communication with traumatised animals, I have to take some time to rebalance internally. Self-care is a very important aspect of this work, and one I'm still challenged by. **How can people get involved to change perceptions about animals?**

Check out Greenpeace. Also there's a global march for lions on March 15. Most of all, get involved at home. Chat to your pets (silently, mentally) and listen inwardly for their answers. Better yet, connect with a creepy-crawly species you may be afraid of like a spider or cockroach. Imagine projecting questions like: "What are your strengths", or "What do you need?" and then go still to perceive possible answers. Empathy and compassion begin at home.

What's the key to an epiphany for humans to situate themselves in the shared medium they find themselves?

People have to go quiet and still to hear again. The noise of our own incessant minds keeps us deaf to our relations. Sitting quietly in a garden for even 15 minutes without an agenda as a daily practice, will reconnect anybody. Just being present in even a tiny bit of nature will allow us to experience relationship with our environment again.

Exploring Consciousness premieres the film on Sunday with a Q&A with Breytenbach and the filmmakers at Labia on Orange at 6.15pm. Tickets are R60. Call 021 424 5927. Screenings continue from February 21 to 27. For workshops, see www.animalspirit.org

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