

I turn bugs into

BLING



A ladybird pendant

Nicola's unique jewellery is inspired by nature **Nicola Hebson, 36**

Trudging through the bush, I spied under plants and behind trees for hidden treasure.

At the bottom of the forest floor, I found just what I was looking for – tiny wild mushrooms, ripe for the taking.

That'll make the perfect pendant, I smiled, placing them in my basket.

Back home, I got to work, drying out the fungi, before using a fine brush to paint it red with delicate white spots to help bring it back to life.

While some women prefer diamonds – I like to make my jewellery out of things I find in nature – mushrooms, plants, even insects and bones from deceased animals.

Ever since I was a little girl I've always felt like the odd one out – more interested in the worms and beetles in my back garden

than in playing with make-up or Barbies.

At primary school I was the self-styled leader of the 'ladybird army' – a small group of boys and girls who'd collect bugs together.

Sometimes I'd bring earthworms into my lounge room in a cup, because I was worried they'd get cold outside.

By age 12 I was embracing being the odd one out, dyeing my hair black and getting into trouble for being late or disruptive in class.

But I didn't mind the detentions, because they were led by the art teacher and I loved art.

Soon I was trying to paint and draw the dead insects and rodents I found.

I was fascinated with the circle of life – but no living being was ever harmed by my art. I'd hunt for dead insects under rocks and stones,

and pick up dead birds and mice while out on walks.

I wanted to celebrate the beauty of death and decay as part of nature.

While other girls screamed and squealed

during biology lessons, I was fascinated by dissection. One day I even found a dead fish in my grandad Fred's pond and took it into school as a present for my biology teacher!

After school, I studied for a degree in fine art, then spent some time travelling in India, before

settling in the UK aged 22.

Buying my first resin kit to experiment with making jewellery, I set a few dead insects I'd found into pendants and earrings.

Then I headed to my local music festival and walked through the crowds, selling my handmade bug bling to the rockers

and goths.

'These are dead good!' my new customers smiled.

I'd found the name for my new venture!

Dead good by name, and dead good by nature.

By 12 I was embracing being the odd one out



With a bird skull I found



Me in my garden

At first it was hard to make ends meet as an artist. I rented a studio and slept there on a sofa.

But then I got a job working in an antiques shop, which taught me so much about sales and customer service. And the owner even gave me a shelf to display my jewellery so I could grow my own customer base.

In 2015 I officially launched my company, Dead Good Jewellery with a website, and became a regular at my local artisan markets and festivals.

I made pendants featuring ladybirds and spiders, and earrings with tiny taxidermied bones of rodents and birds all found dead during my walks, cycles and drives.

I'd often collect dead insects from friends' garages and sheds, and always kept my eyes peeled for roadkill.

Soon business was booming – customers loved my unusual art.

Moving into a share house, I warned my housemates not to come into my home studio when the door was closed – unless they wanted a gruesome surprise!

I also got a vegie patch in a community garden



Me at a market stall

nearby, where I process the carcasses I find by burying them for a few months to let nature take its course.

And I have a freezer where I keep a lot of my finds before I'm ready to use them.

Over the years my friends and supporters have made contributions to my art too.

Local farmers will call me when livestock has died, and customers offer donations of human teeth, either from their kids, or ones removed during dental work, in exchange for a pendant or pair of earrings.

One time a zoo offered to post me a collection of dead insects, and I got

such a shock when I opened the parcel and a pile of tarantula spider skins fell out!

My belief is that death is part of life and my

jewellery is like a wearable memento.

I've always had a love for the unloved – spiders, rats,

worms and dead things – possibly because at times I've felt unloved and misunderstood myself.

I've always loved worms and spiders

A stunning spider necklace



A wasp in a pendant

But now, thanks to my Dead Good Jewellery business, I've found my tribe and a community of friends and customers who really value what I do.

I'm so proud of what I've achieved by being authentically myself and pursuing my unique interest. ●

As told to Jade Beecroft
For more info visit deadgoodjewellery.com