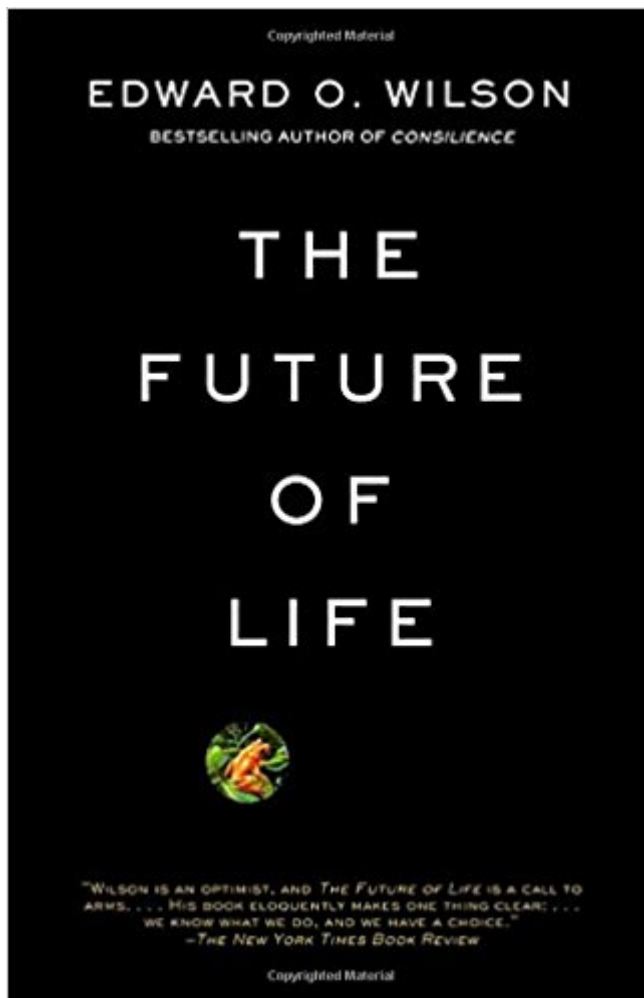


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The Future Of Life



Synopsis

One of the world's most important scientists, Edward O. Wilson is also an abundantly talented writer who has twice won the Pulitzer Prize. In this, his most personal and timely book to date, he assesses the precarious state of our environment, examining the mass extinctions occurring in our time and the natural treasures we are about to lose forever. Yet, rather than eschewing doomsday prophecies, he spells out a specific plan to save our world while there is still time. His vision is a hopeful one, as economically sound as it is environmentally necessary. Eloquent, practical and wise, this book should be read and studied by anyone concerned with the fate of the natural world.

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Customer Reviews

The eminent Harvard naturalist and Pulitzer Prize winner Edward Wilson marshals all the prodigious powers of his intellect and imagination in this impassioned call to ensure the future of life. Opening with an imagined conversation with Henry David Thoreau at Walden Pond, he writes that he has come "to explain to you, and in reality to others and not least to myself, what has happened to the world we both have loved." Based on a love affair with the natural world that spans 70 years, Wilson combines lyrical descriptions with dire warnings and remarkable stories of flora and fauna on the edge of extinction with hard economics. How many species are we really losing? Is environmentalism truly contrary to economic development? And how can we save the planet? Wilson has penned an eloquent plea for the need for a global land ethic and offers the strategies necessary to ensure life on earth based on foresight, moral courage, and the best tools that science

and technology can provide. -- Lesley Reed --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Legendary Harvard biologist Wilson (On Human Nature; The Ants; etc.) founded sociobiology, the controversial branch of evolutionary biology, and won the Pulitzer Prize twice. This volume, his manifesto to the public at large, is a meditation on the splendor of our biosphere and the dangers we pose to it. In graceful, expressive and vigorous prose, Wilson argues that the challenge of the new century will be "to raise the poor to a decent standard of living worldwide while preserving as much of the rest of life as possible." For as America consumes and the Third World tries to keep up, we lose biological diversity at an alarming rate. But the "trajectory" of species loss depends on human choice. If current levels of consumption continue, half the planet's remaining species will be gone by mid-century. Wilson argues that the "great dilemma of environmental reasoning" stems from the conflict between environmentalism and economics, between long-term and short-term values. Conservation, he writes, is necessary for our long-term health and prosperity. Loss of biodiversity translates into economic losses to agriculture, medicine and the biotech industries. But the "bottleneck" of overpopulation and overconsumption can be safely navigated: adequate resources exist, and in the end, success or failure depends upon an ethical decision. Global conservation will succeed or fail depending on the cooperation between government, science and the private sector, and on the interplay of biology, economics and diplomacy. "A civilization able to envision God and to embark on the colonization of space," Wilson concludes, "will surely find the way to save the integrity of this planet and the magnificent life it harbors." Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Wilson's greatest concern is for biodiversity, preventing the extinction of species. A prerequisite for preserving diversity of species is preserving habitats. He advocates both. A whole range of strategies for preserving endangered species, including laws, captive breeding programs, and even cryogenic preservation of the genetic material of creatures that are doomed to extinction. Ecosystems are different game. The best way to preserve them is via laws and by outright purchase. He is a big fan of the Nature Conservancy, which takes the very direct approach of buying up the pristine wildernesses of the world. He admits, that doesn't go into much detail about what to do about it, that setting up a nature reserve side by side with villages full of hungry people in underdeveloped countries is not really going to work. The people will invade your preserve and take bush meat despite your best efforts to stop them. Nevertheless, he is on the side of the angels, and

the organizations to which he gives copious credit in the book are indeed deserving. He tiptoes around the biggest issue, that of consumption in the rich countries. Everything we do to support our lifestyles damages the environment. While he is pretty good about talking about the environmental impact of our preference for meat over grains, he does not go into the cost of our proclivity for building large homes located a long way from anywhere. It results in cutting forests for timber, destroying farmland for home sites and roads, and asphaltting things over to the point where the ground cannot breathe. Likewise, our gargantuan appetite for stuff demands huge mines to get raw materials and huge consumption of carbon and fouling of the waters to manufacture and distribute everything. Live simply, that the planet may simply live! The solution that Wilson does embrace is fewer children. In the decade since he wrote the book the Western world has tilted way below replacement level fertility, 2.1 children per woman. He doesn't even talk about which people have children. It is not the people who are likely to read his book. University educated women, whom one hopes are the smartest and society, are the least likely to have large families. We are falling to zero population growth the wrong way, with the people who are smart enough to understand why it is important being the ones who are deciding not to have kids. At a minimum, the issue is more complex than he lets on. Here's what I like best about the book. Biodiversity is a bit of a hard sell. As Wilson himself notes, whether or not the ivory billed woodpecker is extinct makes no difference whatsoever in the life of anybody living. The preservation of species is largely a moral issue. He would like to say that we have received an endowment from mother nature herself, and certainly from our forebears, and we have an obligation to pass it on as close to intact as we can. Why? So our grandchildren can enjoy walking through a Costa Rican rain forest and marveling at the diversity of colorful frogs and gorgeous orchids just as we can. So they can wake up some spring morning and hear the frogs croaking in a pond near their house. Beyond that, Wilson does as good a job as I have seen in providing a financial justification for preserving biodiversity. Biodiversity implies that there are a number of species in a habitat, which means that if one of them gets in trouble there are others to fill in the gaps. My example would be the way that several species of oaks have filled in the niche formerly filled by chestnuts in eastern US forests. The chestnuts are gone, a tragedy, but we still have climax forest up and down the East Coast. In fact, we have more and more of it as the forest reclaims marginal farmland that has been abandoned. He also explains at length the value of biodiversity, or at least the availability of a vast number of species, for medical research and as a source for genetic engineering. Credit, too, for a realistic, balanced approach to GMOs. Wilson starts out with a wonderfully lyrical open letter to Henry Thoreau, but the style gets rather pedestrian once he gets into the meat of his argument. The book should get five stars because he is so clearly on

the side of the angels. However, I think this is less than his best work. It is a bit tedious. So for the writing, not the ideas, I give it only four. It is not up to the almost impossibly high standard he set for himself with "Consilience."

This is a great book. Very informative and well written. Wilson stresses that biodiversity is the strength of this ever tenuous web of life we find ourselves in the midst of and that it is our job, as large brained bipedal apes with the capability to drastically alter this fragile web, to assume a position of stewardship before we cause an irreparable blow to this foundation we are intimately a part of.

This book can (and should) be read by anyone even slightly interested in improving our world to ensure its future. People with an interest in science or no background at all can take in its message; that with how the earth is going now we will soon reach a point when it will be destroyed. It is beautifully written and brings up so many interesting topics. This book makes you stop to wonder about how much importance we put on humanity without thinking about EVERYTHING ELSE that lives with us.

Edward O. Wilson has produced a map of recovery from the devastation we have wrought on Earth and its life-support systems in this monumental book. As he so expertly points out, humanity is at the "bottleneck" stage of existence right now: that worrisome convergence point where all of our past environmental mistakes have caught up with us and met our current unsustainable resource use that huge population and unrealistic life style demands create. Add to that, Earth's life-cycle mechanics being thrown out of whack by global warming and dwindling green cover resources that help regulate it, water scarcity, pollution, and we have a dire pan of worms on our hands. Wilson maintains, however, that our vast accumulated reservoir of technology and abundant earth resource-cycle knowledge can help us through the bottleneck and on to a more rational, thoughtful, and harmonious future with Earth's regulation processes influencing all of our ethical and moral guidelines in our activities on Earth. On the front cover is a beautiful art rendering of what, at first appears to be an expertly produced flower arrangement. But taking a closer look at it reveals a collage of plants and animals that are extinct or on the verge of extinction and then on pages viii to x is a diagram and list of the cover species and listed by common and taxonomic names. Next, is the Prologue which is a letter to Henry David Thoreau. It is actually a dialogue of Wilson having a posthumous conversation with Thoreau at Walden's Pond where in part, he explains to H.D.T what

state of environmental affairs we are now in- very moving! Wilson's writing style is very gentle, sometimes poetic, and an easy flowing discourse packed with compelling punch lines for thoughtful consideration of the subject matter at hand: hopeful survival of all Earth's flora/fauna. And he posits this can be accomplished in dialogue such as: "In order to pass through the bottleneck, a global land ethic is urgently needed." and, "Surely the rest of life matters. Surely our stewardship is our only hope. We will be wise to listen to the heart, then act with rational intention and all the tools we can gather and bring to bear." And, "The great dilemma of environmental reasoning stems from this conflict between short-term and long-term values." For those that are familiar with the works of Thomas Berry- "The Dream of the Earth" and "The Great Work", Chet Raymo- "The Path", et al., Hawkin and Lovins- "Natural Capitalism" and many more such fine thinkers and doers, will no doubt be impressed with the ground that Wilson covers with his very realistic, but guarded pronouncement that we humans will get through the bottleneck if we immediately start listening to the voices of reason and start embracing what life-style changes we need in order enhance our survival possibilities. To be sure, it is a crap shoot in our survival odds, but Wilson helps bump-up those odds with his guarded enthusiasm based on a life-time of biology and environmental study. There is an abundance of resources and organizations mentioned all through this great work. Thank you, Prof. E. O. Wilson!

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