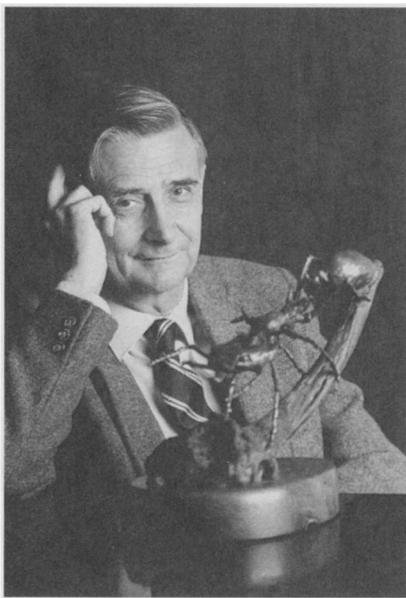




SOCIETY ACTIONS

Awards

EMINENT ECOLOGIST AWARD



Edward Osborne Wilson

The Eminent Ecologist Award is presented annually to a member of the Ecological Society of America in recognition of an outstanding body of ecological work or of sustained contributions of extraordinary merit. These criteria sound like an understatement when used to describe the ecological contributions of the 1994 awardee, Edward Osborne Wilson, Pellegrino University Professor at Harvard University. Professor Wilson is a major leader in the biological sciences of the 20th century. His research spans the fields of ecology, evolutionary biology, the biology of social insects, the classification of ants, sociobiology, biogeography,

and ethical philosophy. He has received many previous awards in the United States, Europe, and Japan, including the National Medal of Science (1977), the Tyler Prize for Environmental Achievement (1984), and the Distinguished Service Award from the American Institute of Biological Sciences (1976), and he is a member of the National Academy of Sciences.

After receiving an M.S. degree from the University of Alabama in 1950 and a Ph.D. from Harvard University in 1955, Wilson joined the Biology Department at Harvard. His paper on character displacement with his advisor, William Brown, which appeared in *Systematic Zoology* the next year (5:49-64), became a citation classic, as did his book entitled *The Theory of Island Biogeography*, published in 1967 with Robert MacArthur. In 1971 Wilson shared the ESA's Mercer Award with his doctoral student, Daniel Simberloff, for three papers on the experimental zoogeography of islands, all of which appeared in 1969 in one issue of *Ecology* (50:267-277; 278-296; 296-314). In 1971, in addition to the book *The Insect Societies*, his book with William H. Bossert entitled *A Primer of Population Biology* appeared. These publications, all more than 20 years ago, showed that Wilson had the intellectual breadth to span detailed natural history observations about daily ecological processes and broad theoretical constructs, often providing the simple theory that ecologists sought. It doesn't really matter whether species turnover rates

in nature reserves are in dynamic equilibria. The theory of island biogeography provided our generation of ecologists with new ways to think about population dynamics. Thus even by the early 1970s, before conservation biology and sociobiology became the major paradigms they are today, Wilson's ecological contributions were outstanding.

A major highlight of the 1970s for whole-organism biologists was the publication in 1975 of *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis*. It put behavioral ecology into the context of population genetics and stirred up a furor among social scientists and psychologists, who challenged some of its implications about the genetic basis of human behavior. In this case Wilson's drive to put observations about the behavior of organisms into a theoretical context got him into hot water in some quarters. In his Pulitzer Prize-winning book *On Human Nature*, he continued to explore the nature of man from an evolutionary point of view.

Since 1980, Wilson's work has moved simultaneously on three fronts. For the elaborate monograph entitled *The Ants*, published with Bert Holldobler in 1991, he received a second Pulitzer Prize. His continuing interest in man's self-image as a species has led to further book-length publications in ethical philosophy such as *Biophilia* (in 1984), and most recently (1993) a compilation of essays called *The Biophilia Hypothesis*, coedited with Stephen Kellert. The third front, and the most ecological one, is the area of conser-

vation biology. Wilson was the editor of the 1988 book *Biodiversity* and sole author of the *Diversity of Life*, highly influential works that summarize the status of our knowledge about the variety of species on earth. Willing to delve into both politics and management, Wilson serves on the Boards of Directors of both the World Wildlife Fund and The Nature Conservancy. He has been a major

spokesperson for the field of Ecology on the subject of how little we actually know about the biodiversity of the planet and how important it is. There are by no means all of Professor Wilson's accomplishments, just the highlights of an ongoing career dedicated to the fullness of nature and its implications for mankind. It is with the greatest pleasure that the Ecological Society of American

awards its 1994 Eminent Ecologist Award to Edward Osborne Wilson.

**Eminent Ecologist
Subcommittee:**

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