

Wilson and Biophilia



Edward O. Wilson 2009

Edward Osborne Wilson was an American biologist, researcher (sociobiology, biodiversity, island biogeography), theorist (consilience, biophilia), naturalist (conservationist) and author.

Wilson's book, "Biophilia," published in 1984, proposed the word "biophilia," meaning love of life, as an umbrella term to describe what he sees as a deep and natural affinity between the human mind and the natural world. He saw it, for example, in the dominance of plant and animal forms throughout our arts and crafts, in the fact that human beings in both the tropical jungle and the urban jungle dream of snakes at night, and in the observation that, if at all possible, people will choose to live close to a green space or a body of water. He did not offer biophilia as a coherent scientific theory. His point was rather that we are not programmed — neither by evolution nor by culture — to live without the natural world. It is what made us and shaped us.

"Biophilia" is an innate affinity of life or living systems, a term first used by Erich Fromm in the early 20th century to describe a psychological orientation of being attracted to all that is alive and vital. Wilson uses the term in a related sense when he suggests that biophilia describes "the connections that human beings subconsciously seek with the rest of life." He proposed the possibility that the deep affiliations humans have with other life forms and nature as a whole are rooted in our biology. Already, studies from around the globe have shown that outdoor and/or nature-connected program participants show positive gains in areas including self-image, coping skills, cognitive and intellectual performance, physical health, personal values, and interpersonal and social interactions.

Because of our technological advancements, spending more time inside buildings and cars disconnects us from the natural environment. Biophilic activities may help to address people's innate urges to reconnect with nature. There are also concerns that a lack of connection with the rest of nature outside of us, breeding a stronger disregard for other plants, animals and less appealing wild areas could lead to further ecosystem degradation and species loss. Therefore, reestablishing a connection with nature has become more important in the field of conservation.