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### **Full Statement on the Death of Edward O. Wilson by the E.O. Wilson Biodiversity Foundation**

The E.O. Wilson Biodiversity Foundation mourns the passing of preeminent scientist, naturalist, author, teacher, and our inspiration, E.O. Wilson, Ph.D. One of the most distinguished and recognized American scientists in modern history, Dr. Wilson devoted his life to studying the natural world and inspiring others to care for it as he did.

“E.O. Wilson’s holy grail was the sheer delight of the pursuit of knowledge. A relentless synthesizer of ideas, his courageous scientific focus and poetic voice transformed our way of understanding ourselves and our planet. His greatest hope was that students everywhere share his passion for discovery as the ultimate scientific foundation for future stewardship of our planet. His gift was a deep belief in people and our shared human resolve to save the natural world,” said Paula J. Ehrlich, CEO & President of the E.O. Wilson Biodiversity Foundation, and co-founder of the Half-Earth Project.

E.O. Wilson was called “Darwin’s natural heir,” and was known affectionately as “the ant man” for his pioneering work as an entomologist. Dr. Wilson was Honorary Curator in Entomology and University Research Professor Emeritus at Harvard University, Chairman of the E.O. Wilson Biodiversity Foundation Board of Advisors, and Chairman of the Half-Earth Council. He is widely recognized as one of the foremost naturalists in both science and literature, as well as a synthesizer in works stretching from pure biology across to the social sciences and humanities. Dr. Wilson was the author of over 30 books and forewords, over 430 scientific papers, and recipient of over a hundred awards including the U.S. National Medal of Science, the Crafoord Prize and the International Prize of Biology of Japan; and in letters, two Pulitzer Prizes in non-fiction, the Nonino and Serono Prizes of Italy and COSMOS Prize of Japan.

In his long career, Dr. Wilson transformed his field of research—the behavior of ants—and applied his scientific perspective and experience to illuminate the human circumstance, including human origins, human nature and human interactions. Wilson has also been a pioneer in spearheading efforts to preserve and protect the biodiversity of earth.

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Dr. Wilson is acknowledged as the creator of two scientific disciplines (island biogeography and sociobiology), three unifying concepts for science and the humanities jointly (biophilia, biodiversity studies, and consilience) and two major advances in global biodiversity conservation (the Encyclopedia of Life and Half-Earth).

Born June 10, 1929 in Birmingham, Alabama, “Ed” grew up in “America’s Amazon”, the Mobile-Tensaw delta, as well as Washington, D.C. At a young age, he cultivated his love for nature among the marshes and bottomland forests of Alabama and in Washington D.C.’s Rock Creek Park. Educated at University of Alabama and later Harvard University, he received his Ph.D. in entomology in 1955 and participated in expeditions to Cuba, Mexico, the South Pacific, Australia, Fiji, Sri Lanka and later, Mozambique. In the 1960s he partnered with mathematician and ecologist Robert MacArthur in developing the theory of species equilibrium which led to Wilson and MacArthur's book *The Theory of Island Biogeography*, now a standard ecology text and the basis for the scientific principle of “half-earth”. He won his first Pulitzer Prize in 1978 for *On Human Nature*, which dealt with the role of biology in the evolution of human culture, and a second in general nonfiction in 1990 for *The Ants*, co-written with Bert Hölldobler. He officially retired in 1996.

After co-founding the Society of Conservation Biology, serving on the boards of The Nature Conservancy, Conservation International, and American Museum of Natural History, Dr. Wilson co-founded the E.O. Wilson Biodiversity Foundation in 2005. In 2016, Dr. Wilson published *Half-Earth, Our Planet’s Fight for Life*, and co-founded the Half-Earth Project with Paula J. Ehrlich, CEO & President, E.O. Wilson Biodiversity Foundation. The Foundation has pursued a goal of educating the next generation about biological diversity, and putting “Half-Earth”, conserving half the land and seas for biodiversity, into practice. The Half-Earth Project aims to raise the world’s level of ambition and action required to reverse the current extinction threat through the support of deep science to discover, identify, and map the world’s species.

In 2009, the E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center, a 54,000 acre Florida preserve founded by M.C. Davis, opened with the mission of environmental education. In 2014, in partnership with Greg Carr, a co-founder of Dr. Wilson’s eponymous foundation, the E.O. Wilson Biodiversity Laboratory at Gorongosa National Park opened to document Mozambique’s vast ecological richness. The laboratory is under the direction of Piotr Naskręcki, Ph.D., and Half-Earth Chair, whom Wilson has called “the best naturalist in the world.”

Dr. Wilson’s last lecture, “Ecosystems & the Harmony of Nature,” was presented in conversation with Sir David Attenborough and Sir Tim Smit at Half-Earth Day® 2021 in

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October. Wilson's authorized biography, *SCIENTIST, E.O. Wilson: A Life in Nature* by Richard Rhodes, was published in November.

"It would be easy to understate Ed's scientific achievements, but hard to overstate his impact which extends to every facet of society. He was a true visionary with a unique ability to inspire and galvanize. He articulated, perhaps better than anyone, what it means to be human. His infectious curiosity and creativity have shaped the lives of so many, myself included, and I feel lucky to have called him a friend," said David J. Prend, Chairman of the Board, E.O. Wilson Biodiversity Foundation.

Paul Simon, friend and member of the E.O. Wilson Biodiversity Foundation board shared, "It is a rare combination of good when an intellectual giant like Ed Wilson can leave a legacy of enormous scientific contributions with a memory trail of a kind, humble, generous man who had great exuberance for life."

E.O. Wilson died on December 26 in Burlington, Massachusetts. He was 92. Dr. Wilson is preceded in death by his wife Irene K, Wilson. He is survived by his daughter, Catherine I. Cargill and her husband John.

A tribute to Dr. Wilson's life is planned for 2022. Memorial details are to be announced.

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## Quotes

### Dignitaries and Colleagues:

#### **President William J. Clinton**

"E.O. Wilson taught us so much about the importance of preserving our rich biodiversity, and perhaps more significant today, how cooperation, not conflict, has enabled humanity to survive and thrive. His later books left us a roadmap for the future. I was honored to know him."

#### **Ted Turner**

"Today the world takes pause to honor the life and legacy of E.O. Wilson - scientist, sage, & modern-day Darwin, whose love and understanding of our natural world was both spellbinding and inspirational. In 2014 - Turner Endangered Species Fund and Turner Biodiversity Divisions partnered with E. O. Wilson Biodiversity Foundation to support the Half-Earth Initiative - aptly named - to protect half of the earth (land and sea). Turner lands, 2 million acres strong, became a fitting laboratory to provide

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conservation opportunities to a new generation of young scientists and policy makers who would carry forth E.O.'s beacon of hope for the planet. On Turner lands and beyond, his indomitable spirit will live on in the call of the wild."

**Dr. Richard Dawkins, University of Oxford**

"Sad news of the death of Ed Wilson. Great entomologist, ecologist, greatest myrmecologist, invented sociobiology, pioneer of island biogeography, genial humanist & biophilic."

**Dr. M. Sanjayan, Conservation International**

"I was saddened to hear of Edward O. Wilson's passing today. My thoughts are with his family and his colleagues at the E.O. Wilson Biodiversity Foundation. Every conservationist and ecologist owes their career path in some way to Ed. Many of us were inspired by his groundbreaking books including "Biodiversity," which was seminal to the field and which helped establish that word in society's consciousness. His writing reminded us that the world is really magnificent and connected and dripping with life. Ed served with distinction as part of the Conservation International board, and we will all miss his curiosity and wisdom."

**Dr. Elizabeth Gray, Audubon Society**

"Nature has lost one of its most ardent advocates today. Being a student of Professor Wilson inspired me to become a biologist and devote my career to conservation. He will be sorely missed."

E.O. Wilson's messages reached millions, whether in the classroom, the field, or through his writings. His love of the natural world taught us to observe wildlife with razor sharp curiosity.

But most inspiring of all, he taught us that we have a deep, collective responsibility to protect our planet. E.O. Wilson's legacy spans generations. It is up to all of us to carry his vision forward."

**Dr. Stephen Pinker, Harvard University**

"Sad indeed. A great scientist and a lovely man (I'm still grateful for a letter of encouragement he wrote to me early in my career, before we were colleagues). We disagreed about some things, but it didn't affect his generosity and willingness to engage."

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## **E.O. Wilson Biodiversity Foundation Board of Directors:**

### **David J. Prend, Chair of the Board of Directors**

“It would be easy to understate Ed’s scientific achievements, but hard to overstate his impact which extends to every facet of society. He was a true visionary with a unique ability to inspire and galvanize. He articulated, perhaps better than anyone, what it means to be human. His infectious curiosity and creativity have shaped the lives of so many, myself included, and I feel lucky to have called him a friend.”

### **Paul Simon, legendary singer-songwriter**

“The world lost a great scientist and I, a dear friend, with the passing of E.O. Wilson. Ed was an intellectual giant and a gentle, humble, compassionate man. We were fortunate to have had him for 92 years.”

### **Jeffrey Ubben, Inclusive Capital Partners**

“Ed loved people and celebrated the human being by celebrating all living species.”

### **Stephen H. Lockhart, MD (retired)**

“I am truly saddened, as I am sure that everyone on this email is, to hear the news about Ed. However, I am grateful for a long life filled with passion, compassion and kindness. His contributions define a path to a brighter future for all of us. It is now up to us to follow it. His life was a blessing.”

### **Keith Tuffley, Citi**

“Ed was such an inspiration, an intellectual giant, as well as a very likable, charming and genuine man. The world is a far better place for Ed’s contribution to science and knowledge. He will be missed, but his legacy is forever.”

### **Greg Carr, Carr Foundation**

“Professor Wilson amplified his scientific understanding of life into a love of all living creatures and a respect for the dignity of all human beings. He taught all of us that self-awareness is a blessed wonder, the variety of living forms miraculous, and worship of Nature a spiritual activity.”

### **Dr. Dawn Wright, Chief Scientist, Esri**

“Our great friend E.O. Wilson (1929-2021), a truly special, wonderful Earthling, will be deeply missed by the conservation and the GIS community!! Nevertheless, his message remains clear and we continue the work in earnest.”

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## **E.O. Wilson Biodiversity Foundation Executive Staff:**

### **Dr. Paula J. Ehrlich, CEO & President, co-founder of the Half-Earth Project**

“E.O. Wilson’s holy grail was the sheer delight of the pursuit of knowledge. A relentless synthesizer of ideas, his courageous scientific focus and poetic voice transformed our way of understanding ourselves and our planet. His greatest hope was that students everywhere share his passion for discovery as the ultimate scientific foundation for future stewardship of our planet. His gift was a deep belief in people and our shared human resolve to save the natural world.”

### **Dr. Walter Jetz, Scientific Chair**

“With Ed we have lost one of the intellectual giants of our time. He was a wellspring of deep and influential ideas linking disparate fields of science. He showed the powerful role of bold, rigorous science for appreciating and preserving the world’s species and their many wonders.”

### **Dr. Dennis Liu, VP of Education**

“In one of our last conversations, Ed talked about his fervent commitment to education and the critical role of teachers and students in the essential work of understanding life on our precious planet and taking action to protect nature for the benefit of all species. Although Ed was charismatically articulate and clear about the bad news, he also had a gift for conveying calm, wisdom, and humor, beyond words. We aim to honor E.O. Wilson by putting love of nature into action by sharing, teaching, witnessing, protecting, restoring, and being grateful.”

## **OBITUARIES**

### **NY Times**

E.O. Wilson, a Pioneer of Evolutionary Biology, Dies at 92

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/12/27/science/eo-wilson-dead.html>

### **Reuters**

E.O. Wilson, naturalist dubbed a modern Darwin, dies at 92

<https://www.reuters.com/lifestyle/science/obituary-modern-day-darwin-eo-wilson-dies-92-2021-12-27/>

### **Washington Post**

Edward O. Wilson, often cited as the heir to Darwin, dies at 92

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/obituaries/2021/12/27/013b4bd2-6700-11ec-a76b-374aeb82e811\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/obituaries/2021/12/27/013b4bd2-6700-11ec-a76b-374aeb82e811_story.html)