

“Critics of environmentalism . . . usually wave aside the small and the unfamiliar, which they tend to classify into two categories, bugs and weeds,” Wilson wrote in *The Creation*.

It is easy for them to overlook the fact that these creatures make up most of the organisms and species on Earth. They forget, if they ever knew, how the voracious caterpillars of an obscure moth from the American tropics saved Australia’s pastureland from the overgrowth of cactus; how a Madagascar “weed,” the rosy periwinkle, provided the alkaloids that cure most cases of Hodgkin’s disease and acute childhood leukemia; how another substance from an obscure Norwegian fungus made possible the organ transplant industry; how a chemical from the saliva of leeches yielded a solvent that prevents blood clots during and after surgery; and so on through the pharmacopoeia that has stretched from the herbal medicines of Stone Age shamans to the magic-bullet cures of present-day biomedical science . . . Wild species [also] enrich the soil, cleanse the water, pollinate most of the flowering plants. They create the very air we breathe. Without these amenities, the remainder of human history would be nasty and brief.

If we destabilize nature by degrading it, Wilson continued, “the organisms most affected are likely to be the largest and most complex, including human beings.”

Biodiversity doesn’t only help us to live—it helps us to adapt. There is nothing more practical than the role that biodiversity plays in easing