

Insec(tc)ure*: Are you insecure about your insect cures?

A UT Urban IPM Lab Newsletter for the Pest Management Industry

Edward Osborne (E.O.) Wilson

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On December 26, 2021, the world lost one of its vital protectors, a scientist named Edward Osborne Wilson, better known as E.O. In this article, I briefly summarize his career and its effect on me and the world. I hope you'll join me in honoring his memory and vow to carry on his life's work.

Mention E.O. Wilson to a biological scientist and notice their eyes brighten and a smile form as they reflect on their respect and admiration for him and the hope that he inspired. E.O. was particularly inspiring to me because of his work on ants. He was gifted at processing large amounts of information and synthesizing clear understandings of the material or proposing new theories. For example, take the book, *The Ants*, an encyclopedia of sorts on all things ant that he co-authored with Bert Hölldobler and won a Pulitzer Prize. As a budding myrmecologist in the mid-1990s, this was a treatise or "bible" to me. I studied it for my Ph.D. qualifying exams at every opportunity. Although I did not read it in its entirety (I certainly tried), I often referenced it to understand a concept or for a summary of the literature on a particular topic before searching for



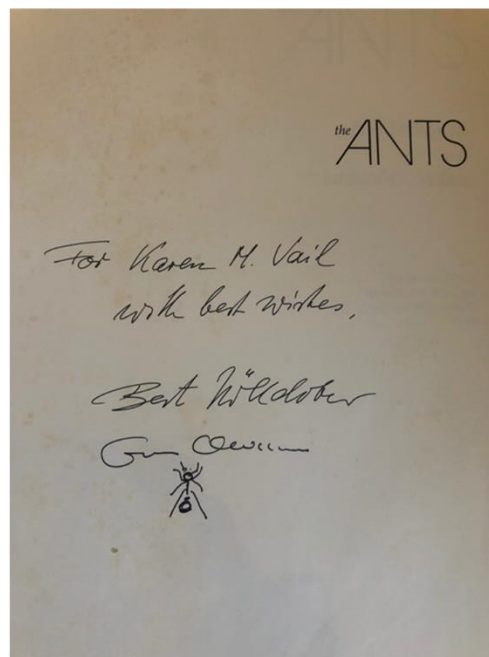
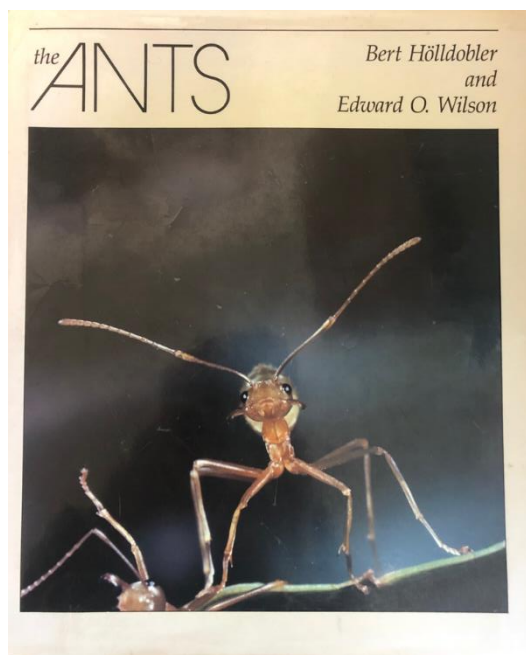
Wrapping up a thought-provoking dinner Saturday with E. O. Wilson and University of Tennessee colleagues at the McClung Museum of Natural History & Culture in December 2014. Note that Ed looks much happier after donning the UT cap.

more current information. Surely he had a similar impact on other urban entomologists.

Dr. Wilson had little supervision during his childhood, allowing him to wander and explore outdoors. He was an avid naturalist from a very early age. Damage to the vision in his right eye due to a fishing incident reduced his far vision but allowed him to see small objects clearly. This event changed history as E.O. switched his interests from larger animals to insects resulting in a spectacular career in entomology, especially myrmecology, sociobiology, among many, many other things. Throughout his varied career, he described 400 ant species and wrote on topics such as ants, sociobiology as it related to social insects and humans, biodiversity, biophilia, conservation, etc. His works were written for scientists and the public and were often controversial and upheaved current understandings and acceptance. I believe his childhood required him to be self-reliant and did not require others' approval or acceptance which laid the foundation for his independent thought-processing and presentations. He cared deeply about this planet and believed future generations would not forgive us if we failed to preserve the planet's current species richness. He inspires us to do our part in preserving biodiversity and protecting this planet and will continue to do so long after his death.

My husband and I had the good fortune to enjoy a dinner with Dr. Wilson and a few colleagues at the University of Tennessee's McClung Museum of Natural History & Culture in December 2014. He spoke of the freak fishing incident that damaged his eye and shared a few other stories. One I recall was about his entry into the University of Alabama as a freshman. When he arrived at the University, he sought out the department head for space to continue curating his insect collection. At this point, he chuckled, I guess at his naiveté of assuming the department would provide him space and the gumption of making the request. But, nevertheless, he succeeded. The world is indebted to this department head who showed compassion, understanding and insight!

Thank you, we will carry on and rest in peace Ed!



My book, *The Ants*, signed by authors E. O. Wilson and Bert Holldobler, that kept me company during my PhD work.

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