

# Sustaining Life

How Human Health Depends on Biodiversity

FOREWORD BY EDWARD O. WILSON



Edited by Eric Chivian and Aaron Bernstein

Forthcoming from Oxford

**“Sustaining Life is the most complete and powerful argument I have seen for the importance of preserving biodiversity” —Al Gore**

## Sustaining Life

How Human Health Depends on Biodiversity

Edited by ERIC CHIVIAN and AARON BERNSTEIN

The Earth’s biodiversity—the rich variety of life on our planet—is disappearing at an alarming rate. And while many books have focused on the expected ecological consequences, or on the aesthetic, ethical, sociological, or economic dimensions of this loss, *Sustaining Life* is the first to examine the full range of potential threats that diminishing biodiversity poses to human health.

Edited and written by Harvard Medical School physicians Eric Chivian and Aaron Bernstein, along with contributions by over 100 leading scientists, *Sustaining Life* presents a comprehensive—and sobering—view of how human medicines, biomedical research, the emergence and spread of infectious diseases, and the production of food, both on land and in the oceans, depend on biodiversity. The book’s ten chapters cover everything from what biodiversity is and how human activity threatens it to how we as individuals can help conserve the world’s richly varied biota. Seven groups of organisms, some of the most endangered on Earth, provide detailed case studies to illustrate the contributions they have already made to human medicine, and those they are expected to make if we do not drive them to extinction. Drawing on the latest research, but written in language a general reader can easily follow, *Sustaining Life* argues that we can no longer see ourselves as separate from the natural world, nor assume that we will be unharmed by its alteration. Our health, as the authors so vividly detail, depends on the health of other species and on the vitality of natural ecosystems.

With a foreword by E.O. Wilson and a prologue by Kofi Annan, and more than 200 poignant color illustrations, *Sustaining Life* contributes essential perspective to the debate over how humans affect biodiversity and a compelling demonstration of the human health costs.

**Eric Chivian, M.D.**, is the Director of the Center for Health and the Global Environment at Harvard Medical School. He shared the 1985 Nobel Peace Prize. He is the lead editor and author of *Critical Condition: Human Health and the Environment* and *Last Aid: The Medical Dimensions of Nuclear War*.

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