Book-keeping

We have recently rekindled our Books & Arts coverage.

Over the course of the twentieth century, the scientific article became the main way in which scientists communicate with each other and, not without controversy, measure their intellectual contributions. However, we should not ignore the fact that scientists write and read in many different formats, including books, for a variety of reasons. Scientists write text books to distil knowledge about a field for educational purposes. These can be texts aimed predominantly at students, often providing a general introduction to a broad field, or aimed at other established researchers who need a guide to a more specialized area or a particular technique. Some scientists also write popular science, which is very clearly aimed at the general public: writing such works requires a skill that is distinct from the art of writing technical articles or books. Some science books, arguably the greatest ones, fulfil more than either of these two purposes — they move thinking in a field forward, and may be accessible at different levels.

As we mourn the loss of E. O. Wilson, his books are a timely illustration of these different — but in his case overlapping —

types of science book. *The Ants* (written with B. Hölldobler) is predominantly a text book, whereas *Half-Earth* is essentially a work of popular science. On the other hand, many of his works combined synthesis with ground-breaking new thinking. Of these, *The Theory of Island Biogeography* (co-authored with R. H. MacArthur) is clearly a work for scientists, while *On Human Nature* and *The Social Conquest of Earth* are widely accessible. His most controversial book, *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis*, falls somewhere in the middle of that spectrum. Wilson was of course a great writer, who even published fiction, and few other scientists have managed to publish such a successful and varied range of books. However, each year many members of our scientific community publish outstanding books in some of these categories, and others create different kinds of artworks that draw on our scientific fields.

As a journal, we want to make sure that we include such works as part of a comprehensive offering to the scientific community, and we are therefore actively expanding our hitherto-modest **Books & Arts** section. As well as writing for a variety of different purposes, scientists read books

and consume art for different reasons that include: to learn a new area; to assist with teaching; to keep at the forefront of thinking in their own subfield; and for sheer curiosity and entertainment. By publishing Books & Arts content we hope to reflect these varied purposes. We review **popular science** and **academic tomes**; we have even reviewed scientific **children's literature** and explored the **real-life zoological inspiration** for a much-loved children's book character, the Lorax. Beyond books, we can consider other art forms where there is a clear ecological or evolutionary relevance — we have previously published an **anniversary celebration** of the eighteenth-century scientist and artist Maria Sibylla Merian and a **review of a play** based on the voyage of *The Beagle*.

The number of ecology and evolution books that are published each year is vast, so as editors we look forward to selecting the Books & Arts content that we think will interest our readers most. And we will keep in our minds Einstein's famous quote: "The greatest scientists are always artists as well." □

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