

REMARKS BY GEORGIA TECH PRESIDENT G. WAYNE CLOUGH
Smithgall Lecture by E.O. Wilson, October 3, 2000

I'm pleased to welcome all of you to this special event, which honors Mr. and Mrs. Charles Smithgall, and recognizes the friends of both Georgia Tech and Zoo Atlanta.

The Smithgall family, Georgia Tech, and Zoo Atlanta all come together in the person of Dr. Terry Maple, who holds the Elizabeth Smithgall Watts Chair in Behavioral and Animal Conservation here at Georgia Tech and is also the CEO of Zoo Atlanta. Zoo Atlanta was one of the nation's worst zoos when Terry took it over, and he has made it into one of the best – known not only for replicating animals' habitats and living patterns in the wild, but also for its extensive and growing work in research and species preservation.

Terry's accomplishments at Zoo Atlanta and Georgia Tech paralleled the hopes and dreams of Elizabeth Smithgall Watts, who at her untimely passing was on her way to becoming an esteemed professor of anthropology at Tulane University. The Elizabeth Smithgall Watts Chair, which Terry holds, is a tribute to her life, and it binds Georgia Tech and Zoo Atlanta together in a joint effort to conduct research, teaching, and service that promotes environmental preservation and conservation.

The Smithgalls have endowed two other distinguished faculty chairs at Georgia Tech, including the Smithgall Institute Chair in Earth and Atmospheric Sciences, which is held by Dr. Bill Chameides. Dr. Chameides is an internationally recognized expert on air pollution, whom we are proud to have on our faculty.

Today we pay tribute to the Smithgalls with the Smithgall Lecture. And to deliver it we are very pleased and honored to welcome one of the world's greatest living scientists, Harvard professor and Pulitzer Prize-winning author Edward O. Wilson.

Dr. Wilson was born here in the South, in Birmingham, Alabama, and as a small boy he was fascinated by ants and other insects. As he grew older, this interest expressed itself in the study of biology. Dr. Wilson completed both his bachelor's and master's degrees in biology at the University of Alabama, then earned his PhD at Harvard University, where he continues today as Pellegrino University Research Professor and Honorary Curator of Entomology at the Museum of Comparative Zoology.

He has spent more time than any other scientist of the century observing insects in their natural habitat, and documenting their behavior patterns, their relationship to their environment, and the social patterns that govern their colonies. In the process, he became a pioneer in sociobiology and biodiversity.

His entomology research has taken interesting and inventive turns along the way, including one project in which he documented the insect species of six small islands off the Florida Keys, then fumigated the islands to destroy all insect life. Eight months later he returned to discover that while the same number of insect species were present as before, the composition was now significantly different. That led him to develop an equilibrium theory for ecosystems.

He also studied social behavior in insect colonies, documenting communication among ants through the release of body chemicals and substantiating acts of altruism, kindness, and labor-specialization. These behaviors appeared to be genetic in insects, and when he suggested at a conference that genetic instinct might also explain the behavior of other animals, including in humans, a pitcher of water was poured over his head.

As you can see, Dr. Wilson has had an adventurous career as well as a distinguished one. He is the author of more than a dozen books, including two Pulitzer Prize winners – *On Human Nature* and *The Ants* – and his book *The Naturalist*, won the Benjamin Franklin Award from the Publishers Marketing Association. His writing is intriguing not only because of its broad appeal, but also because he pushes the envelope, asking his readers to set convention aside and consider things from a new perspective.

In his earlier writings, he crossed the barrier between biology and sociology, arguing that natural instinct forms the basis for complex human behavior. His most recent book, *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge*, published in 1998, leaps the next barrier, connecting the natural sciences with the humanities as well as the social sciences. In it Dr. Wilson argues that the world is organized around a small number of fundamental natural laws, which also comprise the principles underlying all human knowledge and learning, so that all disciplines are interlocked in their underlying explanations. As Georgia Tech becomes increasingly interdisciplinary, we may be helping to prove his point.

Dr. Wilson's efforts and accomplishments have earned him many honors and awards, including the 1977 National Medal of Science, the Crafoord Prize from the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences, the International Prize for Biology from Japan, a King Faisal International Prize for Sciences in Saudi Arabia, the gold medal of the Worldwide Fund for Nature, and the Audubon Medal of the National Audubon Society. He was also the first recipient of an award named in his honor – the Edward Osborne Wilson Naturalist Award from The American Society of Naturalists. He serves on the boards of directors of The Nature Conservancy, Conservation International, and the American Museum of Natural History.

In an interview that appeared in the April issue of *Wired* magazine, Dr. Wilson commented that “the gargantuan problem of the next century is how to settle down our species before we wreck the planet,” and then made the case for sustainable technology

to help us do that. This afternoon he will take us on a tour of Earth's fauna and flora, describing the causes of the rapid decline they are experiencing and suggesting measures that could help to save them.

At this time it is my honor to present to you Dr. Edward O. Wilson to present the Smithgall Lecture, entitled "The Diversity of Life."

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