Sustaining Life: How Human Health Depends on Biodiversity

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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 book 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 more than 100 leading scientists who contributed to writing and reviewing the book, *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 not be harmed by its alteration. Our health, as the authors so vividly show, 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. It is the winner of the Gerald L. Young Book Award in Human Ecology Best Sci-Tech Books of 2008 for Biology by Gregg Sapp of *Library Journal*

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