

# Biophilia Hypothesis

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## RECOMMENDED CITATION

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The biophilia hypothesis suggests that there is an instinctive bond between human beings and other living systems. Edward O. Wilson introduced and popularized the hypothesis in his book entitled *Biophilia*.

### **Love of living systems**

The term "biophilia" literally means "love of life or living systems." It was first used by Erich Fromm to describe a psychological orientation of being attracted to all that is alive and vital. Wilson uses the term in the same sense when he suggests that biophilia describes "the connections that human beings subconsciously seek with the rest of life." He proposed the possibility that the deep affiliations humans have with nature are rooted in our biology. Unlike phobias, which are the aversions and fears that people have of things in the natural world, philias are the attractions and positive feelings that people have toward certain habitats, activities, and objects in their natural surroundings.

To many people, "nature" means plants as in a park or forest, but the weather and animals are also closely involved. In the book *Children and Nature: Psychological, Sociocultural, and Evolutionary Investigations* edited by Peter Kahn and Stephen Kellert (page 153), the importance of animals, especially those with which a child can develop a nurturing relationship, is emphasised particularly for early and middle childhood. Chapter 7 of the same book reports on the help that animals can provide to children with autistic-spectrum disorders.

### **Product of biological evolution**

Human preferences toward things in nature, while refined through experience and culture, are hypothetically the product of biological evolution. For example, adult mammals (especially humans) are generally attracted to baby mammal faces and find them appealing across species. The large eyes and small features of any young mammal face are far more appealing than those of the mature adults. The biophilia hypothesis suggests that the positive emotional response that adult mammals have toward baby mammals across species helps increase the survival rates of all mammals.

Similarly, the hypothesis helps explain why ordinary people care for and sometimes risk their lives to save domestic and wild animals, and keep plants and flowers in and around their homes. In other words, our natural love for life helps sustain life.

### **Development**

The hypothesis has since been developed as part of theories of evolutionary psychology in the book *The Biophilia Hypothesis* and by Lynn Margulis. Also, Stephen Kellert's work seeks to

determine common human responses to perceptions of, and ideas about, plants and animals, and to explain them in terms of the conditions of human evolution.

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