

a voice
for the natural
landscaping
movement



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Celebrating natives
plant and natural
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The Grapevine

By Maryann Whitman

Sustaining Life

According to the new book, *Sustaining Life: How Human Health Depends upon Biodiversity*, we need birds, bugs, and bacteria a lot more than they need us.

Dr. Eric Chivian, sharer of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1985, and Founder and Director of Harvard Medical School's Center for Health and the Global Environment, was recently interviewed about the book he co-authored with Dr. Aaron Bernstein.

He was asked: "If there was one species that you could save right now that's endangered that really has consequence today in our lives, what would it be?"

Dr. Chivian answered: "I think if we were talking about groups of species I could answer that and I would give you several candidates because all life on earth is dependent on it. Plants: We have no oxygen without plants. Microbes: Of all types, the microbes that break down decaying organisms and return the nutrients to the soil and to the oceans. Nitrogen-fixing bacteria: We would have very few crops without nitrogen-fixing bacteria."

Which Came First?

A Canadian biologist doing research with invasive plants suggests that they are not as much a cause of environmental degradation as "eco-opportunists taking advantage of disturbed habitats."

Environmental degradation may result from any event that serves to diminish local biotic diversity – pollution, habitat fragmentation, erosion, clearance of native vegetation, intentional introduction of alien species, deforestation, monoculturing, urban development with impervious surfaces, or outright habitat destruction like wetland drainage or conversion to agriculture. These are the obvious events.

Less obvious are the rapidly increasing concentration of carbon dioxide in our atmosphere, and concomitant climatic changes. It is these last changes that research is predicting will be particularly beneficial to invasive plants.

It seems our native plants can't win for losing.

Maryann is Editor of the *Wild Ones Journal*, and comes to the position with an extensive background in environmental matters of all kinds.