

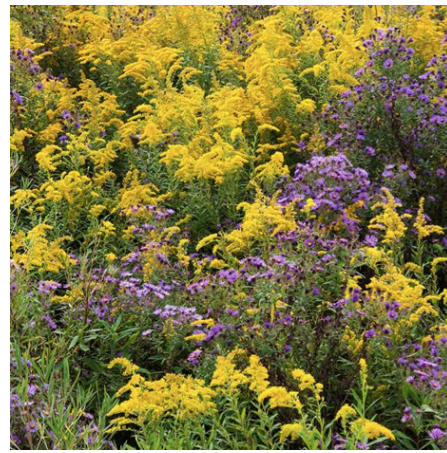


March/April, 2017

## The Aster and the Goldenrod

*"Beauty is our Word for the Perfection of those Qualities that have contributed most to our Survival." ~ E.O. Wilson, Sociobiologist*

Recently I had the good fortune to listen to a podcast by botanist Robin Wall Kimmerer – [The Intelligence in All Kinds of Life](#). Kimmerer's quest to find the scientific answer to the question 'Why is Nature so beautiful?' reminds me of my own work, which ultimately seeks to understand the very nature, indeed the utility of beauty. As is the case for Kimmerer, my rational mind seeks to render my intuitive mind's insights quantifiable.



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Prof. Kimmerer says: “....the reason I wanted to study botany was because I wanted to know why asters and goldenrod looked so beautiful together.....these amazing displays of bright, chrome yellow and deep purple..., they look stunning together.

And the two plants so often intermingle rather than living apart from one another, .... I thought that surely in the order and the harmony of the universe, there would be an explanation ... And I was told that that was not science, that if I was interested in beauty, I should go to art school..... As it turns out, there's a very good biophysical explanation for why those plants grow together, so it's a matter of aesthetics and it's a matter of ecology. Those complimentary colors of purple and gold together, being opposites on the color wheel, they're so vivid, they actually attract far more pollinators than if those two grew apart from one another. So each of those plants benefits by combining its beauty with the beauty of the other. And that's a question that science can address, certainly, as well as artists. And I just think that 'Why is the world so beautiful?' is a question that we all ought to be embracing.”



## The Utility of Beauty

*“Putting beauty into the realm of biology completely alters the time frame of analysis.” ~ Nancy Etcoff, Cognitive Scientist*

A new **definition of beauty** is emerging, not as decoration (which is additive and therefore optional), but rather beauty as innate preference, biologically hardwired, deeply rooted in evolutionary history and thereby quantifiably implicated in the survival of all species. In that context, consider the peacock’s tail: by all appearances it’s likely not the most practical for walking or flying; however, its stunning beauty, apparently much appreciated by pea hens, has proven itself to be an excellent means of survival selection.





# Consilience

*"When I'm working on a problem, I never think about beauty..... But when I have finished, if the solution is not beautiful, I know its wrong." ~ Buckminster Fuller*

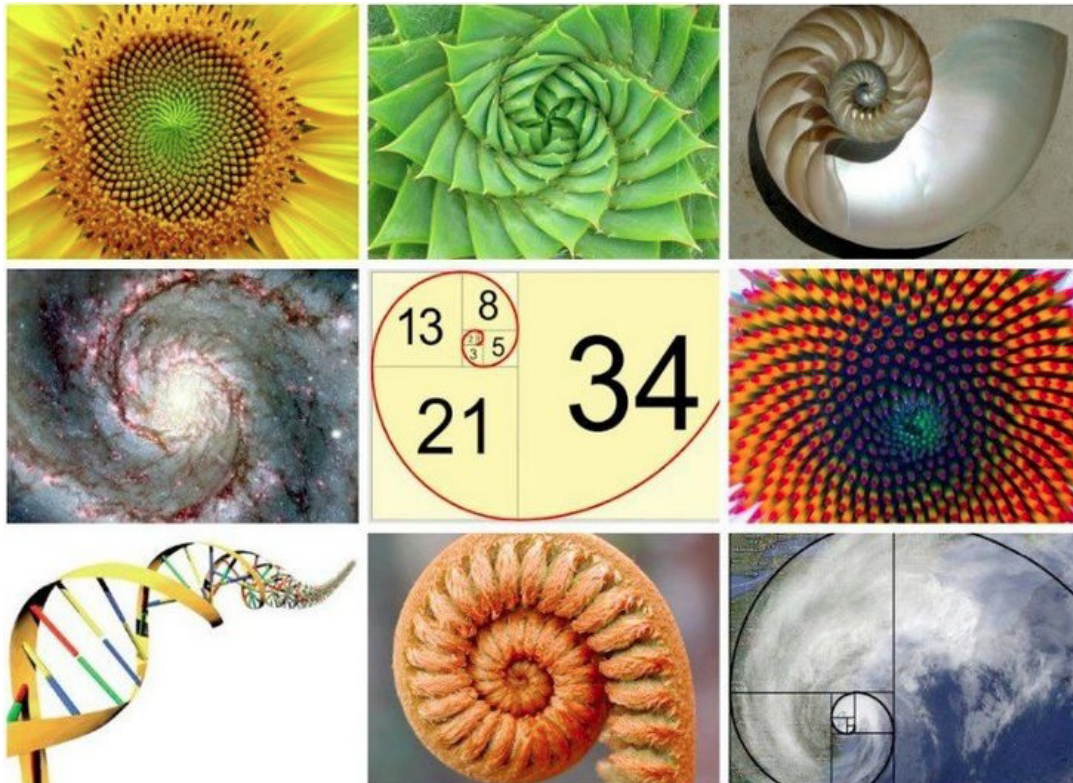
In his wonderful book 'The Shape of Green,' Lance Hosey asks: "Does beauty only result from trial and error, or can it be produced more methodically, as part of the 'problem' to be solved?"

Pair this with Einstein's statement...

"We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them."

...and we arrive back at the beginning of this Blog, where the answer to the question "what is beauty" reveals itself to be biophysical and evolution-based: rooted in both ecology and old brain preferences, living in the sciences as well as in the arts.

E.O. Wilson called this unity of knowledge 'Consilience.' He considers Consilience the only viable path to conquer the significant environmental problems we face.



# The Old Brain Points the Way

Our old brain has not evolved much since the early days of our mammoth hunting ancestors. Evolution takes its time. This explains why we intuit the threat of a snake long before we intuit the threat of climate change. Clearly this is a problem!

On the flip side, however, it turns out that our evolutionary survival preferences of the past point the way for our survival into the future, in terms of human as well as planetary health. The methodology of Biophilic Design seeks to re-claim these tangible preferences, to make the intuitively obvious quantifiable with the help of science, and to thereby re-connect us once again with **our birthright** towards an eco-logically beautiful and therefore sustainable future.

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