Sizing Up S P

Is this a scene from "Invasion of the Killer Dragonflies"? No. It's what's called a *species-scape*—a landscape of different species that symbolize life on Earth. Each of the organisms pictured represents a different group of living things, and the size of each picture indicates the known number of species that are in that group, compared with the known numbers in other groups. For example, the dragonfly represents all the insect species in the world, and the mushrooms represent all known species of fungi. (If you look at the key, you'll see that there are more than 750,000 known species of insects, but only 69,000 of fungi.) And people are represented by the giraffe, which symbolizes all the bats, bears, cats, mice, and other mammals that live on the planet.

Scientists have identified approximately 1.4 million species so far. But they predict that there are millions of other species that haven't been identified or described yet—especially "small stuff" like flies, beetles, bacteria, and fungi. And many of them are probably in places that scientists haven't really had a chance to study yet, like rain forest soils and the deep ocean floor. Who knows, in the next century we might find millions of new species—right beneath our feet!

E C I E S

KEY
1. Bacteria (4800); 2. Scarlet waxy cap mushrooms (Fungi—69,000); 3. Sea colander (Algae—26,900); 4. Trees, shrubs, and other higher plants (248,400); 5. Amoeba (Protozoa—30,800); 6. Yellow tube sponge (Sponges—5000); 7. Compass jellyfish (Corals, jellyfish, and relatives—9000); 8. Leopard flatworm (Flatworms—12,200); 9. Roundworms (12,000); 10. Earthworm (Earthworms and relatives—12,000); 11. Scallop (Clams, squids, and other mollusks—50,000); 12. African seastar (Seastars and relatives—6100); 13. Dragonfly (Insects—751,000); 14. Jumping spider (Spiders, crustaceans, and other non-insect arthropods—123,400); 15. Regal angelfish (Fishes, tunicates, and lancelets—18,800); 16. Leopard frog (Amphibians—4200); 17. Scarlet king snake (Reptiles—6300); 18. Tree swallow (Birds—9000); 19. Giraffe (Mammals—4000).

Illustration by Patrick Gnan
Statistics from *The Diversity of Life* by E.O. Wilson (Harvard University Press, 1992)