

## Beyond Passion

I'm a biologist in the Service's Environmental Contaminants program, and I've never read *Silent Spring*.

There. I've said it. Never read the book, even though I've had a copy in my office, been assigned it in school, and have a nice edition at home. I've read Rachel Carson's other books, studied scholarly and popular biographies, saw the one-woman play about her life. I can't wait for the movie. But I haven't once made it through *Silent Spring*.

Everyone says *Silent Spring* began the environmental movement. Everyone agrees that the careful research, the unbelievable documentation, the voluminous correspondence with scientists researching pesticides, and the attention to detail that characterize all good contaminants work made the book and its conclusions reliable. Some of the papers that Carson used in her research remain cornerstones of understanding the effects of pesticides and other chemicals on wildlife and humans. Research documenting the feminizing effects of DDT in chickens—familiar to Carson—was used by Theo Colborn in a similar effort decades later to summarize and publicize chemically caused endocrine disruption. There's no question that *Silent Spring*, and all of Rachel Carson's other work, was useful—something that she would have been most satisfied to hear.

But there's another element to Carson's work, discernable in the first chapter of *Silent Spring*: emotion. This emotion, so condemned by her industry and government critics, also made her writing lyrical, absorbing, and compelling to the public and to generations of environmental scientists, including many contaminants biologists. This emotion, translated into passion, keeps many of us going to work each day, each week, each year; in spite of the death-by-a-thousand-cuts atmosphere that most of us breathe. Indeed, that passion helps us celebrate when we do achieve something for conservation, because even a band-aid can help a deep cut heal.



But undue emotion, especially in the scientific and regulatory arenas of Service work, is not condoned. We must behave in an objective and dispassionate manner to be heard and believed. And there's the rub for me with *Silent Spring*. Even just scanning the first chapter made me feel as if my hopes and fears were wildly visible, and that I could no longer be objective, no longer dispassionately present you with contaminants facts—the cold, hard kind that make your eyes glaze over with some unconscious but painful memory of a long-ago chemistry class—and help you connect those facts to conservation of the natural world.

If you're one of those Service people who have a grand vision for making the world a better place, please understand that I do too, but mine's specific. I want birds to not die from eating lead shot, or fish to get sick from sewage effluent. I want the knowledge that has been painstakingly gathered during the past 100 years to be used—to be useful—in getting clean water, clean air, clean and plentiful food, for humans and other species. We'll certainly need to use manufactured chemicals, but when we do, I want us to look for safer ones, not just new ones. Above all, I want kids to be healthy.

Even as Rachel Carson inspired millions of people—and maybe you—to think about the environment in a very different, connected, passionate way, she inspired me to think about the pervasive negative effects of chemicals and pollution. She demonstrated to me that research, logic, and attention to detail could help change society for the better. My hope is that you can see why I pester you with chemical details, and try (though often imperfectly) to translate “contaminants” into “plain English.” I also hope you understand why I can't read that book. □

Angela Matz, Environmental Contaminants,  
Fairbanks, Alaska

For more Rachel Carson reflections, visit

<[www.fws.gov/rachelcarson](http://www.fws.gov/rachelcarson)>

## Continuing the Legacy



A career in fish and wildlife conservation offered me the opportunity to join my vocation with my avocation. I have always loved the outdoors and felt

that if I could provide a contribution toward significant fish and wildlife conservation work it would not seem like work at all.

This turned out to be true. I still read books, articles, journals and updates on conservation with the same fervor I did as a youngster. Conservation work is challenging and stimulating and offers opportunities to work with some great people and have fun. To quote Theodore Roosevelt, “Far and away the best prize that life offers is the chance to work hard at work worth doing.”

I became interested in fish and wildlife conservation as a young person when a kindly gentleman introduced me to bird watching and taught me some things about bird behavior. He also introduced me to hunting, and when I learned hunting and conservation went hand-in-hand; I knew this was something I wanted to pursue.

I work to continue the legacy of Rachel Carson by discussing fish and wildlife conservation and stewardship with all people, young and old, everywhere I go and every chance I get. □

Brian Braudis, Deputy Project Leader,  
Edwin B. Forsythe National Wildlife  
Refuge, Oceanville, New Jersey