

# Rachel Carson

## *A Conservation Legacy*



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*It is a wholesome and necessary thing for us to turn again to the earth and in the contemplation of her beauties to know of wonder and humility. – Rachel Carson*

May 27, 2007 marks the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Rachel Carson, one of the world's foremost leaders in conservation. Her work as an educator, scientist and writer revolutionized America's interest in environmental issues.

### **About Rachel Carson**

As a young child, Carson's consuming passions were exploring the forests and streams surrounding her hillside home near the Allegheny River in Pennsylvania and her writing. She was first published at the age of 10 in a children's magazine dedicated to the work of young writers. In 1925, Carson entered Pennsylvania College for Women as an English major determined to become a writer, but switched to biology midway through her studies.

Her first experience with the ocean came during a summer fellowship at the U.S. Marine Laboratory in Woods Hole, Massachusetts. Upon graduation from Pennsylvania College, she was awarded a scholarship to complete graduate work in biology at Johns Hopkins University in Maryland, an enormous accomplishment for a woman in 1929.

### **The Beginning of a Legacy**

Carson's distinction in writing and biology led to a job with the U.S. Bureau of Fisheries (now the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service) in 1935. She created a series of 7-minute radio spots on marine life called "Romance Under the Waters."

Meanwhile, she continued to submit writings on conservation and nature to newspapers and magazines, urging people to regulate the "forces of destruction" and consider always the welfare of the "fish as well as that of the fisherman."

During her free time, Carson wrote books about her government research. Her first book, titled *Under the Sea-Wind* was published in 1941, and highlighted her unique ability to present deeply intricate scientific material in clear poetic language that captivated readers and sparked their interest in the natural world. During her 15-year career with the Service, she wrote numerous pamphlets and bulletins on conservation, one of the most well-known a series called *Conservation in Action* – devoted to exploring wildlife and ecology on national wildlife refuges.

Carson's second book, *The Sea Around Us*, was published in 1951 and remained on the New York Time's best-seller list for 81 weeks. The success of her second book prompted Carson to resign her position with the Service in 1952 to devote all her time to writing. *The Sea Around Us* along with *The Edge of the Sea*, a third book published in 1956, provided a new perspective on conservation to concerned environmentalists.

### **An Environmental Revolution**

But it was her final book, *Silent Spring*, published in 1962, which awakened society to an awareness of its responsibility to other forms of life. Carson had long been aware of the dangers of chemical pesticides but was also aware of the controversy within the agricultural community which depended on pesticide use to increase crop production. She had long hoped someone else would publish an expose' on DDT but eventually realized that only she had the background as well as the economic freedom to do it.

*Silent Spring* provoked a firestorm of controversy as well as personal attacks on Carson's professional integrity. The pesticide industry mounted a

massive campaign to discredit Carson even though she did not urge the complete banning of pesticides but called for research to be conducted to ensure pesticides were used safely and alternatives to dangerous chemicals such as DDT could be found. The federal government, however, ordered a complete review of pesticide policy and Carson was asked to testify before a Congressional committee. As a direct result of that review, DDT was banned. With the publication of *Silent Spring*, Carson is credited with launching the contemporary environmental movement and awakening concern by Americans about the environment.

Carson once said that “man’s endeavors to control nature by his powers to alter and to destroy would inevitably evolve into a war against himself, a war he would lose unless he came to terms

with nature.” She died from cancer in 1964 at the age of 57. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service named one of its refuges near Carson’s summer home on the coast of Maine as the Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge in 1969 to honor the memory of this extraordinary woman.

#### **What can you do in honor of Rachel Carson?**

- Go outside and explore the wonders of our natural world at a National Wildlife Refuge, a local park or even your own backyard.
- Volunteer with a local conservation organization to help conserve wildlife habitat.
- Read one of Carson’s books and pass the conservation message along to a friend or family member.

- Explore a career in natural resources or wildlife conservation.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is creating resources and tools to help you build on Rachel Carson’s legacy and instill a sense of environmental stewardship in a new generation of conservationists.

For more information, please visit <http://www.fws.gov/rachelcarson> in the coming months.



*National wildlife artist Bob Hines (1912 - 1994) and agency writer and editor Rachel Carson (1907 -1964) spent many hours along the Atlantic coast visiting national wildlife refuges and gathering material for many of the agency’s pamphlets and technical publications. Here, Hines and Carson search out marine specimens in the Florida Keys around 1955, which Hines drew as illustrations for Carson’s third book, “The Edge of the Sea.” By this time, Carson had left the Interior Department agency and was writing full-time as a nationally-known author and popularizer of biological subjects.*

USFWS/Rex Gary Schmidt

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