

# Rachel Carson Centennial

## *School Newsletter*

Rachel Carson grew up exploring the forests and streams surrounding her hillside home near the Allegheny River in Pennsylvania, and she loved to write stories about her adventures. One of her stories was even published in a magazine when she was only 10 years old. When she went to college, she studied English and wanted to become a writer. It wasn't until she took her first biology course that she fell in love with plants and animals and changed her mind to pursue a career in science.

Her talent for writing and her degree in biology provided the perfect springboard for her first job with the government. She began working for the Bureau of Fisheries (now the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service) during the depression, writing radio scripts about marine life. Her ability to understand complex environmental issues and explain them to the general public in an interesting way combined her passions and paved her way to success.

She continued to work for the government, and submitted her stories about the government's research to magazines and local newspapers. She became so successful at writing that she began to write books. Her first book was called *Under the Sea Wind* and described the life forms that live in the ocean. Her second book, *The Sea Around Us*, focused on the relationships between the earth, oceans and moon, and was so popular that it gave her enough money to resign from the government and become a full-time author. Then she published *The Edge of the Sea* about the organisms that live in the tide pools, shallows and marshes along the Atlantic shoreline.

But it was her final book, *Silent Spring*, that sparked an environmental revolution. *Silent Spring* brought the risks of chemical pesticides to the attention of the American public.

Rachel Carson wrote about the pesticide DDT, used to control mosquitoes in coastal areas and agricultural pests on farmlands. When it rained, DDT would wash off the soil and into the waterways. There, it was absorbed by aquatic plants and animals. Fish ate the plants and animals, and then eagles ate the fish. When eagles became poisoned with DDT, they were unable to form strong eggshells. So when adults tried to incubate their eggs, the eggshells would crack. Because of *Silent Spring*, people realized how damaging these chemicals can be, not only to animals, but people too. The government banned DDT, and the recovery of such species as the peregrine falcon and the bald eagle, would not have happened when they did were it not for the alarm that Carson sounded in *Silent Spring*.

Rachel Carson combined her two consuming passions, writing and biology, into a tool to tell the American public how human activities can be dangerous to wildlife.

In this same spirit, schoolchildren can help raise awareness about threatened and endangered species in their area and educate their school classmates about environmental issues in a school newsletter.

A school newsletter celebrating Rachel Carson's legacy incorporates history, language arts and writing skills, civics and government, art and science. It can be a project for one class, or for many classes because it spans so many subject areas.

To make a school newsletter, students can each create their own pieces or work in teams. Students can research their story, interview the experts, write a piece and include a photo. A newsletter can be a paper copy to distribute at school or be online

through the school internet site. Newsletters have a wide range of possibilities and can be easily tailored to both group size and varying ages.

A school newsletter can contain a variety of topics. For example:

- Rachel Carson's biography
- Rachel Carson's book *Silent Spring* and the following impact on bald eagle recovery
- History of the bald eagle as our national symbol
- Bald eagles in your state
- Places to see bald eagles in your community
- Other plants and animals affected by DDT
- DDT as it is used today
- Pesticides and fertilizers that people use in their own backyards
- Threatened and endangered species in your state and the threats to their decline
- Threatened and endangered species across the country or all over the world
- Local environmental issues
- Volunteer opportunities in the community to help keep wildlife habitat healthy
- Simple changes people can make to keep a healthier environment
- What people are already doing in your area to help endangered species

To acquire information and inspire creative ideas for a school newsletter, encourage students to begin researching information on the internet, visit their local library or scan the newspaper headlines for current hot environmental issues. But then take it to the next level! Set up interview with local biologists or elected officials, visit a national wildlife refuge to watch wildlife, volunteer to monitor water quality at a local stream, or set up a birdfeeder and take inventory of the birds using the feeder. The possibilities are endless!

A newsletter about Rachel Carson and her impact on the recovery of our nation's symbol should include factual information and can range across a diversity of topics, but it doesn't have to be entirely science based. Creative writing and poetry describing how it makes students feel to read about the plight of endangered species can be very powerful and inspirational to fellow classmates. To make the newsletter visually appealing, encourage students to photo-document their research and take pictures of local wildlife.

When the final version of the newsletter is completed, send a paper copy or email an electronic copy to the Fish and Wildlife Service at the contact information below and it will get posted on the Service's Rachel Carson website.

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**U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service**  
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