RCC Bird Watch and Wonder Program

“The heron stood motionless, his neck curved back on his shoulders, his bill poised to spear fish as they darted past his legs.”
— Rachel Carson, *Under the Sea-Wind*

“Flying up the estuary from the river, the osprey carried the mullet headfirst in his talons.”
— Rachel Carson, *Under the Sea-Wind*

“One way to open your eyes to unnoticed beauty is to ask yourself, What if I had never seen this before? What if I knew I would never see it again?”
— Rachel Carson, *The Sense of Wonder*
"...a sanderling could, if he were quick and sure of foot, insert his bill and draw out the crab before the next wave came tumbling in."
Rachel Carson, *Under the Sea-Wind*

“In that dawn chorus one hears the throb of life itself”
— Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*
With *Silent Spring* (1962), Rachel Carson alerted Americans to the threat of a time, in the words of Keats, when “no birds sing.” The beloved American Robin, the harbinger of spring, was dying on lawns, on campus quadrangles, on the front porch of families. The majestic bald eagle, soaring ospreys, and the spectacularly swift Peregrine Falcon were endangered, too.

Carson aroused the public, stirred an environmental movement. The Rachel Carson Council, many, many other organizations, writers, scientists, and ordinary citizens were moved to action. DDT and similar pesticides and herbicides were banned. The Clean Air, Clear Water, Endangered Species, and other acts were passed. The EPA was formed. The birds and their habitat, their songs and beauty were protected, as was the health of humans, which, as Carson showed, is inseparable from that of birds and bees and beasts.

The *RCC Bird Watch and Wonder* program seeks to protect today’s birds and preserve and protect the ecosystems, the very planet, on which they and we depend. Since the 1970s, the number of North American birds has declined by some 30%. Global climate change, rampant development and sprawl, the continued use of toxic chemicals, the decline in insects, the toll from cars and towering buildings are among the culprits.
But Rachel Carson’s legacy is not just of watchfulness and warning. There is wonder—imagination, empathy, love. Carson and we are drawn to birds from childhood as the nearest, most visible, most vibrant visitors from the world of nature. Poets, artists, photographers, writers have drawn them to our hearts. Audubon, Susan Fenimore Cooper, Florence Merriam Bailey, Mabel Osgood Wright, Roger Tory Peterson, Marjorie Stoneham Douglas, J. Drew Lanham, Jennifer Ackerman, Deborah Cramer, and many more have helped us care, to feel for, to love the birds. We wonder at their colors, their flight, their songs—how they think and build and play—such small creatures who find their way across astonishing distances, entire oceans and continents, to reproduce and flourish.

Rachel Carson is also known for her ocean trilogy, three incomparable, best-selling books about the evolution, mysteries and grandeur of the sea and the marine life that inhabits it. But even her first and most finely wrought book, *Under the Sea-Wind* (1941), opens with the slow, steady wingbeats of a mysterious bird who approaches the North Carolina shore on a moonlit evening. “Its wings were pure black, and from tip to their spread was more than the length of a man’s arm. It flew steadily and without haste across the sound, its progress as measured and as that of the shadows
which little by little were dulling the bright water path. The bird was called Rynchops, the black skimmer.”

It is this sense of mystery, of delight and wonder, of empathy that is essential if we are ever to change how we act in the world. It is why we act to save the birds and the birthright of our planet. The RCC Bird Watch and Wonder program invites you to share your own stories, photos, observations, art, essays, as well as your actions and advocacy, with us so we can share them widely wherever birds, and those who watch and wonder, can be found. Rachel Carson believed it was as important to feel as to think. We intend to do both with the latest news and science and stories about birds and the world that they and we inhabit. Join with us now to enter into the long, proud line of those who have loved the birds and fought to save them – and us.

The Latest on Birds and Our World

Supreme Court Ruling is Bad News for Birds and Everyone Else, Too

The court’s ruling in the West Virginia v. Environmental Protection Agency case limits our ability to respond to the climate crisis and could have other serious implications.

“This ruling by the Supreme Court directly threatens our ability to protect birds, people, and the places we need,” said Marshall Johnson, chief conservation officer, National Audubon Society. “Birds are telling us that the climate is changing and more action is needed. Stripping agencies like the EPA of their ability to respond to these real and urgent
threats puts our communities, birds, and other wildlife at greater risk.” Read more

Birds Are Remarkable and Beautiful Animals – and They’re Disappearing From Our World

When the poet Mary Oliver wrote “Instructions for living a life,” she reminded us: “Pay attention. Be astounded. Tell about it.”

This past autumn, wildlife officials announced that a bird, a male bar-tailed godwit, flew nonstop across the Pacific Ocean 8,100 miles from Alaska to Australia in just under 10 days. Fitted with a small solar-powered satellite tag, the godwit achieved “a land bird flight record”. But of course godwits have been doing this for centuries. Come next April-May, all things well, determined godwits will make the trip in reverse, bound for Alaska to nest and raise their young. Read more

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