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Environmental Hero: Rachel Carson

Biologist, Writer, Ecologist

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"Over increasingly large areas of the United States, spring now comes unheralded by the return of the birds, and the early mornings are strangely silent where once they were filled with the beauty of bird song."

- *Silent Spring* (1962)

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Rachel Carson (1907-1964) stunned the world with the publication of *Silent Spring*, her lyrical yet scientific account of the dangers of pesticides to the natural world, including humans. Almost immediately Carson was flooded with letters from those moved by her account but was vilified by the pesticide industry. Despite the attacks, her research and conclusions were firmly supported by reputable scientists, and she was awarded the Albert Schweitzer Medal that same year.



Rachel Carson (Photo courtesy U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service)

As a young child in Pennsylvania, Carson was a voracious reader and took to writing at an early age, publishing her first story at ten. She spent long hours observing nature, especially birds. As an adult, with degrees in biology and zoology, Carson continued to write, conveying the beauties and mysteries of nature - and man's hand in destroying it - with an elegance and conviction that caught the eye of editor William Shawn, who serialized in *The New Yorker* what became her second book, the highly acclaimed *The Sea Around Us*.

In the mid-1940s, Carson became alarmed by the government's increasing use of new pesticides like DDT and its harm to wildlife. "The more I learned about the use of pesticides, the more appalled I became," Carson recalled. *Silent Spring*, a best-seller that was translated into 12 languages, woke up the world to the hazards of chemicals and led to the ban of DDT in the United States in 1972.

Today, thanks to Carson, the beauty of bird song still fills spring mornings - yet we are still far from being out of the woods. Far too little is known about the hazards of most chemicals, and an international ban on DDT is still being debated. But in her lifetime Carson was fortunate to have seen the world galvanized into action by her remarkable book that made, in the words of her editor Paul Brooks, "death a celebration of life."

[Listen to Rachel Carson](#) talk about the lethal effects of DDT on bald eagles in a 1962 speech. (RealPlayer required)

[Find out more](#) about the dangers of pesticides like DDT and how Environmental Defense first got started by going to court to stop the spraying of DDT on Long Island.

To learn more about Carson visit these sites:

- [Rachel Carson.org](#)
- [Rachel Carson Council, Inc.](#)
- [Time's 100 Scientists - Rachel Carson](#)

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