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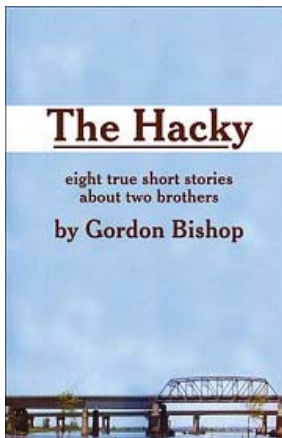
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Rachel Carson and the Malaria Tragedy

By Guest: Dennis Avery on Apr 12, 07

If Rachel Carson were still alive, April 12 would have been her 100th birthday. All over the Western World well-meaning, but misguided, souls marked that day with choruses of praise for the woman who almost singly-handed created the modern environmental movement. Her book, *Silent Spring*, warned us that man-made pesticides would kill our kids with [cancer](#) and eliminate our wild birds.

Since *Silent Spring* was published, of course, massive testing has documented that synthetic pesticides are no cancer threat to humans. Dr. Bruce Ames, who received the National [Science](#) Medal from President Clinton, has found that 99.999 percent of the cancer risks in our food supply come from natural pesticides which Nature has put in the fruits and vegetables to ward off the pervasive insects, fungi and diseases. Even so, the one-fourth of our population which eats the most fruits and vegetables has half the cancer risk of those who eat the least produce. So much for the toxicity of pesticide traces.

Rachel Carson's major impact on the planet has been to discourage the use of a safe, cheap pesticide called DDT to suppress disease-bearing mosquitoes. North America and Europe used DDT to eradicate [malaria](#). After our children were safe, we told the Third World not to use it because it might harm their bird populations.

The absence of DDT has led to the needless deaths of at least 30 million people from malaria and yellow fever in the tropics. (Five times as many as Hitler killed in his concentrations death camps, albeit inadvertently). Most of them were helpless African children. In addition, malaria has been allowed to blight the lives of perhaps 1 billion chronic malaria sufferers, who are too often unable to work and further erode economic resources by requiring [family nursing](#) care. The millions of malaria cases in the tropics may, just by themselves, explain half of the poverty and human degradation on the planet today.

It's not widely known that Ms. Carson originally had a co-author for *Silent Spring*. His name was Edwin [Diamond](#), and he had been Science Editor of *Newsweek*. Early in the drafting of the book, he resigned from the project. He declared later that *Silent Spring* was an "emotional, alarmist book seeking to cause Americans to mistakenly believe their world is being poisoned."

About saving birds: Nothing could be more appropriate for Rachel's 100th birthday than to dial up the Audubon Society's annual Christmas eagle counts from 1900-2000 for a first-hand view of the destruction wrought on our national bird by DDT. The "Journey North [Bald Eagles](#)" website has it, among others.

The chart shows fewer than 100 eagles counted per year from 1900 to about 1940 in the inhabited regions of the United States. Farmers, hunters, and fishermen shot and poisoned our national bird because it competed for fish—and occasionally lambs and calves. The government even paid a bounty for the dead birds.

Fortunately, for us and the eagles, the Bald Eagle Protection Act was passed in 1940, and the bounties ended. This began a slow but eventually spectacular surge in eagle numbers. DDT was not used in North America until 1946; by 1972, when DDT lost its registration, the annual Christmas bird count was up nearly 3000 eagles. In recent years, Audubon has counted as many as 16,000 eagles per year.

One of the most effective Third World uses of DDT is to spray the inside of homes. It's the most cost-effective mosquito repellent known. Instead of a mosquito entering the home; biting



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someone; spreading the disease; and dying hours later, the mosquito never comes in. One application every six months is enough to reduce malaria rates by 60 percent. DDT is the only highly effective strategy we have for suppressing this massive problem. If malaria made a comeback in America, the EPA would have to re-register DDT.

The U.S. Agency for International Development is now offering modest funding for the indoor use of DDT in poor tropical countries—30 years late. Happy Birthday, Ms. Carson.

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By Guest: Dennis Avery on Apr 12, 07 | Email | Profile Permalink

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The items below only apply to non-columnist opeds:

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