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Famed UF naturalist Archie Carr is dead



Dr. Carr

By EUGENE MORRIS
Sun staff writer

Archie Fairly Carr Jr., the University of Florida zoology professor whose studies brought the plight of sea turtles to the world's attention, died of cancer Thursday at his home on Wewa Pond near Micanopy. He was 77.

During his 55-year affiliation with the university, Dr. Carr compiled the first comprehensive list of Florida's reptiles and amphibians and frequently led worldwide expeditions. He was the longest-tenured professor at UF.

One of his many books, "The Windward Road," created a worldwide movement to protect Caribbean green turtles.

A native of Mobile, Ala., Dr. Carr came to the university during the Depression years hoping to earn an English degree and be-

come a teacher. But a professor kindled in him a suppressed love for nature and convinced him to change his major to biology.

Some former associates and longtime friends remembered Dr. Carr as a genuine naturalist who was more comfortable behind the scenes than in the limelight.

"When I recall Archie, I think of a Renaissance man who was accomplished in so many fields and who was a delight to be with," said David Anthony, a member of the Florida Marine Fisheries Commission and a professor emeritus at UF. He and Dr. Carr were friends for more than 30 years.

"Archie was always the same fundamentally shy unassuming guy who was most comfortable around a small group of friends," Anthony said. "He was a great man

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of very wide accomplishments. His impact will long be felt in Florida, the nation and around the world. We will miss him."

Another friend of more than two decades, Dr. Edward O. Wilson, delivered the keynote address in March when Dr. Carr received the UF Presidential Medal for 50 years of service. Wilson, recipient of the university's first Archie Carr Medal in 1979, is a science professor at Harvard University in Cambridge, Mass.

Wilson called Dr. Carr "a great naturalist and explorer of the tropical environment who could stand alone on his own principles for years at a time without applause."

"Archie was a rare and almost vanishing breed of scientist who brought a freshness of vision to the ancient imagery of an unlimited natural world that awaits young scientists," Wilson said. "He was an inspiration to biologists entering the fields of animal behavior and tropical biology around the world."

Thirty years after they met, Bob Bryan, UF provost, said Dr. Carr always maintained a lighthearted wit and a sense of humor about life and work.

"I believe he was the first internationally known scientist that we had on our faculty," Bryan said. "He was the first person to bring international renown to the university."

Dr. Carr received his bachelor's degree from UF in 1932 and his master's degree two years later. In 1937, he was the first person to earn a doctorate in biology from UF. He was named graduate research professor in 1959. He remained at the university until he died.

In 1972, UF named Dr. Carr a distinguished alumnus. In 1984, he was the first recipient of the National Audubon Society's highest honor, the Hal Borland Award. In March, he received the UF Presidential Medallion for lifelong contributions to zoology and the university. In May, he received the Eminent Ecologist Award by the Ecological Society of America.

Countless students credited Dr. Carr with generating their enthusiasm for zoology. Occasionally, he ate insects in the classroom to hold their attention.

Dr. Carr wrote 11 books and more than 100 scientific papers and articles on sea turtles. In 1952, his "Handbook

for Turtles" won the Daniel Giraud Elliott Medal by the National Academy of Sciences. "High Jungles and Low," published in 1953 and based on his experiences in Honduras, won Dr. Carr the 1955 John Burroughs Medal for exemplary nature writing.

But his book, "The Windward Road," which described the declining numbers of green turtles in the Caribbean, began a worldwide movement to protect them. A chapter in the book won the 1956 O. Henry award for best non-fiction short story.

"The Windward Road," considered a classic among conservationists, led to the establishment in 1959 of the Caribbean Conservation Corp., a non-profit group dedicated to studying and saving turtles from extinction. Dr. Carr was the group's technical director. His findings are credited with helping to establish Tortuguero, a green turtle sanctuary on the Costa Rican coast, the only significant egg-laying area in the Caribbean for the turtles.

Before his death, Dr. Carr was helping organize the world's largest sea turtle center at UF. He was continuing his study of the effects of man-made pollutants on sea turtles. He found that the turtles often eat plastic garbage, tar balls and other forms of persistent junk in the oceans, clogging their digestive tracts and killing them.

"Records of such mishaps have increased markedly in recent years," he said in a recent interview, "and this definitely poses a threat to sea turtle survival, if not now, then 10 or 15 years in the future."

Dr. Carr is survived by his wife, Marjorie Carr of Micanopy; four sons, Archie F. Carr III of New York, Stephen H. Carr and Thomas Carr, both of Micanopy, and David Carr of Tallahassee; a daughter, Mimi Carr of Gainesville; a brother, Thomas D. Carr of Gainesville; and two grandchildren.

The funeral will be held at 11 a.m. Tuesday at the First Presbyterian Church at 106 SW 3rd St. in Gainesville. Burial will follow at Evergreen Cemetery.

The family requests that expressions of sympathy may be in the form of donations to the Florida Defenders of the Environment, 1523 NW 4th St., Gainesville, Fla., 32601, or the Caribbean Conservation Corp., P.O. Box 3942, Tallahassee, Fla., 32315.

UF Information Services contributed to this report.