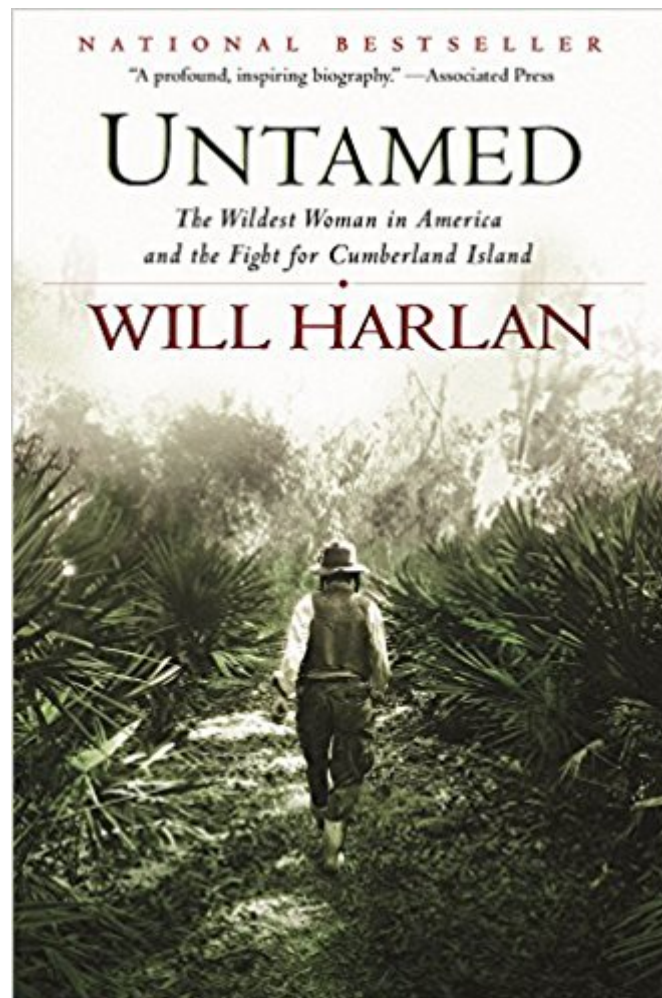




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# Untamed: The Wildest Woman In America And The Fight For Cumberland Island



## Synopsis

Carol Ruckdeschel is the wildest woman in America. She wrestles alligators, eats roadkill, rides horses bareback, and lives in a ramshackle cabin that she built by hand in an island wilderness. A combination of Henry David Thoreau and Jane Goodall, Carol is a self-taught scientist who has become a tireless defender of sea turtles on Cumberland Island, a national park off the coast of Georgia. Cumberland, the country's largest and most biologically diverse barrier island, is celebrated for its windswept dunes and feral horses. Steel magnate Thomas Carnegie once owned much of the island, and in recent years, Carnegie heirs and the National Park Service have clashed with Carol over the island's future. What happens when a dirt-poor naturalist with only a high school diploma becomes an outspoken advocate on a celebrated but divisive island? *Untamed* is the story of an American original standing her ground and fighting for what she believes in, no matter the cost.

## Book Information

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A New York Times Bestseller  
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A Daily Beast Best Nonfiction Book of the Year  
Winner of the Langum Malott Prize  
Winner of the 2015 Society of Environmental Journalists Rachel Carson Environment Book Award  
An Advisory Council for the Georgia Center for the Book's &#147;Books All Georgians Should Read' &#147;  
Vivid. . . . Ms. Ruckdeschel's biography, and the way this wandering soul came to settle for so many decades on Cumberland Island, is big enough on its

own, but Mr. Harlan hints at bigger questions. Who does this island belong to? The Park Service, the Carnegies, Carol—and, for that matter, the turtles? What is the difference between stewardship and ownership? Carol Ruckdeschel found a home as the latest in a series of women who have tried to protect Cumberland Island. The difference being that, rather than being a Carnegie, she is a benevolent invasive species of one. . . . Wall Street Journal;Harlan intimately and expansively profiles a fearless Southern island dweller. . . . A moving homage and an adventure story that artfully articulates the ferocities of nature and humanity. . . . Kirkus Reviews;Carol Ruckdeschel isn't quite your mother's idea of a role model, but she is my idea of an inspiring woman. Her gifts are many, her commitment resolute, her contribution world-class. And boy—as you'll read;has she had fun. What a story! It's as beautiful as the island she loves. . . . Carl Safina, author of *The View from Lazy Point* and *A Sea in Flames*;Now this is an adventure story. *Untamed* is the true-life saga of a brilliant, beautiful woman who became her own tall tale. Just to survive, Carol Ruckdeschel had to become as elusive and mysterious as the creatures she first set off into the wilderness to study. Hunted by her enemies, stalked by an ex-lover, living off the land, Ruckdeschel found herself locked in a battle of wits to stay alive and pursue her scientific passion. This is no *Sad Girl on a One-Year Quest for Love and Backbone*; Carol Ruckdeschel is on a mission, and she's smart and lethal enough to deal with anyone who tries to stop her. . . . Christopher McDougall, author of *Born to Run*;A true action hero, Carol Ruckdeschel is using her powers of insight, persuasion, and personal commitment to protect a wilderness island off the coast of Georgia. She's not just bemoaning the tragic decline of the natural world that sustains all life on earth, humans and turtles included. She is also putting her own life on the line to save what's left. Thanks to Carol, there is hope for wild creatures who have preceded humankind by hundreds of millions of years—and hope for an enduring future for ourselves as well. . . . Sylvia Earle, record-setting oceanographer, National Geographic explorer-in-residence, 2009 TED Prize winner, Mission Blue founder, Time's first Hero of the Planet, and author of *The World Is Blue*;Wild country produces wild people, who sometimes are just what's needed to keep that wild cycle going. This is a memorable portrait. . . . Bill McKibben, author of *The End of Nature*, winner of the 2013 Gandhi Peace Award, founder of 350.org;Get ready to inhale steaming carcasses, gun smoke, and salty sea air. Harlan has a magic touch for storytelling. He rings out every sensory detail in this compelling sketch of a controversial, no-holds-barred life. . . . Jennifer S. Holland, National Geographic writer and New York Times bestselling author of *Unlikely Friendships*;Open this book to the brine of salt marsh, the musk of turtles and sea breezes, and the astonishing story of Carol

Ruckdeschel. From the first line I was captivated by this biography of a fierce and enigmatic passion for wildness, mesmerizing and beautiful. May we all learn something of love from it.âJanisse Ray, author of *Ecology of a Cracker Childhood*âUntamed is not only a page-turner but also a show-stopper. Its engaging protagonist, Carol Ruckdeschelâa combination of Jane Goodall and Annie Oakleyâis kaleidoscopic in her paradoxes:âbrutal and benevolent, savage and sympathetic, cutthroat and compassionate.â Will Harlan has written an environmental classic that belongs on the shelf alongside Carson, Leopold, Muir, and Thoreau. This crafty, adventurous biography reads like a good novel and leaves readers in tears. Itâs a tale of an American hero told by an American hero, and the collaboration is luminous.ââThomas Rain Crowe, author of *Zoroâs Field: My Life in the Appalachian Woods*"This is going to be a winner. I loved itâand was even choked up a time or two by Carolâs passion to save wild Cumberland. An âundertow of aweâ sweeps beneath the entire story. As Carolâs life reveals, the battles for wilderness are many and the victories are short-lived, but ultimately the fight comes down to one thing: pure, unwavering love."âBrooke Williams, author of *Halflives: Reconciling Work and Wildness*âDeliciously engrossing. . . . Readers are in for a wild ride.ââCitizen-Times (Asheville)âThis is one gorgeous book, a testament not only to Will Harlanâs obvious writing chops but also what the best in journalism is all about, the passion to dig and go beyond the obvious. Harlanâs unflinching, inspirational biography of Carol Ruckdeschel . . . shows the reader her amazing character, spine and spunk . . . Untamed is a unique portrayal of a unique crusader . . . Very thought-provoking stuff, with beautiful writing and an eye-for-detail.ââSociety of Environmental Journalists

Will Harlan is the editor in chief of Blue Ridge Outdoors Magazine and has had work appear in National Geographic Adventure, Sports Illustrated, and the Wall Street Journal. He is also one of the countryâs top trail runners. He lives in the mountains of North Carolina.

I read this book with great interest and I enjoyed it. Whether some of the anecdotal stories about Carol are all entirely accurate or not, as some reviewers question, is unimportant. In fact, the stories themselves are unimportant. With something like a 100 visits to Cumberland over the past 30 years, I have heard them all before. Cumberland Island is a special place. The south part, is very friendly to families for hiking, camping, shark tooth hunting, meandering through the islandâs rich history, or spending a day at one of the worldâs great beaches. The north part is a little harder to enjoy, and well it should be. It is half an island where nature should be left to her own devices. Had it not been

for a favored president's son getting married in the north, few would care about it. Even as you read this, there are a lot of people trying to turn Cumberland Island, this magnificent resource, into something that we already have a lot of; paved bike trails, motor vehicle tours, parking lots, beach boardwalks and all that come with them. I enjoy that too, but, a few places need to be preserved, giving turtle nesting a priority over sea kayak rentals and suntan lotion sales. Today, Cumberland Island is special, but, fragile. Fragile, not because of shifting sands, occasional wildfires, or summer storms, but fragile because a few political decisions could make it just another beach place, like the rest of the East Coast. I hope that everybody reads this book and that every reader comes away with the notion that the special places like Cumberland require the public's constant surveillance to keep them special. Harlan did not make this message explicit, but, it is imbedded in his book's pages. The government has done a lot to preserve our natural heritage, but, they often need help in making the right decisions and we need to keep an eye on them. Carol has kept an eye on them and deserves a major share of credit for how Cumberland has turned out.

I've visited Cumberland Island many times over the past 40 years and can't believe that the Park Service is so villainous as depicted here. The use of dialog dating back around 70 years gives the work an air of fiction, an air augmented by the fact that the author seems to view everything in terms of black/white (no nuances). For a more balanced treatment of issues on the island, read "Cumberland Island: Strong Women, Wild Horses."

Will Harlan's "Untamed" is a readable and informative screed about the life and crusades of Carol Ruckdeschel. While describing her a misfit would be an injustice, she has battled against the powers that be for decades in order to preserve Cumberland Island as a wildlife refuge. I had read a piece about her in The New Yorker by John McPhee years ago. To say her approach to saving wildlife is idiosyncratic would be an understatement. Her in-your-face confrontational attitude to the old monied residents, the National Park Service, shrimp fishers, the US Navy and hack politicians (her friend Jimmy Carter being a notable exception) may have undermined her cause at times. Hers is an interesting life down a path few would dare to take. There is no doubt the country owes her and others for the preservation of one of our most beautiful barrier islands on the East Coast. Cumberland will doubtlessly need more advocates in the future but they may not need to be quite as controversial as she to be effective.

This is a heartbreaking story of courage and passion -- and, at least to this reader, of hope lost.

Carol "Turtlesell" spent her life living her beliefs, and Harlan beautifully portrays how difficult that is. Many of us care about the environment in an abstract way, romanticize wilderness without ever experiencing it, and mourn the loss of species without actually seeing the individual animals die. Carol has the guts to watch the tragedies up-close and personal. I have visited Cumberland Island many times in the past, and Harlan's descriptions capture its magic perfectly. However, I plan to never go there again, and I hope this book and sure-to-come film do not lead tourists to overwhelm the place, ironically finishing the ruin of the wilderness they would come to see. Just read the book, know that Cumberland is there, and do as Carol asks: Leave it alone.

Have been to Cumberland every year for many years and know the island and the history well. Have also read about every book, both fiction and nonfiction, that took place on the island. This book provides some details that gave a different scenario of events and filled in some of the blanks that others left empty. The work that Carol has done is exceptional, although controversial. One lesson from her life that cannot be reputed is that we can live with much less material stuff.

I live in Georgia, but I have never been to Cumberland Island. This book was fascinating, and I think it would be to anyone, not just someone from Georgia. Carol, the subject of the book (although I think she would say the island is the subject of the book) is beyond compassionate. As a child she identified with the animals, with most any living being, even if most people would shy away. She had better luck with non humans than humans, and she suffered for her losses. Carol was and maybe even is the premiere turtle nesting expert, having lived years tracking their journeys. Never one for pretense, Carol is quick to use every bit of what is provided, and has found little need for the luxury of modern life. Her joys are simple, a sunrise, and sitting on her porch at the end of the day. Fighting with both the Carnegie and Candler families over the preservation of the island, she has turned even the National Parks Service into the enemy because their efforts do not go far enough. Leave the island alone..that is Carol's mantra. I admire her efforts, she champions for wildlife, in the long run making the world a better place, one critter at a time.

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