

Women and Nature

Women and nature have always been inseparable. Nature invented woman and she invented agriculture. This discovery dates back to prehistoric times, men dedicated to look for food while women cleaned and cooked the animals men brought to them. Then women found out that discarded seeds of fruits and vegetables, could sprout giving life to new plants and that, if regularly planted and treated, they guaranteed food! So that, women's interest in plants grew more and more. But they didn't stop improving and applied their discoveries in other more specific fields such as: painting, literature, chemistry, biology and physics. There are many women who have dedicated studies and research to the discovery and protection of the environment. Among these: **Maria Sibylla Merian**, naturalist and painter of the late 1600s, wrote and painted the work *The metamorphosis of insects*. She was the first who studied caterpillars and butterflies, and her work founded the entomology. **Mary Anning**, palaeontologist, fossil collector, was the author of many important findings in the field of marine fossils from the Jurassic period, including the first complete skeletons of some dinosaurs. Her work contributed to the fundamental change on what was believed to be the age of the Earth. **Nettie Stevens**, a geneticist lived in late 19th century, discovered the chromosomal basis of sex by studying the worms of the flour. **Rachel Carson**, biologist and zoologist, launched the environmental movement, wrote *Silent Spring*, which denounced the

devastating effect of the abuse of DDT on animals, man and nature. **Wangari Maathai**, activist and founder of the *Green Belt Movement*, an organization that takes care of replanting the trees to replace those that have been cut down daily by the vile practice of deforestation. Wangari received the Nobel Peace Prize for planting over forty million trees. **Sylvia Earle**, an oceanographer, who carried out studies on the damage caused to the ecosystem by oil spills in the Persian Gulf following the Gulf War. She claims that when the oceans will be irreparably polluted, we will be condemned to extinction. Furthermore, other women have consecrated their lives to the protection of some animal species: **Birute Galdikas** for Orangutans with *Orangutan Foundation International*; **Jane Goodall** for chimpanzees with the *Jane Goodall Institute*; **Joy Adamson**, her moving story with the lioness Elsa, her “adoptive daughter”, told in the book and Oscar-winning film *Born Free*. She was brutally murdered, and later, her husband too, by the poachers who gave the blame and guiltiness to the lions; **Daphne Sheldrick** was fond of elephants and wrote *Sheldrick Wildlife Trust*; **Dian Fossey** dedicated her life to the observation and protection of gorillas in Rwanda. She was brutally murdered, officially by unknown people, truly by the poachers. Her life is told in the Oscar-winning film *Gorillas in the mist*. Her work inspired **Ellen Degeneres** who founded the *Dian Fossey and Ellen Degeneres centre* to protect endangered animal species.

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