

Rudloe's Gulf Coast Crusade

From Panacea to Pensacola wildlife habitats are shrinking

By Robert Lucas

His supporters consider him, "one of the foremost conservationists in America" and his detractors say, "he is a meddlesome fool who should be shot."

Jack Rudloe, author and marine biologist, will be remembered as the man who would not give up, who fought land speculators and developers to preserve the coastal environment at Panacea.

He has been compared to world-famous environmentalist Rachel Carson because his eyes and thoughts have always been on the future — how the generations to come will live and hopefully flourish as a direct result of what we do with the environment today.

In addition to the obvious reasons for preserving the environment and the natural habitat of endangered species, Rudloe and his wife, Anne, would add another — the benefits to be derived from scientific research.

In Anne's words, "Species should not be allowed to be destroyed by our wanton misuse of the land because of all of the millions of plants and animals on earth, scientists have screened only a small fraction of them for lifesaving and unique properties. Allowing species to become extinct at the current worldwide rate is depriving us of what could be incredibly valuable lifesaving compounds."

Since 1964, the Gulf Specimen Company has collected fish and invertebrates for anti-cancer drug screening for the National Cancer Institute. Rudloe, who is a self-taught naturalist, founded the company in 1962. He and Anne collect both ordinary and exotic specimens of marine life and ship them to commercial and university laboratories all over the country. Students as well as scientists use the specimens for basic study and for research into possible lifesaving and life-sus-



PHOTO: Robert Lucas

After the seine is hauled in, Jack and Anne quickly examine the contents and return unwanted specimens to the Gulf.

taining properties.

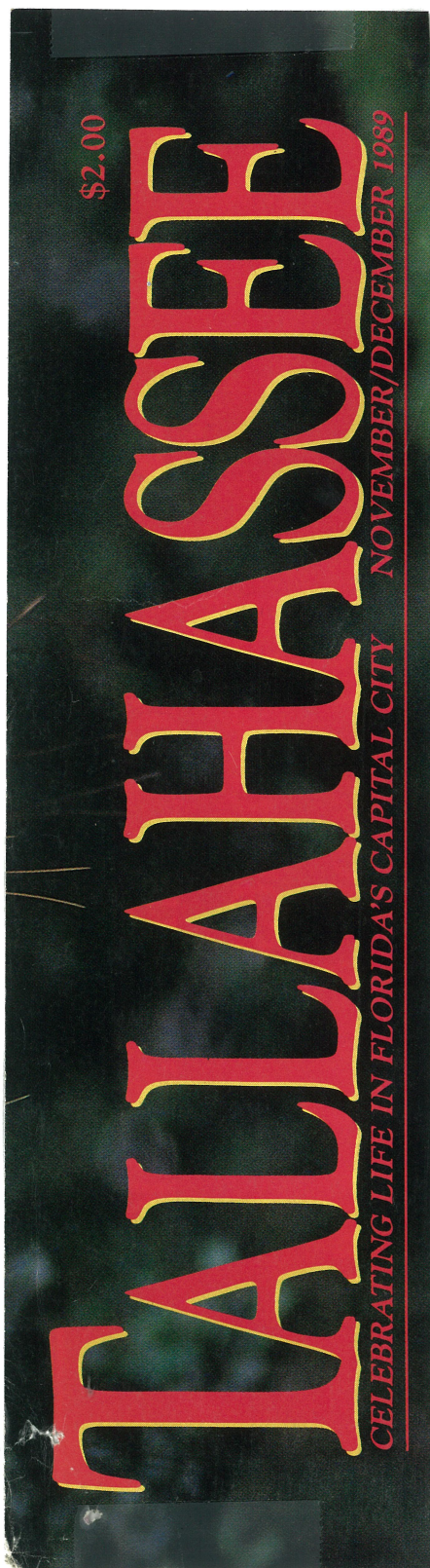
For example, the bryozoan, a brown animal that lives in the ocean resembles a small plant and produces within its own body a toxic compound which presumably deters other animals from eating it. When that compound is extracted it turns out to be an effective anti-cancer drug. It kills certain types of tumor cells; scientists are interested in using the drug in clinical trials against various types of cancers.

Because the extract of the bryozoan is almost impossible to synthesize, the scientists at the National Cancer Institute are interested in developing techniques for growing the bryozoan com-

mercially. According to the Rudloes this is part of a larger program initiated by the Institute in which scientists screen species of wild plants and animals for compounds that would be effective not only in treating cancer but, also in treating AIDS.

Since 1984, the Gulf Specimen Company has been supplying electric rays to several institutions for their work on Alzheimer's Disease. Each month, Rudloe collects rays from shrimp trawlers working off Apalachicola, and ships them to the Howard Hughes Medical Institute and Massachusetts General Hospital.

Soon after Rudloe began collecting electric rays, rumors began to circu-



late that he was directly involved in Alzheimer's research. Anne was quick to set the record straight.

"The Gulf Specimen Company does not do Alzheimer's research," she said. "It does provide a support service in that it sends animals to the laboratories where this research is being conducted."

If Rudloe's detractors could say that the Rudloes were becoming affluent because of the volume of business generated by the Gulf Specimen Company, then their outspoken stand on environmental issues could be understood. On the contrary, the Gulf Specimen Company provides them with a meager income.

Their principal income comes from their publications. Rudloe is the author of five books, all of which have received international acclaim. His articles have appeared in *Scientific American*, *Sports Illustrated*, *National Geographic*, *Natural History* and *National Wildlife* as well as in numerous scientific journals.

Anne, who received her doctorate from the Department of Biological Sciences at Florida State University, has been published in *Underwater Naturalist*, *National Geographic*, *Readers Digest* and *National Wildlife* and in many scientific journals.

Recently, the Rudloes were offered positions which would take them out of state and which would provide them with a joint income in excess of six figures. They declined. They reasoned that the need for their services and knowledge was more critical in Florida, a state already torn apart and abused by irresponsible development. Their goal, to protect the environment.

The reputation of the comparatively simple Gulf Specimen Company at Panacea has drawn scientists, researchers, conservationists, federal and state officials, media representatives, naturalists and literally thousands of school children from throughout the region. Year after year school buses fill the side-yard parking lot and the overflow lines the street beyond the gate. The Gulf Specimen Company has become a tourist attraction, something to be reckoned with in the community.

Depending on the resident with whom one speaks, the Rudloes "... really care about today's environment and its influence on the future. Their goal is not to stop all progress or to curtail well-planned development, but

to stop at all costs the very real threat to our ecosystems."

Opponents, including one who has already boasted about "doing away" with Rudloe, have tried to swing public opinion against the Rudloes. These voices, behind amiable masks, claim that "... if Jack Rudloe had his way Panacea would become a ghost town."

"Not so," say the Rudloes, "take a good look at what has happened to the Everglades, at what has happened to Lake Jackson, at the excessive building from Miami to West Palm Beach, at the ruination of large tracts of waterfront from Panama City to Pensacola and at the destruction of habitats throughout the state. Few, too few, are thinking about the legacy we shall leave for future generations."

Are the Rudloes the anti-everything radicals their denigrators portray? Or are they dedicated conservationists who are committed to leaving the environment a little better than when they found it? Either way, they are having a profound effect on the Gulf Coast at Panacea. ♣

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