



Photo by Nina Tasi

A Conversation: Carter Roberts & Jen Esten

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Jan Harrison

AIL was excited to host [World Wildlife Fund](#) (WWF) President & CEO Carter Roberts and local wildlife photographer Jen Esten at a members-only event on July 25 at the Black Box Theater located at Colby-Sawyer College's Davidow Center for Art + Design.

WWF, the world's largest network of international conservation organizations, works across 100 countries and enjoys the support of 5 million members worldwide. Its Panda logo is recognized and well-loved throughout the world.

Roberts leads WWF's efforts to save the world's great ecosystems and address climate change by linking science, field, and policy programs with an ambitious initiative to work with markets and businesses to lighten their impact on the planet. He has worked with communities and heads of state in North America, Africa, Latin America and Asia; and has built partnerships with some of the world's largest corporations to set new industry standards for resource efficiency. Before coming to WWF in 2004, Roberts led international conservation and science programs for fifteen years at The Nature Conservancy. His philosophy is reflected in the following quote: "People look to WWF and its leadership to bring imagination and perseverance to the important work of conservation, and to build bridges between government, civil society and business in devising solutions at the scale of the challenges we face. The world demands no less of us."

Jen Esten co-authors the [Pleasant Lake Protective Association](#) (PLPA) e-newsletter, *The Nature of Pleasant Lake*, with her husband, Jonathan Waage. Jen has been photographing the birds on Pleasant Lake since 2007. She is currently chair of the Wildlife Committee for PLPA and active member and volunteer with New Hampshire Audubon and Audubon of the Everglades.

The teaming of Roberts and Esten for this presentation is a natural extension of their friendship that goes back to their childhoods. The conversation between these two friends – with Esten posing questions to Roberts – covered a wide range of themes – from the personal to those of international importance, including the following.

- **New London Connection** – Roberts' New London connection goes back four generations and fostered his love of sailing, bird watching, and community. Long-time AIL members may remember Roberts' father, John Roberts, who served as AIL curriculum chair and taught many courses in history, and his Aunt Fran, who taught art courses at AIL.
- **Love of Nature** – Roberts recalled his delight in discovering red salamanders under logs every spring in the woods and smushed on roads. This love of red salamanders will be carried over to the "ROBERTS" sign he's designing for his New London home.
- **Career Path** – After college and business school and a stint at world shaving headquarters in Boston, Roberts and a friends started a company that would provide services to mothers with newborn children. He acknowledged that the model (an early Amazon) was about 20 years too early. He moved on to The Nature Conservancy and then the WWF, where he's worked for the last 20 years.
- **Climate Change** – Roberts acknowledged that we should be nervous about climate change, but he worries more about missed opportunities. He is excited about the monies available and opportunities to invent new ways to do things, but we need to get busy! He also discussed how solutions addressing climate change and loss of nature must be intertwined.
- **Definition of Leadership** – Roberts said that a good leader sees where we are today, determines where we need to be, and figures out how to bring lots of people along to make it happen. He admitted that we live in an angry world right now, where people see things in black and white, but our work should be about being in the middle – understanding people who are different, listening to each other, being able to see the other side, and crafting bipartisan solutions that last.
- **Interesting Project** – Roberts shared a story about WWF's participation in the Global Tiger Recovery Program to double the number of Bengal tigers in the wild. While visiting Nepal, which has been extremely successful in this effort, Roberts was assisting in putting a collar on a tranquilized tiger when one of the team started shouting something in the Nepali language. Asking for a translation, he learned: "It's waking up!"
- **Politics** – Roberts stated that while the WWF is fiercely apolitical, its positions on conservation issues can make it a target for some government actions. WWF's challenging of Russia's approach to oil drilling recently resulted in Russia's designation of WWF as an "undesirable organization". This label is equivalent to a ban on the group's activities in Russia.
- **On Retirement** – New London friends frequently ask when he'll retire because they'd like to have him around more. But Roberts loves his job, thinks he's one of the luckiest people in the world, and, even after he leaves WWF to make room for the next generation, he plans to work in the conservation field as long as he can.

AIL would like to thank Esten and Roberts for this enjoyable, candid, and informative conversation, and AIL members for their participation in this special event.

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