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## A Month To Celebrate Extraordinary Scientific Achievements

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There were at least three reasons for scientists and nonscientists alike to celebrate the month of April: One was the 20th annual celebration of Earth Day on April 22. Another was the 100th birthday of Marjory Stoneman Douglas on April 7. The third was the deployment of the Hubble Space Telescope on April 25.

While all three events certainly are associated with significant activity of particular relevance to the science community, all serve as reminders that one does not necessarily need formal scientific training to make a real contribution to science.

The launch of the Hubble telescope is a fine example of this, since it calls to mind the late Milton Humason, who served as assistant to astronomer Edwin Powell Hubble, after whom the space telescope is named. Humason, who had only an eighth-grade education, was originally hired as a mule packer for the Mt. Wilson observatory workers and went on to become a full staff member. Discovering distant galaxies, he provided crucial evidence in support of Hubble's expanding universe theory.

Nor did 20 million Americans

need a scientific background 20 years ago when they participated in the first Earth Day, an event that may have appeared to be an offshoot of the antiwar movement. But with today's attention to oil spills, global warming, toxic waste, and other environmental concerns, Earth Day has entered the mainstream of American society—complete with the presidential seal of approval, the celebratory participation of schoolchildren and university students, and even the sponsorship of major corporations.

Earth Day, in short, has become a celebration of environmental awareness and education that has had considerable influence on the priorities of scientific research—and that's something we as scientists can certainly join in supporting.

As for the third notable April event, the birthday of Marjory Stoneman Douglas: In 1970 she founded an organization called Friends of the Everglades, a half-century after she had taken her first glimpse of the Florida expanse. In the years since, she has become celebrated for almost single-handedly waging a battle to protect that fragile and irreplaceable ecosystem.

The scientific value of her work

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in saving ecosystems, while enormous in having preserved the research platform of many scientists, is still probably secondary to Douglas' contribution to making environmentalism one of this country's social—as well as scientific—priorities. Fortunately, Douglas has lived long enough to see the blossoming of environmental awareness. Last year, in recognition of her contribution, she received high acclaim from the Sierra Club in the form of an honorary vice presidency.

Despite losing her eyesight, Douglas continues to speak and work on behalf of the Everglades. Her causes include protection of the Florida panther, of which there may now be fewer than 50 left in the state. (On April 27, I had the honor of joining Douglas to dedicate a statue of the Florida panther—commissioned by the Eugene Garfield Foun-

dation—as a monument to Ernest F. Coe, who conceived the idea of an Everglades National Park.)

When I first met Douglas several years ago, she spoke not only of the problems facing the Everglades and surrounding areas, but also of education and politics. She also spoke about herself. Douglas, who had little formal scientific training, had told me previously that she has always thought of herself primarily as a writer (*Current Contents*, Aug. 14, 1989). In our conversation, she noted that if you want to write about something, you have to know your subject thoroughly. Her commitment to a comprehensive involvement with the areas she has labored to preserve helps explain the continuing success of her 1943 book, *The Everglades: River of Grass* (Pineapple Press, Sarasota, Fla.), which helped launch the drive to create the Everglades National Park. ■