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Award-winning Children's Book Creators Team Up for Conservation Work with Wild Tomorrow

New York, NY—August 3, 2023: On October 6, 2023, a group of children's book authors and illustrators will embark on a two-week-long volunteer trip in South Africa with Wild Tomorrow, a nonprofit focused on reconnecting and restoring habitat for threatened wildlife in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

The newly developed group, Children's Book Creators for Conservation, is an initiative created by *New York Times* bestselling, Caldecott Honor-winning author/illustrator John Rocco and children's book author Hayley Rocco. It aims to bring passionate and conservation-minded children's book creators together to collaborate in hands-on conservation work while inspiring conservation-minded books for young readers for the greater good of the planet. "Joining us are some of the best bookmakers in the business, and I know that this experience will profoundly inspire and inform their work. I cannot wait to see what comes out of it," says CBCC co-founder John Rocco. The volunteer trip will include numerous conservation-focused opportunities which could include but are not limited to: ringing birds for research, searching alongside rangers for poacher's snares, volunteering at the local orphanage and creche (preschool), removing alien and invasive plant species from reclaimed land, rhino conservation work such as dehorning/trimming and assisting at the local rhino orphanage, and much more. The group will also be given the opportunity to study wildlife in their natural habitats on research safaris throughout the duration of the volunteer trip.

The group consists of ten award-winning children's book creators including Candace Fleming, Meg Fleming, Brian Floca, Jessica Lanan, G. Neri, Sherri Duskey Rinker, John Rocco, Hayley Rocco, Eric Rohmann, and Corban Wilkin. Collectively, their work has garnered numerous awards including multiple Caldecott Medals and honors, Robert F. Sibert Medal and honors, a Coretta Scott King honor, among many others. In addition to their volunteer work in the field, the CBCC hopes to raise \$20,000 towards the conservation efforts being made with Wild Tomorrow.

"We are extremely excited that CBCC's esteemed group of children's book creators will spend time working hands-on helping conservation efforts at Wild Tomorrow's Greater Ukuwela Nature Reserve and at our partner reserves in South Africa. Often, we hear it said that animals can't speak and need our voice. Wildlife and their wild spaces need our creative talents too, to move hearts and minds to take action to save our planet," says Wild Tomorrow's founder and executive director, John Steward. "We are very much looking forward to seeing the creative outputs inspired by this one-of-a-kind volunteer group." For more information about the fundraiser, follow: wildtomorrow.org/cbccdonate.

About Children's Book Creators for Conservation (CBCC): The CBCC is a collective group of children's book authors and illustrators who share a love of the planet, support conservation efforts, and believe that protecting biodiversity and re-wilding our planet is essential for a better tomorrow. Visit meetthewildthings.com/cbcc for more information.

About Wild Tomorrow:

Wild Tomorrow is dedicated to the protection of threatened and endangered species and the habitats they depend on for survival. They work on the ground in southern Africa with a vision for a world in which wildlife habitats are expanded and protected and where existing reserves have the resources needed to keep their animals safe. Visit wildtomorrow.org for more information.

Candace Fleming

Candace Fleming writes picture books, middle grade and young adult fiction and nonfiction.

Among her nonfiction titles are the Sibert Medal winning *Honeybee: The Busy Life of Apis Mellifera*, as well as *The Family Romanov: Murder, Rebellion and the Fall of Imperial Russia* the winner of the Los Angeles Times Book Prize and the Boston Globe-Horn Book Award, and *The Rise and Fall of Charles Lindberg*, winner of the 2021 YALSA Award for Excellence in Nonfiction for Young Adults. Her most recent nonfiction titles include *The Tide Pool Waits* and *Polar Bear*.



“...I want to come away with new eyes; a new way of looking at our world. I want to find untold stories, ones that will spark both wonder and empathy in young readers.”

Meg Fleming

Meg Fleming is the award-winning author of many books for children, including *I Was Born A Baby*, *Wondering Around*, *Sounds Like School Spirit* and her newly released, *I Live in a Tree Trunk*. Her books have been highly lauded by the American Library Association, the Canadian Children's Book Center, The Today Show, and others for their capacity to educate, inspire, and in some cases – incite fits of laughter.

Meg's lifelong love of animals and nature are a never-ending source of inspiration for her stories. She is honored to be joining the Children's Book Creators for Conservation on its first trip to South Africa in 2023 where she is looking forward to meeting some spotted and speckled critters. Meg writes from her home outside of San Francisco where she lives with her three kids, her one husband and their adorable dog, Opal.

"I am looking forward to sharing space with animals in their natural habitats while participating in efforts to protect them. There's a special kind of respect for the earth and its inhabitants that comes when we are fully immersed in wild spaces."



Brian Floca

Brian Floca is the award-winning author and illustrator of *Locomotive*, winner of the 2014 Caldecott Medal, *Moonshot: The Flight of Apollo 11*, *Lightship*, *Keeping the City Going*, and other acclaimed picture books. He has also illustrated books by the award-winning authors Avi, Maria Gianferrari, Jan Greenberg and Sandra Jordan, Laura Amy Schlitz, and others. In addition to the Caldecott Medal, Brian's books have received four Robert F. Sibert Honor awards for distinguished informational books, an Orbis Pictus Award and Orbis Pictus Honor, a silver medal from the Society of Illustrators, and have been selected three times for the annual *New York Times* Best Illustrated Books list. Brian was born and raised in Temple, Texas, and now lives and works in Brooklyn, New York.

“What drew me to this adventure was the opportunity to visit an inspiring part of the world in inspiring company and to be exposed to unfamiliar places and cultures...and to share that experience through writing and drawing.”



Jessica Lanan

Jessica Lanan is the award-winning author and illustrator of *Jumper*, *A Day in the Life of a Backyard Jumping Spider* and *The Fisherman and the Whale*, a Colorado Book Award finalist and winner of the Bull-Bransom Award for wildlife art. She has illustrated many other books including *The Lost Package* by Richard Ho, *Just Right: Searching for the Goldilocks Planet* by Curtis Manley and the upcoming *Thank You, Moon: Celebrating Nature's Nightlight* by Melissa Stewart. Jessica grew up surrounded by nature in the Rocky Mountains. She studied sculpture and Japanese at Scripps College and after graduation traveled solo for a year in Japan, Thailand, Laos, and India on a Thomas J. Watson Fellowship to study and illustrate folk tales. She lives in Boulder, Colorado with her daughter and cat. This will be her first trip to Africa, and she's looking forward to the opportunity to sketch on a fifth continent.

“I believe storytelling is a powerful tool that can change our world, and I hope to bring back a fresh perspective and new inspiration for how I can make a positive impact.”



G. Neri

G. Neri is the Coretta Scott King honor-winning author of *Yummy: The Last Days of a Southside Shorty* and *Ghetto Cowboy*, which was made into the movie, *Concrete Cowboy*, starring Idris Elba, which debuted at #1 on Netflix. His books *Tru & Nelle*, *Grand Theft Horse*, *Hello, I'm Johnny Cash*, and *Dino Detectives of Antarctica* have been translated into multiple languages in over 25 countries. Since being awarded two National Science Foundation grants that sent him to Antarctica in 2017, he is currently serving as co-chair of the Antarctic Artists and Writers Collective (AAWC) which aims to inspire and educate the public about Antarctica and its scientific exploration through collaborations in the arts. Prior to becoming a writer, Neri was a filmmaker, an animator/illustrator, a digital media producer and one of the creators of "The Truth" anti-smoking campaign. He is currently collaborating with fellow CBCC member and illustrator John Rocco on *We Are All Apollo*, a book about the black pioneers in the space program who made significant contributions to the civil rights movement. He lives on the Gulf Coast of Florida with his wife.

“I hope to takeaway a deeper understanding of the ecology of humans, animals, and wild spaces on our planet... Joining Wild Tomorrow in the field is a dream come true and I can't wait to tell the story of what is happening there to young people back in America.”



Sherri Duskey Rinker

Sherri Duskey Rinker is the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *Steam Train, Dream Train* and the *Goodnight, Goodnight Construction Site* series (eight picture books and counting!). She is also the author of the young middle grade novel *Revver the Speedway Squirrel* and its sequel *Revver the Speedway Squirrel: The Big Race Home*, a brand new picture book series that kicks off with *Roto and Roy: Helicopter Heroes*, and a nonfiction picture book biography *Big Machines: The Story of Virginia Lee Burton*, illustrated by fellow CBC member, John Rocco, which received multiple starred reviews.

Sherri lives in the Midwest with her husband, two sons, and one fluffy dog. She loves to read, collect antique oil paintings, cook, garden, and travel. Inspired by her sons, her 25-year career as a graphic designer, and her own childhood memories, Sherri writes from a place of love. She hopes to encourage young readers and make the world a happier place, one book at a time.

“Playing a small part in something larger and truly meaningful and allowing me to use my vocation to turn attention to a critical global issue is what makes this group so special.”



Hayley Rocco

Hayley Rocco is the author of *How to Send a Hug*, her first collaboration with her husband, John Rocco. Before dedicating herself to writing for children full-time, she worked as a publicist for several major publishers. She has five books launching in 2024 including *Wild Places: The Life of Naturalist David Attenborough*; and three of the first four books in *Meet the Wild Things*, a new series introducing young readers to endangered animals including: *Hello, I'm a Pangolin*, *Hello, I'm a Sloth*, and *Hello, I'm a Quokka*.

In addition to becoming an ambassador for Wild Tomorrow, she is also co-chair of the Children's Book Creators for Conservation group, which is embarking on its first trip to South Africa together in October 2023. She lives in Rhode Island with fellow co-founder of the CBCC, John Rocco.

“Upon returning from my first visit to South Africa in 2022, my wish was that everyone could experience this level of enchantment, inspiration and sense of purpose. I am beyond excited to be going back with such a talented group of creators, with the hope that we can all bring back stories that will captivate and inspire young readers.”



John Rocco

John Rocco is a *New York Times* bestselling author and illustrator of many acclaimed books for children including *Blackout*, the recipient of a Caldecott Honor, and *How We Got to the Moon*, which received a Robert F. Sibert Honor and was longlisted for the National Book Award. Rocco is also known for illustrating the cover art for Rick Riordan's internationally bestselling series *Percy Jackson and the Olympians*, *Magnus Chase and the Gods of Asgard*, and *The Trials of Apollo*. He also created the illustrations for the #1 *New York Times* bestsellers, *Percy Jackson's Greek Gods* and *Percy Jackson's Greek Heroes*.

In addition to becoming an ambassador for Wild Tomorrow, he is also co-chair of the Children's Book Creators for Conservation group, which is embarking on its first trip to South Africa together in October 2023. He lives in Rhode Island with his wife—and fellow co-founder of the CBCC—author Hayley Rocco.

“I believe that spending time in the South African bush, experiencing real conservation work in action, and to be around the wild animals and people that it affects will be a life-altering experience and I cannot wait to begin.”



Eric Rohmann

Eric Rohmann is the award-winning author/illustrator of thirteen books for children and in 2004 won the prestigious Caldecott Medal for *My Friend Rabbit* (Roaring Brook/Macmillan, 2003).

He was previously awarded a Caldecott Honor for his book, *Time Flies* (Crown/Random House, 1995). His other books include the ALA Notable titles, *Clara and Asha* (Roaring Brook/Macmillan, 2005), *A Kitten Tale* (Knopf/ Random House, 2008), and *Bone Dog* (Roaring Brook/Macmillan, 2011). He has also illustrated many other books, including the Sibert Honor winning *Giant Squid* written by Candace Fleming, and has created book jackets for a number of novels, including *His Dark Materials*, by Philip Pullman and *Bless This Mouse* by Lois Lowry. His artwork has been featured in various exhibitions and permanent collections throughout the United States.

He lives in a suburb of Chicago with his wife, award-winning author, Candace Fleming.

“The unexpected always sparks imagination. I have always been fascinated with Africa and hope that fascination might find its way into my books for kids...When I travel I always find something I didn’t see coming. It’s the inherent magnanimity of experience—big words that say, I can’t wait.”



Corban Wilkin

Corban Wilkin is an award-winning children's book illustrator and graphic novelist. He is the recipient of multiple awards including the 2012 Cape/ Observer/ Comica Graphic Short Story Prize for his comic *But I Can't* and was nominated for the 2014 British Comics Awards in the Emerging Talent category for the graphic novel *Breaker's End*. Most recently, he's illustrated the critically acclaimed graphic novel, *Grand Theft Horse* and *My Antarctica*, both written by fellow CBCC member, G. Neri. Corban Wilkin lives in Suffolk, England.

“What appealed to me most about this trip is the opportunity to see a side of nature that is sadly already gone from much of the world and the chance to develop experiences very different from those that have informed my work so far.”

