A Review by Shelly Hatton for **The Optimist**

Award-winning writer Susan Cerulean has lived in our neighborhood with her husband Jeff Chanton for over 27 years. She has relentlessly advocated for the rights of wild birds, featuring them in most of her writing. Her soon-to-be published book, *The Call to a Wilder Wisdom,* takes us on a profound journey through her decades of visiting St. Vincent Island National Wildlife Refuge, located off the coast of Apalachicola. There, as a trained biologist, she monitored shorebirds and seabirds, tagged turtle nesting sites, followed the tracks of wolves, and spent countless hours among American oystercatchers, snowy plovers, herons, and its other inhabitants. But she wanted more, a more authentic relationship with this North Florida Island. Her book is about this quest—one that cracks the heart wide open and lets the tides come through.

Her gorgeous sentences wrap around tales of the island's wildlife who are living lives on a collapsing planet. She writes of her evolution from an employee with a state wildlife agency to a kind of interrelated being, in deep kinship with the wild things on the Island. She has become an island thing herself, deeply attuned to its inhabitants, to the rhythms of tide and sand, waking at dawn by the hoot of her neighbor owl. She listens attentively to the voices on the island, as any family member would do for a loved one.

She asks the birds, the wolves, and the great pine that survived loggers and turpentine harvesters: what is required of her to stop their extinction? How can she best serve them? She advises us that we must shift away from the human mindset and "learn to understand the language of completely different species." Through her nighttime dreams, her symbols, her attunement, she hears their unequivocal message: Talk about us. Advocate for us. Tell our story. KEEP US SAFE.

Shorebirds and seabirds are declining on every continent; some are already gone. Cerulean writes that we Westerners have swallowed the myth of human exceptionalism—the notion that our species is entitled to exploit the natural world, that we are apart and above the rest of creation. She says that until people

respect the rights of all living beings, we will continue obliterating the natural world upon which we rely, as much as any other being. The Earth “cannot be protected fully by laws and bureaucracies no matter how well intended because our culture assumes that only our species has full rights.”

She has crawled belly down in sand and sweat to excavate turtle eggs, count them, rebury them, and then mark off the site for protection. Of a turtle nest drowned by rising sea water, she writes of the “smell of rich yoke in the air,” and of the nest being, “the consistency of creamed butter and eggs.” These pooling waters are becoming more frequent, as Earth’s climate warms and change.

Driving along the highway near Apalachicola, she witnessed migrating indigo buntings. She writes, “They had left Cuba the night before and flown through the dark hours.” She gives the birds voice, “The flight from Cuba was long and effortful. We had to burn fat, every bit we had stored in our bodies from the oily seeds of tropical plants, burn every bit of it like a flame, to fuel our Gulf crossing until our bodies had no more to give…We had no more energy for song.” Devastated, she found dozens of bunting carcasses littering the highway, hit by vehicles. Like so many interrupted life processes, “migration is an earth right,” Cerulean explains. She felt “crazy with loss,” witnessing their annihilation.

And yet, Cerulean has many sweet tales to share with us as well. On observing a baby alligator (the runt of the litter), she writes “I’d watched her yawn, the two halves of tiny gator jaw widening to their fullest extension, bound at the joint, then silently clapping shut: a baby reptilian yawn.” Cerulean kept watch as the sleepy creature flattened out in the mud for her nap.

Cerulean is a nationally-known author residing in Indianhead Acres (when she is not on the island), and we are proud to call her our own. This is her fourth book.