



Durrell School of Corfu Κερκυραϊκός Συνδεσμός Νταρελ

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PRESS INFORMATION

The Durrell School of Corfu is pleased to announce its participation in the naming of the Corfu Bosketto as “**Bosketto Durrell**” and the unveiling of a plaque commemorating the brothers **Lawrence Durrell** (1912-1990) and **Gerald Durrell** (1925-1995).

The plaque celebrates the fact that Lawrence Durrell and Gerald Durrell were “**writers and Philhellenes**”, and that they lived in Corfu 1935-1939.

Lawrence Durrell was one of the most influential novelists of the twentieth century. In addition to being a significant poet, dramatist and travel writer, he wrote *The Alexandria Quartet* (1957-60) which changed the direction of the modern novel, *The Avignon Quintet* (1974-85) which achieved a synthesis of western narrative style and eastern philosophy, and his personal evocation of Corfu, *Prospero's Cell* (1945).

Gerald Durrell was the founder of the Jersey Zoological Park (1959) and became one of the world's leading experts and activists in the breeding of animals in danger of extinction in their natural habitat. A humorous and persuasive writer and broadcaster, he popularised his work with books such as *A Zoo in my Luggage* (1960). His own accounts of growing up in Corfu include *The Garden of the Gods* (1978) and the world-famous best-seller *My Family and Other Animals* (1956).

Their books – and, in the case of *My Family and Other Animals* which celebrates its 50th anniversary in 2006, in two films of the book by the BBC, in 1989 and 2005 – contributed significantly to the worldwide reputation of the island of Corfu and to the development of the Corfiot tourist industry.

The Bosketto (literally, 'garden') in the heart of Corfu Town, has been a recreational space for Corfiots for many years. Lying between the Esplanade (the most extensive of its kind in the Balkans) and the Old Fortress, it runs alongside the still-used cricket ground in front of the Palace of St Michael and St George (which was formerly the home of the British administration of the Ionian islands 1814-1864) and the pavement cafés of the ‘Liston’ boulevard.

Speaking at the ceremony on Sunday 24 September when the plaque was unveiled by the Mayor of Corfu, **Mr Giannis Trepekis**, the Academic Director of the Durrell School of Corfu, **Richard Pine**, said:

“Κύριε Δήμαρχε, μέλη του Δημοτικού Συμβουλίου Κερκύρας, Αξιότιμοι Καλεσμένοι: ως Πρόεδρος του Κερκυραϊκού Συνδέσμου Ντάρελλ, έχω την τιμή να πω λίγα λόγια σε αυτή την θαυμάσια περίπτωση. Θα μιλήσω σε λίγο στα Αγγλικά για τους αδερφούς Ντάρελλ, αλλά στη

γλώσσα της χώρας που μας φιλοξενεί θέλω απλά να πω, ότι αυτή είναι μια σπουδαία μέρα για την οικογένεια Ντάρελλ, είναι μια σπουδαία μέρα για αυτούς που εκτιμούν τον Λωρενς Ντάρελλ και τον Τζεραλντ Νταρελλ, τα βιβλία των οποίων δημιούργησαν τόσο ενδιαφέρον για αυτή την όμορφη πόλη και αυτό το υπέροχο νησί. Και, τέλος, είναι μια σπουδαία μέρα για την Κέρκυρα.

“In giving the names of Lawrence Durrell and Gerald Durrell to this Bosketto, the town of Corfu is honouring two writers and philhellenes whose books have made the town and island of Corfu famous throughout the world.

“The five years that the Durrells spent in Corfu was a period of personal growth for both of them. Lawrence was 23 years old, and these were his formative years as a writer. On the first page of his book about Corfu, *Prospero's Cell*, he wrote: ‘Greece offers you the discovery of yourself’, and in Greece – Corfu in particular – he found his true voice as a writer. Greece continued to provide him with his inner strength as an artist throughout his life.

“Gerald was only 10 years old when he came to Corfu, and as a child his eyes were opened to the secrets and beauties of the natural world, not least under the guidance of his teacher, Doctor Theodore Stephanides, who himself deserves to be commemorated in the streets of Corfu Town. Everyone knows that Gerald described his life in Corfu in three books, the most famous of which is *My Family and Other Animals*, and most Corfiots will know that there have been two BBC films of the book, one in the 1980s and another at the end of 2005.

“What you may *not* realise is that over **5 million copies** of *My Family and Other Animals* have been sold worldwide, and hundreds of thousands of copies of *Prospero's Cell*. In this way, Lawrence Durrell and Gerald Durrell celebrated the beauty of this island and its people. This plaque announcing the ‘Bosketto Durrell’ is therefore a way of paying tribute to the brothers who contributed so significantly to the development of tourism in Corfu and to worldwide awareness of its unique character.

“I would like to take this opportunity of congratulating my friend Dr Spiros Giourgas for the commitment he has shown over the years in campaigning to have this commemoration.

“Finally, I will say in English what I said in my remarks in Greek:
This is a great day for the Durrell family, two of whom are here this evening;
it is a great day for the admirers of Lawrence Durrell and Gerald Durrell;
and it is a great day for Corfu.
Thank you.”

Also speaking at the ceremony were **Penelope Durrell** (daughter of Lawrence Durrell), **Dr Lee Durrell** (widow of Gerald Durrell) and **Dr Spiros Giourgas**, who originally proposed the commemorative plaque and worked in association with the Durrell School of Corfu for its realisation.

The Durrell School of Corfu marks the occasion with a seminar (24-28 September) led by **Dr David Bellamy** OBE on the theme **Tradition and Change in Rural Society**. The seminar features lectures by David Bellamy on “Following in the Footsteps of Gerald Durrell” and on the Corfiot olive-oil industry, by Dr Lee Durrell on the breeding of endangered species, and by Dr Kara Vaneck, on the Sylva Project for the protection of the Skyros ponies. It also includes a visit to the Sylva Project near Corfu Town, directed by an honorary patron of the Durrell

School, **Sylvia Demetriadis Steen**, and a botanical tour of the deserted village of Perithia (NE Corfu) by David Bellamy.

David Bellamy's lecture "Following in the Footsteps of Gerald Durrell" will be given on Monday 25 September at 7.30pm in the Durrell School's premises to inaugurate the DSC Library and Study Centre which opens to the public in October.

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