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J. Drew Lanham to Speak at Converse University's Undergraduate Commencement on May 20

SPARTANBURG, S.C. (March 23, 2023) – Ornithologist, naturalist, and writer J. Drew Lanham will be the [Undergraduate Commencement](#) speaker at Converse University on Saturday, May 20, 2023.

A native of Edgefield, South Carolina, Lanham was recently announced by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation as one of its [2022 MacArthur Fellows](#). Often known by the descriptive title of “genius grants,” MacArthur fellowships are awarded to talented and creative individuals as an investment in their potential.

Lanham is a self-proclaimed “[man in love with nature](#) – a wanderer finding foundation in wild places.” A birder, naturalist, and hunter-conservationist, he has published essays and poetry in publications including *Orion*, *Audubon*, *Flycatcher*, and *Wilderness*, and in several anthologies, including *The Colors of Nature*, *State of the Heart*, *Bartram's Living Legacy*, and *Carolina Writers at Home*.

“We are honored to have J. Drew Lanham as our Commencement speaker this year,” said Boone J. Hopkins, Converse president. “His passion for creativity, love of scholarship and appreciation of the beauty surrounding us will no doubt resonate with and inspire our graduates as they launch from Converse as transformative leaders who see clearly, decide wisely, and act justly.”

Lanham holds three degrees from Clemson University – a Ph.D. in Forest Resources (Wildlife) (1997), an M.S. in Zoology (1990), and a B.A. Zoology (1988) – which he counts as “structured steps to learning and self-awareness.” Honored as a Distinguished Alumni Professor and Alumni Master Teacher, his 20 years on the Clemson faculty includes courses, research and outreach in woodland ecology, conservation biology, forest biodiversity, wildlife policy and conservation ornithology. He has mentored more than 40 graduate students during his tenure.

Lanham is the author of *The Home Place: Memoirs of a Colored Man's Love Affair with Nature*, which received the Reed Award from the Southern Environmental Law Center and the Southern Book Prize, and was a finalist for the John Burroughs Medal. Most recently, he is the author of *Sparrow Envy: Field Guide to Birds and Lesser Beasts*. Hub City Press is set to publish his next poetry collection, *Joy is the Justice We Give Ourselves*, in fall 2024.

He serves on the boards of the South Carolina Wildlife Federation, South Carolina Audubon, American Birding Association, Aldo Leopold Foundation, BirdNote and the North American Association for Environmental Education, and views this service as a means for putting conservation into practice. He has worked closely with Audubon/Toyota Together Green Fellows, Knoll Farm's Whole Thinking Community, and Wildbranch Workshop. Lanham and his family live in the Upstate of South Carolina.

Converse University's 2023 Undergraduate Commencement ceremony will take place at 9:30 a.m. on Saturday, May 20, in Twichell Auditorium at the Zimmerli Performance Center on Converse's main campus in Spartanburg. In-person attendance is limited to Converse graduates and their families. The ceremony will be livestreamed, and details can be found on the [Converse Commencement webpage](#).

About Converse University

Converse University empowers students to become transformative leaders who see clearly, decide wisely, and act justly. Converse was founded in 1889 by citizens of Spartanburg, SC, who aimed to create an educational experience for women, and in fall 2020 it welcomed its first undergraduate co-educational incoming class. The University encompasses the School of Humanities, Sciences, and Business; the School of the Arts; the School of Education and Graduate Studies; and the Converse College for Women. Converse students experience deep scholarship, transformative mentorship, experiential learning, and wonderful support for and belief in each other. Through this unique formula, Converse is a creator of opportunity for its students through a personalized education that also includes the professional and technical skills graduates need to be successful in their careers.

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