

Ardastra hosts meet-&-greet for authors

★ **THEY** were unlikely candidates to share a platform—a biologist, a 10th grade student and a therapist. And yet a common thread connected them—their knack for writing stories about animals that resonated with young audiences.

Each gravitated towards writing for different reasons. Through *Roman and the Pink Flamingos*, Sierra Blair wanted to document her family exploits, particularly the antics of her baby brother, *Roman*. Meantime, marriage and family therapist *Allie MacPhail* penned her children's book, *Sammy the Snail* to help youngsters better understand and therefore cope with life's ups and downs. For laboratory biologist and iguana rescuer *Elaine A Powers*, the books in her *Curtis Curly-tail* series are a way to unite her two passions—big lizards and learning.

Visitors to *Ardastra Gardens Zoo and Conservation Centre* were introduced to the trio of authors behind their favourite books and characters.

"We think it's really important to make these connections between people and wildlife and books are another way to do that besides coming to the zoo," said animal curator, *Bonnie Young*.

"It's really great when a child is able to come to a zoo, meet an animal and then they have a story they can take home and continue that relationship with that animal.

"We wanted to give local children and our young tourists the opportunity to meet the brains behind these wonderful stories by meeting these authors."

Ms Blair, the youngest author, published her first book, *Roman and His Mean Family* in 2017. She took pleasure in sharing the limelight with the two established writers.

"It was interesting for me to learn what motivated the other writers to share

their story," said the Kingsway Academy 10th grader.

"Whether it's a funny, adventure book or a short story with deeper meaning, each person has their own unique story to tell if they take the time to tap into what they love or what inspires them. It was my first book signing event and it's not something I will ever forget."

An Iguana research trip to Warderick Wells Cay in the Exuma Cays in 2014, inspired Mrs Powers to write her first book, *Curtis Curly-tail and the Ship of Sneakers*.

"The kids were interested in the characters and they wanted more adventures. I realized that this was a way of educating kids about some of the environmental issues in a fun yet educational way," said the Illinois native and author of 17 books.

"The Bahamas National Trust took notice and asked me to write more books about the land animals in The Bahamas. There were lots of books about the sea creatures but



● **ANIMAL AUTHORS (L-R): Elaine Powers, Sierra Blair & Allie MacPhail (Photo: CAMERON THOMPSON)**

very few about the land animals."

No stranger to literary events, Mrs MacPhail previously conducted a school book tour highlighting how easy it is to become an author. Her two books impart

important life lessons. "My stories come from my work as a therapist with kids and helping them work with different and difficult emotions and making it into a more manageable bite of how to deal with this

stuff," she explained. "Sammy's story is about a big event that happens in his life. He's sad and embarrassed, but he learns how to deal with his sadness in a new way."

Home of the world-famous marching fla-

mingos and playful, handfed lorry parrots, Ardastra Gardens is expected to host other events connecting writers—whose books are sold at Toby's Treasures, its gift shop—with readers.



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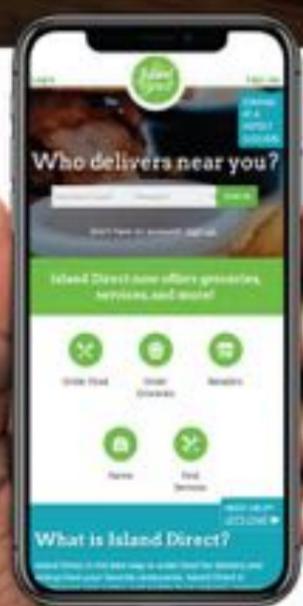
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