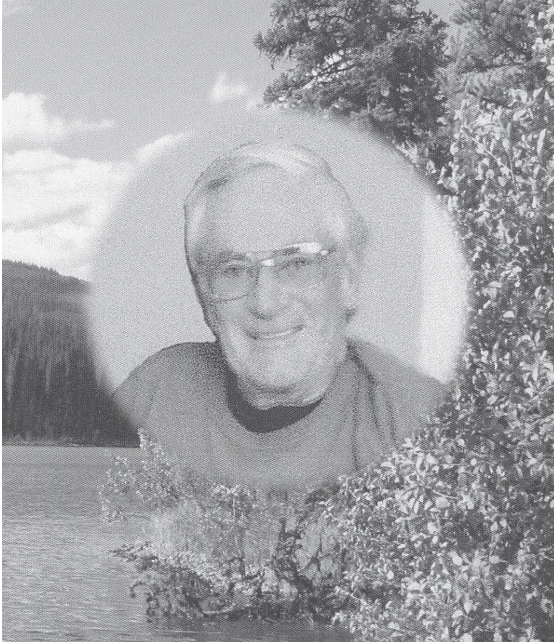


IN MEMORIAM: BILL MATTHEWS, 1929 – 2012

C. STUART HOUSTON, 863 University Drive, Saskatoon, SK S7N 0J8



Bill Matthews and his father Walter were close friends of Maurice G. Street at Nipawin. Entranced by Maurice's bird banding, Bill obtained his own banding permit in 1950; in his third year, 1952, he banded 2220 birds, 600 higher than Maurice ever obtained in a single year, and 101 species to Maurice's 106. Prior to 1960, Bill's lifetime total of 11,296 was third highest for Saskatchewan, exceeded only by Maurice Street and Fred Bard, in that sequence.¹ Assisted by his father and his sister Anne, ten years his junior, Bill's highest species banding totals were 3804 Common Redpolls, 2176 Slate-colored Juncos and 746 White-throated Sparrows, most caught with a simple pull-string drop trap set over weed seeds. Bill had unprecedented success in re-trapping Arctic-breeding Common Redpolls in subsequent winters:

at one year, 15; at two years, seven in addition to one banded by Street; and at three years, one. Of the 13 Mallards he banded, individuals were shot in Manitoba, Arkansas and Georgia. The only Canvasback and the only Northern Pintail Bill banded were both shot, the former in South Dakota and the latter in Arkansas.

The most exciting find was when Mrs. J. A. Nevins heard an unmistakable call of a Whip-poor-will from her farm home 7 miles east and 5 miles north of Nipawin. Being familiar with the call in eastern Manitoba, she notified the Matthews, father and son; the two came out to hear the call on 18 June 1956. The following evening, in company with Street, they flushed a Whip-poor-will from a jackpine ridge about 200 m from the Nevins farm

home. On June 27, Street returned with Roy Lanz and flushed the Whip-poor-will again; this time it had been incubating two eggs, easily visible from 50 m distance on a few dead leaves and pine needles. It was the first reported Whip-poor-will nest in Saskatchewan. The first egg hatched July 15. Matthews and Street returned for a final visit July 27 and found both young about 30 m from the nest. Each banded one young.²

From the 207 American Robins banded by Bill, four returned at one year, two at two years and three at three years. From four robins banded while in their nest, his sister Anne reports that one returned as an adult the next year to build its nest on a rafter in the Matthews tractor shed. Each time the tractor was returned to the shed, the vertical exhaust pipe was immediately below the nest, where the trusting adult female remained unflinching; sometimes parts of her band number could be read from the tractor seat. The bird returned to use this nest for six consecutive summers, as Anne remembers; if so, the latter three years were not reported to the banding office.

One fall day the Matthews family returned from fishing to find an unprecedented 57 robins in their large, walk-in 2.5 m² “house trap” with a funnel entrance and a door for the bander to walk through upright. The attraction was constantly dripping water. Once through the funnel, each robin was caught in the butterfly net in turn, banded and released, the “largest single catch” of Bill’s banding career.

Bill was born 30 December 1929. The Matthews farm was 3 miles southeast of Nipawin, with planted trees of many kinds and spacious gardens bordering on open cultivated fields. In winter months Bill Matthews opened his banding traps at his town residence. Long after he left school, his voracious reading allowed

him to write the GED exam and obtain a Grade 12 certificate. Bill continued to farm with his parents until 1963, the year he worked for the Provincial Museum of Natural History at the Francois Finley Fort. In the spring of 1964 he began work with the Department of Natural Resources at English Cabin Tower and then Beaver House Tower. In 1977 he was promoted to Resource Officer 1. He maintained parks and campsites, marked trees, observed from fire towers, and fought fires. His most scary adventure was hanging out over the front of a boat, seeing a pair of eyes on shore. His father steered the boat towards those eyes, the boat hit the bank, and Bill somersaulted on to the ground – at the feet of a startled wolverine.

In 1981, Bill married Lynn Updike, a widow, and moved to her home in the village of Love; he drove to work in Nipawin for his final six years with DNR. He served three terms of three years each as councillor and one year as mayor of the village of Love, 1996-97. His final two years were spent as a resident of Arborfield Special Care Lodge, where he died 13 November 2012.

Acknowledgments

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1. Houston CS (2010) Early Saskatchewan bird banders. *In*: W. E. Davis, Jr. and J.A. Jackson, eds., Contributions to the history of North American Ornithology 3:319-353.
2. Street MG (1956) Saskatchewan’s first nesting record of the Whip-poor-will. *Blue Jay* 14:87-88.

