

MAURICE G. STREET, 1910 - 1966

Maurice George Street was a quiet, modest man—as Reverend Roderick said at his funeral sermon, Maurice was a listener. Yet beneath his unassuming countenance was the intellect and methodicity of the scientist and the heart of the true naturalist. He was that rarity, a self-taught naturalist who learned much more from nature than from books.

Maurice was born at Whiteparish, Wiltshire, England, on September 28, 1910 and was only three years old in November 1913 when his parents emigrated to Canada and homesteaded near Moose Range post office, two miles from the Carrot River. Today, after drainage and burning of the six to 24-inch layer of peat moss, the area is rated among the best agricultural land in Saskatchewan, but it is hard to imagine the land as Maurice's brother Stanley describes it in 1913. Then Tisdale, the nearest town, was accessible only in winter when the meadows and bogs were frozen. In summer, Star City was the closest point, some 60 miles distant via the sand ridges west of Codette, and then south from Gronlid. The land was covered with willow clumps and grass four feet tall, growing in wet, mossy soil, affected little by attempts at plowing. Any wheat planted wilted and turned yellow before it was two feet high. The only truly arable land was a small garden patch behind the house. The second fall, a raging fire crossed the Carrot River and destroyed all before it, though the Streets' house was saved by the firebreak. The homestead was abandoned after two years and the family lived for one to a few years each on various farms near Aylsham, Codette and Tisdale. Maurice was unable to attend school until he was nine, and then only for five years until he completed his grade eight.

As a child, Maurice spent his evenings and Sundays exploring the nearby woods and marshes with his elder brother Stanley. At the age of 12, he began his egg collection and

started to keep careful records. All interesting observations were faithfully recorded in a small 5¢ notebook which he carried in his pocket, an exemplary habit he followed all his life.

In 1927, Maurice moved to Codette to operate his brother-in-law's farm (Ted Street, but no relation). In 1935, he took over his brother Frank's farm, four miles southeast of Nipawin. In 1938, he moved into Nipawin and was employed by the Imperial Oil bulk dealership, until he died suddenly at work, Thursday, October 27, 1966.

Maurice had infinite patience and found total peace and relaxation while communing with nature. His favorite method was to sit still on a stump or log, perhaps for half an hour, all the while watching with his keen eyes and listening with his gifted ears. In this way, he learned the habits of every resident species of bird in his area. Before the days of bird song records, or even adequate descriptions in books, Maurice learned to identify each species by its song, or in some cases by its call notes. His knack for finding birds' nests was uncanny. His lifetime total for the Nipawin area included 143 breeding species (Lark Sparrow and Osprey added after 1959), 133 with nests and 10 with flightless young. His egg collection included 111 species.

Perhaps one of the greatest contributions of the late Mrs. Isabel M. Priestly and her fledgling mimeographed publication, the *Blue Jay*, was the contact this established with Maurice G. Street. This led to the publication in July, 1943 of Contribution No. 2 of the Yorkton Natural History Society entitled *A List of the Birds of Nipawin, Saskatchewan*. This list contained 196 species and breeding records for 115 species. Not only did it bring records that might otherwise have gone unnoticed to the attention of other naturalists, but new contacts and encouragements



Maurice G. Street, SNHS Summer Meeting, Candle Lake, June 12, 1965

stimulated Street to "fill in the gaps".

Street contributed 21 items to the *Blue Jay* prior to 1960, but in most cases these notes were "lifted" from his lengthy informative letters, or else were only submitted after special encouragement. He always minimized the importance of his own observations. He gained pleasure from every contact with nature and particularly from personal "first" records, but seemed surprised at the degree of interest others showed in his observations. However, when he found the first nest of the Whip-poor-will in Saskatchewan, on June 27, 1956, he was anxious that this discovery should be shared by publishing the record.

When our publication *The Birds of the Saskatchewan River, Carlton to Cumberland* appeared in time for the A.O.U. meeting in Regina in 1959, no one realized how much this depended on Street. I had tried to persuade Maurice to rewrite and expand his Nipawin records for a printed bulletin to appear for the A.O.U. meeting, but without avail. His wife Rose had died November 25, 1957 after two years' illness, leaving him with two young daughters and heavy

medical expenses, so he had no enthusiasm for a major project. Early in 1958, I had the inspiration that we might produce a joint publication to include the historical records for Carlton and Cumberland. He rose to this bait. By the summer of 1958 he had mailed his portion of the manuscript to me, and this fait accompli pressured me into keeping my half of the bargain. What happy times we had together during that week in July 1959 when we made the final revisions of the manuscript. What reminiscences each item brought forth, until late each night! Maurice visited us on a number of other occasions and always he was the unobtrusive helpful guest who made his host feel at home!

Chest pain kept him from the A.O.U. Meeting in Regina in August 1959—and shortly thereafter he was hospitalized with his first coronary thrombosis. The next spring he was able to resume work and restricted field activity. Gradually a high-tone deafness muffled and obliterated the sounds of his beloved warblers. He changed the direction of his activity,

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gave up bird banding and amassed a collection of excellent kodachrome slides of the local birds and flowers, taking increasing interest in the latter. In two years, he collected virtually every species of butterfly to be expected in his area. He did not complain, and even on the day of his death his companions were not aware of the increasing severity of his angular pain.

Should one even try to summarize his lifetime of careful observations? His total of 143 breeding species for a single area may be a world's record, as virtually a one-man effort, and each of these species he knew intimately. He banded over 13,000 birds of 101 species, and some years banded more Tennessee Warblers than all the other banders on the continent together. His habits of careful observation and accurate recording are an

outstanding example of the contribution that an amateur can yet make to science.

Yet few people in Nipawin knew of his deep interests and knowledge. They knew him as a cheerful quiet listener who spoke ill of no one. Some may even have been mystified by the tiny white spruce on his coffin. Close inspection showed a Chipping Sparrow nest in it. This had been selected with infinite care by two very close friends who searched their old haunts a whole afternoon to find just the right specimen. Above all, Maurice liked a little white spruce.

He is survived by his brother Stan and sister, Mrs. Iris Dunlop, both of Victoria, B.C., and by two daughters, Mrs. Victor West and Mrs. Gordon A. Brown, both of Thompson, Manitoba, and three grandchildren.—*C. Stuart Houston*, 863 University Drive, Saskatoon.

THE NATURE CONSERVANCY OF CANADA

The Nature Conservancy of Canada is dedicated to the preservation of our heritage of wild nature. The Conservancy, with this objective in view, has acquired a list of natural areas across Canada which in many instances are still in their original primeval state.

The Nature Conservancy of Canada is endeavouring to organize support for the preservation of these areas wherever this may be accomplished. Already it has been responsible for the delay in sub-dividing the Rattray marsh near Toronto. It has purchased an original stand of cedar in the Bruce peninsula. It is negotiating support for the preservation of one other original stand of pine near Lake Huron, and is negotiating the protection of a marsh and wild wood complex near Kitchener.

The Nature Conservancy of Canada was founded in 1963: Conservancies already existed in England and the

United States. Nature lovers of the United States are familiar with the extensive number of nature preserves implemented by the Nature Conservancy of that country.

In Canada, exploitation and the force of population is rapidly depleting the still untouched wild areas of the country. For the present and future generations we need to preserve adequate examples of these living museums as a link with our past.

How can people help in this work? By writing the Conservancy, advising it of some choice natural site which should be preserved; by getting people together in support of the site; by getting people to help finance the purchase of the site, and finally by donating funds to the Conservancy for the continuation of its work.—*Charles Sauriol*, 22 Hillside Drive S., Toronto 6.