

House Sparrows appeared within a few years and Barn Swallows perhaps as late as 1915. Sharp-tailed Grouse were much more common then and Pinnated Grouse (Greater Prairie Chicken) were present until about 1914 or 1915. Crows occurred, but were not common because they lacked nesting sites anywhere nearby for many years; their numbers increased later. Marsh Hawks were common, but there were no tree-nesting hawks on the farm. Great Horned Owls were never seen in the first 20 years and Mourning Doves were absent at least until 1920, though Harley Ranson saw one four miles further east in 1919 (*Blue Jay* 23: 3-9). About 1910 or 1911, there was a small colony of Burrowing Owls in the pasture; there were snakes in some of the burrows.

Black-billed Magpies were completely absent until at least 1920 and uncommon until the 1940's. Lark Buntings were absent until at least 1920;

Harley Ranson reported his first in 1922. In winter, there were fewer birds than today, but Snow Buntings appeared every winter.

Janet Houston Mark thinks her first bird recollections date back to 1934 when the shelterbelt trees were 20 feet high, growing slowly in the drought years. In 1937 and 1938 she became interested in nature when their teacher Miss Ferne Barker, had their class join Dick Bird's "Camera Trails Club." They listened to Dick's nature broadcasts received his club bulletin, and went on at least one nature hike when he visited their school. Janet remembers Baltimore Orioles, Eastern Kingbirds, Robins, Yellow-shafted Flickers, Brown Thrashers, Loggerhead Shrikes, and House Wrens at first, Western Kingbird arrived later, likely about 1937, though Harley Ranson reported them regularly after 1924.

In Remembrance: MARION NIXON (1902-1972)

"Nature — by Marion Nixon, Wauchope, Sask." was the title of the column in the Saskatchewan Farmer which I had been reading for several years, enjoying its precise observations and deft descriptions. I always admired the writer's ability to give unity and artistic form to a day's grab-bag of sights and sounds, caught in spare moments of a busy farm life.

Finally — and this would be exactly 30 years ago this March — I sat down and wrote to Marion Nixon. Back came the swift response, grateful for the appreciation and offering friendship full and free. She introduced me to the *Blue Jay* and to a writer's magazine, and, within the year, she had found a berth for me in the writers club to which she and her husband both belonged.

It operated by mail — a fat little "budget" wherein each member submitted a manuscript to the judgement of his peers. Only once did we assemble from our separate hinterlands, in January, 1945, in conjunction with a press women's gathering in Regina. I mention it here because guest speakers on that long ago night were two elequent forerunners of the gospel of conservation. Fred Bard and R. D. Symons!

The *Budget* eventually folded, but my friendship by letter with Marion Nixon highlighted by infrequent visits, continued through the years to the last letter in August, wavering but still comprehensible. Partially paralyzed by a series of strokes both reading and writing had become difficult for her, and creative thinking impossible.



Marion Nixon and Sweetheart

Marion Houston, an aunt of Dr. Stuart Houston and a relative, on her mother's side, of the Belchers, was born in Ottawa on August 10, 1902. Her family came to Saskatchewan in 1904 where she was brought up on a farm north of Tyvan. She attended Regina Normal School and in the early twenties, while teaching at Wauchope, she met John Nixon, a man who shared her literary interests. They married in 1923 and here in this parkland corner of Saskatchewan they raised three girls and one boy. They farmed 4 miles north of Wauchope until retirement in 1964. A quiet life, one might say; nevertheless, it was filled with activities and interests, fruitful, and far-ranging in thoughts and ideas.

Marion Nixon became widely known for her nature column which began in the *Saskatchewan Farmer* and ran from 1939 until April, 1958; in nineteen years she never missed her twice monthly deadline, a feat which many a professional might envy. As I browse through the faded clippings I find them still morning-fresh, partly because nature is eternally new, but also because of the clarity and grace of the words.

In spring the writer sees "the poplars' tiny lamb tails hanging in bunches" and listens to "the long smooth rise and fall of the upland plover's call." In September the dome of the sky seems to act as a huge hemispherical sounding board, against which the drone of combines and threshing machine, the long wail of a moving freight, reverberate and echo upon each other till we seem immersed in throbbing sound."

Perhaps the long, quiet winters leave "more time to stand and stare," for she writes fascinatingly of winter in all its beauty and malevolence. Here is a sample from an essay on snow formations after a storm: "Packed close by the wind that whirled and snaked the loose snow up their carven crests like smoke . . ."

Besides her column, Marion Nixon wrote articles on a vast variety of subjects — knitting, sewing, making over, household hints for improvising during the Depression, gardening, cooking, weaving — her interests seemed unlimited. These articles were accepted for publication in *Country Guide* and *Nor'West Farmer*, *Free Press Prairie Farmer*, *Toronto Saturday Night*, *Saskatchewan Farmer*, *Grain Growers' Guide*, *The Family Herald*, *The Leader Post*, *Writers' Studio Magazine*, and *Blue Jay*. In later years they were complemented by her own photography. One color photo appeared in a *Western Producer* calendar, another of herself at her loom was used as a *Family Herald* cover.

Marion excelled at all crafts, but weaving was her favorite. To make her own designs was the ultimate delight; I still have place mats in her Saskatchewan plaid, a delicate pastel with snow-like background. This flair for art repeats itself in a daughter who is a commercial artist in London, England.

Marion enjoyed gardening too, an enthusiasm which will continue to bloom in the beautiful grounds and nursery of another daughter, Joy Purvis, at Redvers, Saskatchewan.

Every hobby had to pay its way in produce, in prize money at the Redvers Agricultural Fair, in writing cheques which went into typewriters, cameras, looms, good books in plenty, and above all into Christmas and birthday gifts for her ever-expanding family, which now includes 14 'grands' and 6 'greats' as Marion called them.

Marion Nixon enjoyed young folk; no one will ever know how many young people have been nudged toward their destiny by her unobtrusive encouragement.

One last talent must be mentioned, her gift for hospitality. To quote from the tribute of one who knew her well: "In this household of stimulating conversation, enthusiasm, ideas and integrity, there was boundless hospitality for neighbours, friends, her husband's acquaintances in the Livestock Associations and in the court of justice where he acted as J.P., for newspapermen, writers and readers, gardeners and naturalists, 4H and Homemakers, local politicians and voters during the many

years when their home was a polling booth, for members of the R.C.M.P. and lonely English airmen training in Canada during the war." To the list one might add weakling lambs born in the cold of early spring, and Sweetheart, Marion's pet chickadee, which learned to eat nuts from her hand.

After the *Saskatchewan Farmer* ceased publication, Marion Nixon began editing her Nature columns into book form; but illness in the home, followed by her own tragic loss of health, cancelled out the plan and left prairie literature the poorer for it. For Marion there was compensation in the fact that John Nixon, whose poetry was printed in many places, including *Queen's Quarterly*, had been able, some years previously, to publish two collections of his poems. She lived to see many of her observations used in R. W. Nero and M. R. Lein's *Birds of Moose Mountain* in 1971. She died on October 6, 1972. — *Rose McLaughlin, Indian Head, Sask.*

The following notes were supplied by Mary Houston:

Marion Nixon was a supporter of the *Blue Jay* from its beginning, contributing many articles to it on a variety of subjects developed from her own nature observations. Although unable to attend many meetings of the Saskatchewan Natural History Society because of home commitments, she retained her interest in the society and served two 3-year terms as director from 1949-52 and 1958-61. On three occasions (1943, 1947 and 1953) she conducted a Christmas Bird Count at Wauchope. Her contributions to the *Blue Jay* include:

Sept. 1949 Vol. 7 (3) 10. Bird notes; (3) 17. Mammal notes.

Sept. 1950 Vol. 8 (3) 11. Prairie Chicken Dancing Grounds; (3) 13. Friendly Chickadees; (3) 21. Beavers at Wauchope.

March 1951 Vol. 9 (1) 10. Chickadees Back Again

Sept. 1952 Vol. 10 (3) 2. Patience and Peanuts.

March 1954 Vol. 12 (1) 13. Untimely Snow: Woeful Weather for Birds

Sept. 1954 Vol. 12 (3) 4. A Sense of Humour; (3) 24. A pair of Yellow Lady Slippers; (3) Inside back cover. Stone Hammer.

June 1955 Vol. 13 (2) 2. Then and Now.

June 1956 Vol. 14 (2) 50. Try "Drawing" Bird Song

Sept. 1957 Vol. 15 (3) 97. The Wily Magpie

Dec. 1959 Vol. 17 (4) 159. The Yellow Lady's Slipper (illustrated by daughter Helen)

MARION NIXON MEMORIAL

The family and friends of the late Marion Nixon of Redvers, Sask. have provided funds given in her memory to underwrite a project of the Saskatchewan Natural History Society. The family and Board of Directors have agreed that the publication of an Index issue of the *Blue Jay*, covering the 10 year period since a similar issue was published,

would be an appropriate project. Marion Nixon was active in the affairs of the Saskatchewan Natural History Society and was a frequent contributor to the *Blue Jay*; thus it was considered fitting that funds given in her memory should further the goals of the Society. Mrs. Pat O'Neil will edit the special issue and it is expected that publication will occur in about a year.

R. D. SYMONS

At the time of going to press, we have learned with regret of the death of Mr. R. D. Symons on February 2, 1973.