

## SYLVIA VAN BRIENEN (HARRISON): AN EXTRAORDINARY NATURALIST

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The life of an active and very visible Saskatchewan Natural History Society (SNHS) member came to its close on 19 June 1992.

Sylvia Harrison left Regina and moved to Rosetown in 1967 when she married Anton van Brienen (known as "Van" to Sylvia and to many of us). There she continued to be a keen observer of plants and birds and shared her natural history observations with her relatives and other naturalists at the meetings of the SNHS, or through letters and visits. In the last four years, Sylvia's own deteriorating health and her total commitment to Van's care in the progress of his affliction with Alzheimer's disease severely restricted her activity.

Sylvia's view of the natural world came from her parents, who transposed their appreciation of their native English countryside to the land near Kelvington, Saskatchewan. She was the "family naturalist" throughout her lifetime and continues to pass on her naturalist-observer approach to SNHS members through her nephew, Brian Irving. When Sylvia and Van moved back to the parkland on Van's retirement from teaching woodworking at Rosetown, she no doubt influenced the next generation of Irvings and her Fosston neighbours. In the 1960s, both my own children benefited by the exposure to the "Harrison-Irving" view of the natural world.

Sylvia's activity in the natural history

groups was notable not only for her knowledge of plants and birds but also because she was a gentle, sociable person. She was always willing to assume responsibilities where she felt she could aid in resolving some of the Natural History Society's problems. It was in such circumstances that Sylvia and I first worked together for SNHS. To get more members involved in the Society, Frank Brazier called a meeting in Regina. Few came to the meeting, but it was at this meeting Sylvia, Helen Keay and I re-organized the book sales activities into what is now the Blue Jay Bookshop. Later, I discovered through Sylvia how interesting natural history field trips and annual meetings could be.

Sylvia worked on some of the social activities associated with the American Ornithologists' Union Regina meeting, which was hosted by SNHS and the Regina Natural History Society in 1959.

In 1960 Sylvia (then Harrison) recorded the first sighting of a woodcock in the Qu'Appelle Valley in a short article in the December 1960 issue of *The Blue Jay*. Though she seldom served on the executive herself, Sylvia influenced SNHS policy through committee work and through conversations with executive members.

Sylvia van Brienen's life and words and ways left a lasting imprint upon the lives of many people. We celebrate her life.

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*Mourning Dove*

Wayne Lynch