
IN MEMORIAM

VICTOR JOHN HARPER 1900-1995

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Vic Harper was a kind, wise and gentle man, with a superb sense of humour. Quiet and modest, he was a friend to people of all ages. He didn't have an enemy in the world.

A busy farmer, Vic was fond of wildlife and the out-of-doors. Bird photography was his favourite hobby. He put up bluebird houses at his farm, 20 km northwest of Saskatoon, and attracted Mountain Bluebirds which he watched from his window. One of his bluebird pairs nested twice in the same year, and both broods were banded by Mary Houston. Black-capped Chickadees were so trusting that they took sunflower seeds from his mouth.

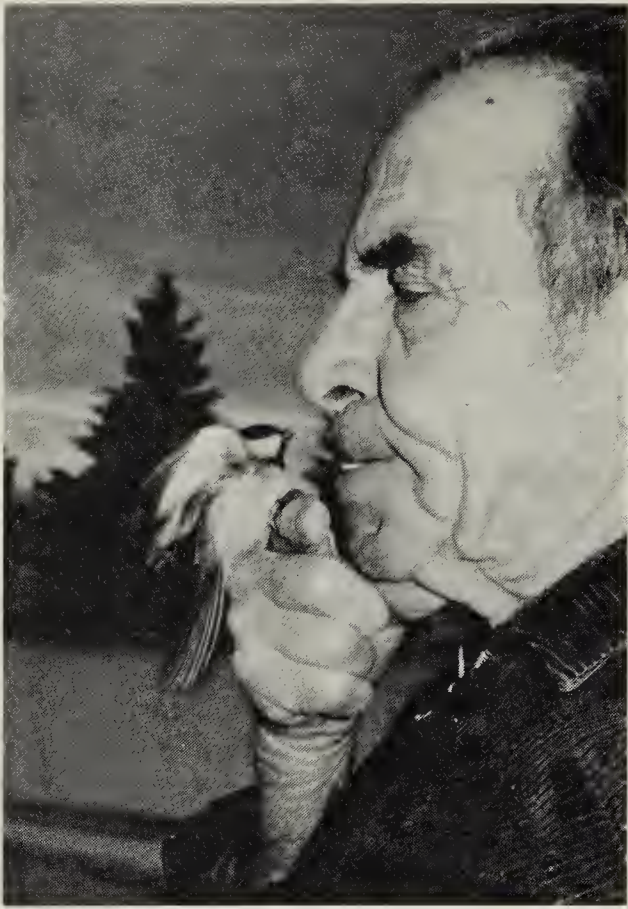
Vic was delighted when Western Kingbirds first nested in his fine farm shelterbelt. That year both Eastern and Western Kingbirds nested. Another year he found a Short-eared Owl nest while discing the stubble. Always thoughtful, he called me out to band the young owls.

Above all, Vic was quietly proud of finding the Saskatoon area's first nest of the Orchard Oriole, on the south edge of his farm shelterbelt, and within sight of his farm home. His Orchard Oriole nest record stands to this day as the most northerly in the province. Manley Callin had found the first Saskatchewan nest at Fort Qu'Appelle in July 1974. Only six years after that, Vic noted a territorial pair in his trees on 15 June 1980, the same year that Dale Hjertaas and Nigel Caulkett found an

Orchard Oriole nest near Buffalo Pound Lake on 30 June. Vic's nephew, Stan Shadick, having gone down to Buffalo Pound with Lawrence Baschak on 12 July to see that nest, decided on their return to Saskatoon to help Uncle Vic find the Orchard Oriole nest on his farm. An evening search located it. Well hidden, it was suspended in a more sessile fashion than that of a Northern (Baltimore) Oriole, from the branch of a spruce tree 5 m above the ground. There were two young in the nest. My wife Mary and I went out to see this find the next day; Vic watched the adults feeding the two young, now out of the nest, on 16 and 18 July (*Blue Jay* 38:247).

Vic contributed one well-written book review to the *Blue Jay*. The book was titled *The World of the Bison* (*Blue Jay* 29:44-45, 1969). He also contributed one closeup photo of a Golden Eagle to illustrate an article written by Theresa Heuchert about a rehabilitated Golden Eagle (*Blue Jay* 30:257).

From the beginning, Vic played a quiet but active role in the Saskatoon Natural History Society. He was treasurer for three years, 1966 through 1968. At each annual meeting his treasurer's reports explained everything clearly but with a wry sense of humour that brought on giggles and much outright laughter. After two year's respite, he came back on the board as a director for another three years, 1971-73, making a total of six years' service on the



Victor J. Harper with
Black-capped Chickadee Stan Shadick

executive. For two of these years, Vic was also corresponding secretary for the provincial society.

In the days when fewer members showed their slides on Member's Night in January, Vic would modestly show some of his best. And they were good! Best of all was his low-key commentary, delivered with his wry sense of humour, again guaranteed to provoke gales of laughter.

Vic regularly attended meetings for another twenty years. His 90th birthday fortuitously occurred on a Natural History Society meeting night; the society members shared Vic's birthday cake, provided by Stan Shadick.

Vic's wisdom was evident in his choice of a wife, Vi Cairns. Another society member, John Shadick, was married to Vi's sister, Mary. Marg Belcher, the older Belcher sister and Mary Cairns, the younger Cairns sister, were special pals among the four women in a class of five in Education

at the University. The Cairns home was the "home away from home" where much table tennis was played. It was a joke for both families when Mary Belcher (my wife) chose to be the "big sister" to the older Vi Cairns, when Vi attended University classes somewhat late in life. Vi later took a Master's degree in library science and became the librarian at Mount Royal Collegiate in Saskatoon.

Through the Mount Royal contact, Vi and Vic encouraged a promising young student by the name of Al Smith, editor of the soon-to-be-published *Atlas of Saskatchewan Birds*.

The Harpers and Shadicks attended many meetings and outings together, whenever Vic's farm duties did not interfere. These included some of the Christmas bird counts, usually in the company of Mary and John Shadick.

Vi's death in August 1980 was a real blow to Vic. He quit farming in 1981 (he felt it permissible to retire as he came 81) and moved into Oliver Lodge the next year. He maintained his independence; when he was 90, and nephew Stan Shadick was busy elsewhere, Vic went alone on the bus to his brother's funeral at Kerrobert.

Vic was an unselfish pioneer who, in every sense, left the world a better place in which to live. The world is now in desperate need of men and women with his generosity, quiet wisdom, and ever-present sense of humour.

Editor's Note: One of Vic's poems appears in the poetry section.

