
IN MEMORIAM

ROSEMARY NEMETH 1955-1995

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Rosemary Nemeth was born on 28 September 1955 at Melfort, Saskatchewan. She attended elementary and high school in Yellow Creek. As one of her teachers, Ted Magis, said at her funeral eulogy, “her kind smile, friendly laugh and warm-hearted personality” made her a favourite with both students and teachers, and foretold the “happy, loving, laughing, energetic, radiant person” that she became. After one year of biology at the University of Saskatchewan and completion of the two-year Wildlife Resources program at the Kelsey Institute in Saskatoon, she became Saskatchewan’s first female conservation officer. Her job was challenging, many times enforcing the law out on a stormy lake or on a snowy trail. Rose served at Lower Fishing Lakes, Creighton, La Ronge, Beauval, and Dore Lake, then managed fire control and trained fire control personnel, based at Weyakwin. She found nests of Barred Owl and Bald Eagle, which I visited for banding. A writer, she will be remembered for her article about “Chappy — a Legend of Northern Saskatchewan,” for the *Western Sportsman* and a booklet “Over the Narrow Hills — the Story of the Fishing Lakes District.” A return to University gained her a B.Sc. in biology in 1985.

For her last ten years, Rose lived in La Ronge, where she assisted Jacques Proulx in his expediting business, meanwhile helping to establish the Conservation Officer’s Museum on Highway 2 just north of Prince Albert.

Rose was important to Saskatche-

wan naturalists for her studies around her home farm at Yellow Creek. I explained this in an article in the regular Saskatoon Nature Society column in the *Saskatoon Sun*, on 28 January 1996 — “Why have I banded so many Great Horned Owls at Yellow Creek?” As good fortune would have it, the right people were in the right place at the right time. Bryan Isinger taught grades 4 to 7 in the six-classroom school at Yellow Creek for five years, 1963-68. And Yellow Creek had the Nemeth family. In 1966 Bryan learned that I was looking for owl nests to band the young. That year and the next two as well, the Yellow Creek school children looked for owl nests. Each year it was Rosemary Nemeth who found the most owl nests. Each year Rose wrote a short article for the Junior Naturalists’ section in the *Blue Jay* magazine, the quarterly journal of the Saskatchewan Natural History Society.

That year we went to three owl nests at Yellow Creek. Two had three young and one had two young. Food brought by the parent owls and still uneaten by the young, included four northern pocket gophers (often called “moles” because of the mounds they dig in pastures); another nest had three pocket gophers and an adult Long-eared Owl as food. The third nest contained two coots and a barn rat.

In 1968 Rose wrote to the *Blue Jay* about another three nests that she had found and four nests her classmates had found. Two of



Rosemary Nemeth

Rose's nests had four young each and the other had three young. Snowshoe hares were building in numbers, so it was not surprising that both young and full-size hares were found as food in the nests, as well as one coot and a Franklin's ground squirrel (bush gopher).

Rose also wrote to the *Blue Jay* about other interesting nature observations, including blueberries, a nature hike, a lost gosling, a weasel, and a dog with over 600 porcupine quills. Under encouragement from Isinger, some classmates contributed notes as well, but it was Rose who was singled out for special commendation by Joyce Deutscher, editor of the active junior section.

In 1969, though Mr. Isinger had moved to the city, Rose and her Dad continued their interest and found a little adult Saw-whet Owl nesting in a hollow tree. That year Rose had five horned owl nests, one with four young. In 1970, at the peak of the snowshoe hare cycle, productivity was the highest on record: 25 young in 8 nests.

When in high school, Rose continued to find owl nests and kept on writing, but now to the adult Letters section of the *Blue Jay*. In 1971, she told of finding only 19 owlets in her 12 nests. Hare numbers had just begun to drop, so plenty of owl pairs were present, but productivity was already falling below the long-term average of 2.2 young per nest. In 1972, things were worse, with only 11 young in 8 nests.

The team of Rose and Leslie Nemeth has become one of the world's top nest finders, with a grand total of 152 successful nests with young banded. It was easy for me to find helpers to go along on the Yellow Creek weekend because Liz Nemeth, Rose's mom, would serve a delicious meal to the hungry tree-climbers from produce grown on the Nemeth farm.

The good news is that Rose was able to turn her skills and her interests into a career. She became Saskatchewan's first female conservation officer.

The bad news is that Rose's life ended, prematurely, in a head-on collision on 17 December 1995, half-way between Prince Albert and Rose's recent home of La Ronge. She died the next morning in Royal University Hospital, Saskatoon. Naturalists will remember the "glory days" of the Junior Naturalists' section, for there hasn't been anything approaching the participation level that Joyce Deutscher inspired. Nor have there been teachers as effective as Isinger in encouraging student nature contributions. Nor students with the enthusiasm and drive of Rosemary Nemeth. Rose will be sorely missed by all who knew her.