
IN MEMORIAM

DOUG GILROY, 1915-2003

LORNE SCOTT, Box 995, Indian Head, SK, S0G 2K0

On October 19, 2003, Saskatchewan lost one of its best-known naturalists. Through his *Prairie Wildlife* column, which spanned five decades in the *Western Producer*, Doug Gilroy was a household name in farm homes across western Canada.

Doug was born on October 20, 1915 and raised on a farm along Boggy Creek, a few miles northwest of Regina. Like many youngsters raised on a farm, Doug developed an interest and appreciation of the natural world at an early age. He was also quick to realize that insects, plants and aquatic life were as much a part of the natural world as the colorful robin and stately White-tailed Deer.

In the late 1940s, Doug attended his first color slide presentation on wildlife. It was given by naturalist Dan McCowan in Regina and so impressed Doug that he decided to pursue nature photography. After purchasing his first camera with colour capability for \$5, Doug was soon on the lecture circuit, showing his slides and talking about wildlife and conservation. Over the years, he visited hundreds of school classes with his slide programs. Dozens of classes also came to the Gilroy farm, where he and his wife Mary hosted the energetic, eager children.



A longtime supporter of the Saskatchewan Natural History Society, Doug served as president in 1951-52. In 1954, the Society presented him with the Conservation Award for his exceptional ability as a nature photographer, columnist and lecturer. In 1990, Doug received the Gordon Lund Conservation Award from the Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation for his untiring efforts in writing the *Prairie Wildlife* column in *The Western Producer* for over 36 years.

In his introduction to Doug's final book titled *Prairie Wildlife: The Best of Doug Gilroy's Nature Photography*, R.H. (Rusty)

Macdonald, Executive Editor of the Western Producer reminisces about his early contact with Doug.

“This writer became involved with Gilroy in what can fairly be called the major turning point in Gilroy’s career. In the early 1950s we set out to “western Canadianize” the contents of the Western Producer, replacing features and regular columns by eastern Canadian, American, and British writers with those written by westerners.

“I approached the late Clifford Shaw of Yorkton, a master photographer and writer, but he was too busy and recommended Gilroy. ‘He’s a farmer down by Boggy Creek who rides a tractor with a camera around his neck. He’s got a good collection of photos, too.’

“Gilroy was interested but doubted if he could produce each week. I said it was just like writing home: ‘Sit down, and write a family letter, cut off the personal paragraphs top and bottom, and send the middle to the Producer.’ If he kept it homey and chatty, (he wasn’t the kind to get fancy) readers would respond with letters and his answers would add interest and ease the writing chore. ‘If you do it that way, you’ll be writing it when you’re sixty.’”

According to Macdonald, Doug also published articles in *Family Herald*, *Country Guide*, *Nature Canada*, *B.C. Living*, *Alberta Living*, and *Time* as well as *Blue Jay*, in which 28 of his articles and 17 photographs appeared. His four books are *Prairie Birds* (1967); *Prairie Birds in Color* (1976); *Parkland Portraits* (1979); and *Prairie Wildlife: The Best of Doug Gilroy’s Nature Photography* (1985).

Doug’s final column, number 1594, appeared in the Western Producer on December 14, 2000. It is difficult to measure the impact Doug’s column had in promoting an interest and awareness of our natural world. Undoubtedly, hundreds if not thousands of people across Western Canada either

communicated directly with Doug or can relate to something read in Doug’s column over the years. In my own case, it was through one of Doug’s Prairie Wildlife columns in 1965 that I contacted Alfred Serfas at Snowden, SK who was, like me, setting out bluebird nest boxes. Through Alfred, I discovered the Saskatchewan Natural History Society. In early 1966, Stuart Houston used Doug’s column to request people to report Great Horned Owl nests to him so that he could band the young. As a teenager, I skeptically wrote to him that I had located three owl nests. Much to the surprise of my whole family, Stuart showed up from 200 miles away on the May long weekend to band the owls. Three years later, Stuart and Doug provided references for me to obtain my own bird banding permit.

In his final column Doug said,

“I’ve finished a cycle. The column began with the January 7th issue of The Western Producer in 1954 and I am finishing it at the end of 2000. Forty-six years is a long time and everything must come to an end sometime. It was a ritual for me to write my column longhand, and have my wife, Mary, type it. I never learned to type, even in the two fingered manner, but Mary has always enjoyed doing it for me.

“One of the things I greatly enjoyed about doing the column was the letters I received. It was always a treat to get wonderful, interesting letters from down-to-earth prairie people who enjoy the outdoors and nature. I would like to extend my thanks to all those who wrote and contributed of their experiences with the outdoors and who let me know how much they valued the column.”

Doug, with his wife, Mary, and son Greg, farmed on the Boggy Creek farm for many years. Doug and Mary retired from the farm in 1973 and resided at Regina Beach, where they pursued their life-long interests for many years. Mary passed away on June 12, 2003 and Doug died peacefully at home on October 19, 2003, one day before his 88th birthday.