

NATURE SASKATCHEWAN MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: LORNE SCOTT

Jared Clarke

How do you even begin to describe the impact that Lorne Scott has had on Nature Saskatchewan over the last 50 years, or the impact that Nature Saskatchewan has had on Lorne Scott?

I mean, the guy has an entire book written about him and the efforts he has made for conservation in Saskatchewan! But alas, I'm going to try to describe a man who has been a huge part of my life, too. (By the way, you should definitely read the book about him — *Protecting the Prairies: Lorne Scott and the Politics of Conservation* by Andrea Olive. Although if Lorne hasn't already tried to sell you a copy, I will be shocked!).

Most of you reading this issue of the *Blue Jay* will know Lorne Scott as the current President of Nature Saskatchewan. He is a stalwart in the Saskatchewan conservation scene. I know him as a very humble man, which he proved repeatedly as I talked with him in preparation for this article. He continually stressed the impact of others, the impact of the team, not wanting to take much of the spotlight.

Lorne grew up on a farm south of Indian Head, where he still resides. When he was 17 years old, and after locating two Mountain Bluebird nests in tree cavities on his farm, he started building bird houses. He hoped he could attract the bluebirds to nest in his bird houses. Success came soon, although the results were a bit mixed. The first year, three pairs took up residency, although one nest box on a fence post was pulled out and thrown to the ground by a road maintenance crew and a second box was depredated by a cat. However, the third box fledged five young! Lorne can recount this story like it was just yesterday. From that day, he was hooked on conservation and the impact people can have on wildlife.

Lorne became a member of Nature Saskatchewan in 1965. It was through a fellow young person, Alfred Serfas,



Lorne Scott

that Lorne learned about the nature organization. Alfred had written to Doug Gilroy, the columnist of "Prairie Wildlife" in the *Western Producer* asking about bluebirds near Snowden. Lorne sent Alfred a letter asking him about bluebirds and the two have stayed in touch ever since.

It is with great fondness that Lorne recalls the friendships he has had over the last 50 years through Nature Saskatchewan. Lorne says you can walk into a spring or fall meet, having not seen someone in three or four years, and it is hugs and handshakes all around. The community has been tight knit and warm. Gary Seib, Fred Lahrman, and Stuart Houston all played key roles in shaping Lorne's progression as a naturalist. Gary and Lorne met on May 1, 1967, when Lorne moved into a boarding house to work at the Royal Saskatchewan Museum. They spent many days together crisscrossing the province to band birds and photograph wildlife.

It was Stuart Houston who set Lorne up with his first bird banding permit

in the fall of 1968. The next year, Lorne banded 600 Mountain Bluebirds! He has gone on to band more than 10,000 bluebirds and 23,000 Tree Swallows over the years. This year alone, he has banded more than 1,100 Tree Swallows!

As a strong voice for nature, Lorne is proud of Nature Saskatchewan's accomplishments. The establishment of Grasslands National Park tops the list as a "momentous achievement" in which Nature Saskatchewan was a key advocate for, following the lead of George Ledingham. Lorne remembers standing up at a meeting of Environment Ministers from across Canada (he was Saskatchewan's Minister of Environment at the time) and telling Sheila Copps, the Parks Canada Minister, that "Saskatchewan is ready to proclaim the Grasslands National Park!" The park came into being soon after and a breathtaking landscape was to be preserved for eternity.

Lorne also points to the establishment of the *Wildlife Habitat Protection Act* as another key achievement for Nature

Saskatchewan, which happened during the 1980s and saw 3.5 million acres of Saskatchewan Crown land protected from sale and development. Lorne credits Grant Devine's government for passing this legislation.

Over the last 50 years, in many capacities, including three terms as President, Lorne has watched the society evolve. Prior to the 1980s, there were no paid office staff, whereas today there is a handful of permanent staff members, as well as numerous Stewards of Saskatchewan field crews! These positions have meant that so much work can be done to protect Saskatchewan's wildlife and landscapes. Lorne speaks very highly of the people who have been employed with Nature Saskatchewan over the years.

Another way the organization has evolved is its relationships with landowners across the province. These relationships are key to protecting species like Burrowing Owls, Loggerhead Shrikes, rare plants and so much more. Today, Nature Saskatchewan has partnerships with more than 900 landowners!

However, it has not been all roses for Nature Saskatchewan. The fight to be the voice of nature means that things can get intense. Whether it was the decision to shutter the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation

Administration (PFRA) program, sell off Crown land in the province, closing the Indian Head Tree Nursery, or the establishment of the coyote bounty by the provincial government, there have been many fights waged with some lost and some won.

However, Lorne says it's better to save a little than to lose it all.

The loss of biodiversity in Saskatchewan, and across the world, is what concerns Lorne as the most significant environmental issue. He says this is being driven largely by habitat loss. Lorne has witnessed this loss over his life, which has undoubtedly been crushing for him.

When he started placing bluebird boxes on his land back in the '60s, Lorne had 25 to 30 pairs of bluebirds nesting on four quarters of farm land! "Just unbelievable numbers," Lorne describes. In the '90s, numbers started to go down. And stunningly, the last pair nested on Lorne's farm in 2014. There hasn't been a pair since. The bluebirds are simply not returning. The habitat on Lorne's farm has remained intact, but the land around him — the bush and wetlands — have largely been lost.

Despite the losses over the years, Lorne still keeps advocating and caring about the land he has called home his entire life. He still wants to see Nature Saskatchewan be the strong voice for

nature that it has been in the past. And he wants to see more people get involved, especially youth.

I met Lorne in 2003 when I started working as a seasonal naturalist at Wascana Centre Authority. I was inspired by his knowledge, his bluebird work and his extensive network. We became friends through our time on the Friends of Wascana Marsh board and spent days banding Ferruginous Hawks, Great Horned Owls and Swainson's Hawks together out in the Herbert and Morse area with Lori Wilson and Randy McCulloch. Lorne has been a mentor to me in many ways, including politically. He was the one who first suggested I run for politics. I have always valued his views, even when I don't necessarily agree with them.

Lorne has greatly shaped conservation in so many ways over the last five decades, even in ways that aren't easily noticed.

When I was in Grade 4, my class had the chance to go to Wascana Park to help release Wood Ducks into the marsh. I remember getting a full-grown duck placed in my hands and then launching the brilliant bird into the air. I already loved birds by this point in my life, so this kind of experience just solidified that connection even further. We took a photo of the group after the ducks had all been released that day. Years later, I came across that photo that had been taken. In the photo, I am just beaming from an exhilarating day and behind me stands the Environment Minister, Lorne Scott, already influencing my life before he even knew who I was.

Lorne says we can't give up — that nature is worth fighting for and that Nature Saskatchewan must continue to be a responsible, credible and loud voice for nature in Saskatchewan. "We need as many supporters as we can possibly find. We welcome everybody!"

As part of our 75th anniversary celebrations, we are interviewing and writing articles that highlight active members who have had a significant impact on Nature Saskatchewan, as nominated by fellow members. 🐦

