

## 1995 DORIS HUESTIS SPEIRS AWARD FOR OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTIONS IN CANADIAN ORNITHOLOGY

Robert W. Nero

The Society of Canadian Ornithologists presents the Doris Huestis Speirs Award for 1995 to Robert W. Nero. Ethologist, naturalist, conservationist, archaeologist, writer and poet, Bob Nero's influence on Canadian ornithology has been far-reaching. In 1955, Bob received the Ph.D. degree from University of Wisconsin for a classic study of territorial and courtship behaviour of Red-winged Blackbirds. Bob then moved to Regina as Assistant Director of the Saskatchewan Museum of Natural History. He was a strong supporter of the Saskatchewan Natural History Society, and his first articles, summarizing records of Black-throated Blue Warbler and Kangaroo Rat in Saskatchewan, were published in its journal *Blue Jay* in March 1956. His papers, on various subjects, appeared in most subsequent issues of this journal. Bob edited the *Blue Jay* in 1965-66 and continues to serve it as an Associate Editor.

During eight years at the Museum, Bob explored, with others, many little-known areas of Saskatchewan, documenting additions to known ranges of mammals and new occurrences of birds. He continued studies of bird behaviour, particularly of blackbirds and Lark Buntings. Bob encouraged amateur naturalists and bird-watchers to record and publish their observations in the *Blue Jay*. He saw birds of prey as creatures of beauty and recognized their importance in natural ecosystems at a time when these birds were much persecuted. His efforts contributed importantly to the Saskatchewan government's enactment of legislation, in the early 1960s, that afforded birds of prey full legal protection in that province. With Bob leading local ornithologists in Regina, the Saskatchewan Natural History Society and the Museum hosted the 77th Stated Meeting of the American Ornithologists' Union in 1959, the first time this body had met in western Canada.

In 1962, Bob accepted a position as associate professor of biology at University of Saskatchewan's Regina Campus. He continued to write about natural history, and conducted avifaunal studies of three little-known areas of Saskatchewan: the Lake Athabasca region, northeastern Saskatchewan, and the Moose Mountain region. Results of those studies appeared as *Special Publications of the Saskatchewan Natural History Society*, and they remain the definitive works on birds of those regions.

Bob spent the rest of his career in Manitoba, from 1967 at Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature, and from 1972 until his recent retirement as non-game specialist with Department of Natural Resources. His experience as a scientist and naturalist was immediately recognized, and Bob became known as the Provincial Ornithologist. His colleagues, newspaper reporters, environmental groups, and members of the general public tapped his broad knowledge on natural history and conservation affairs, and his considerable writing and editorial skills. Bob supported the *Bulletin of the Manitoba*

*Naturalists' Society* with many writings, his sometimes controversial opinions, and poems.

Soon after arriving in Manitoba, Bob became interested in the Woodcock. In searching for this species in southeastern Manitoba, he soon met the Great Gray Owl. That was it! A love affair with Great Gray Owls began and endures to this day. With Herb Copland, hundreds of sightings were made, dozens of nests were observed, over 500 owls were banded, and hundreds of photographs were taken by renowned wildlife photographer Robert R. Taylor. Bob supervised a Ph.D. study of the Great Gray Owl, and wrote many articles and two books in which he shared his experiences and the knowledge he had gained. Bob revealed in these books the artistic sensitivity with which he perceives the natural world. With his captive owl Gray'l, Bob visited school classrooms to talk about the beauty of nature, his love for it, and the importance of treating the environment with respect.

Bob compiled records of Cougar sightings in Manitoba and adjacent areas, spurred on by the shooting of a Cougar near Winnipeg in 1973. With Robert Wrigley, he published on the status of this mammal in Manitoba, and was instrumental in having it afforded protection by the Manitoba government. Bob encouraged amateur naturalists and other people around the province to report records to him. Everyone with an observation of a Cougar, Great Gray Owl, or chipmunk was important. Indeed, one of Bob's greatest contributions was his passionate encouragement of non-professionals to participate in the discovery of happenings in the bird world. In their younger days, many ornithologists now active in Canada were positively influenced by Bob Nero. The Society of Canadian Ornithologists takes great pleasure in presenting the 1995 Speirs Award to Robert Nero for his many important contributions to ornithology in Canada.