

## THE PRESIDENT'S PAGE

MARGARET MORSE NICE,  
1883-1974

On 26 June 1974, Margaret Morse Nice died at her home in Chicago, Illinois, at the age of ninety.

Mrs. Nice, in a sense, was only one of many important American contributors to ornithology in the twentieth century, but she was far more than that. She had become a symbol and an inspiration to a host of would-be ornithologists, particularly but not exclusively nonprofessionals. Dr. Mary Heimerdinger Clench, for example, tells me that it was her reading of Mrs. Nice's "The watcher at the nest" as a high school freshman that solidified her resolve to become an ornithologist. Mrs. Nice's career demonstrated to countless others that a housewife without a doctorate, raising four children, could, by studying the birds in her own backyard, make "the outstanding contribution of the present quarter century to ornithological thinking in America"—a quotation from the citation accompanying an honorary D. Sc. awarded to Mrs. Nice at her Fiftieth Reunion at Mount Holyoke College.

Mrs. Nice is survived by four daughters, seven grandsons, four great-grandchildren, a sister, and two brothers, to one of whom, Edward S. Morse of South Londonderry, Vermont, I am indebted for some of the biographical material used here. Her husband, Professor Leonard Blaine Nice, died in January 1974.

Margaret Morse Nice looms large in the history of the Wilson Ornithological Society. Her name first appears on our membership roll in 1921, and she wasted no time in adopting *The Wilson Bulletin* as a publication medium for her bird observations. The lead article in the September 1921 issue was "The roadside census" by Margaret M. Nice and L. B. Nice (her husband), then residents of Norman, Oklahoma. In the same issue's general notes is a report by Mrs. Nice on a white Cowbird. In October 1922, the Wilson Ornithological Club (as it was then called) hosted the American Ornithologists' Union meeting in Chicago. During this joint meeting a dinner was held by a group of 52 bird banders, including Mrs. Nice, who organized themselves into the still thriving Inland Bird-Banding Association.

At the 1925 meeting in Kansas City, Mrs. Nice was to have delivered her first paper at a Wilson meeting, "A study of a nesting of Magnolia Warblers," but according to the published Proceedings, she was unavoidably absent and was unable to present the paper. It was published in the *Bulletin* in 1926. Again in 1927, a paper on Ovenbirds was read by title at the meeting in Nashville in Mrs. Nice's absence. In the report of the Secretary for 1927 (published in 1928) appears the first evidence of Mrs. Nice's participation in Wilson Club matters other than as an author—her name appears in the list of those who had recruited a new member during 1927. Although the Nashville meeting, held in conjunction with the A.A.A.S. in December 1927, is officially recorded as the 14th Annual Meeting of the Wilson Ornithological Club, 1927 was a somewhat unusual year in that *another* meeting of the Club had already been held a month before in Cleveland, as a joint meeting with I.B.B.A. At this meeting Mrs. Nice did present a paper in person, on the nesting of a pair of Myrtle Warblers.

At the 15th Annual Meeting in Ann Arbor in 1928, the Nominating Committee presented, among others, the name of Mrs. Margaret M. Nice, Columbus, Ohio, for Councilor, to serve in 1929. The slate presented by the Committee was duly elected, and Mrs. Nice took up her first duties in the administration of the Wilson Club. She served on

the Council through 1931. At the 1934 meeting in Pittsburgh, Mrs. Nice was elected Second Vice-President of the Club and served in this office during 1935 and 1936. The custom had not yet been firmly established of two-year terms for officers, and Mrs. Nice was elevated to the presidency of the Wilson Ornithological Club after having served only one year, 1937, as First Vice-President.

The second and last year of Mrs. Nice's presidency, 1939, was also the first year of the long and memorable editorship of *The Wilson Bulletin* by Josselyn Van Tyne. At the same time that his name first appears as Editor, Margaret Morse Nice is listed as Associate Editor. Her duties were not specifically mentioned, but it is obvious from the frequency of the appearance of her name or initials that one of her main interests was ornithological literature. She remained on the editorial staff through 1949, but it was our sister journal *Bird-Banding* that received the major share of Mrs. Nice's skill at reading and interpreting a tremendous variety of ornithological books and papers. As Associate Editor of that journal from 1935 to 1942 and from 1946 until her death, Mrs. Nice prepared more than *three thousand* reviews and abstracts. Her fluency in German was particularly helpful in making the important literature in that language accessible to the non-linguists among us.

Mrs. Nice joined the American Ornithologists' Union in 1907 and was elected a Fellow in 1937. A full-length memorial, with a more thorough coverage of her ornithological career, will eventually appear in *The Auk*. Meanwhile, in these days of hypersensitive consciousness of the gender of scientists, it is perhaps excusable that we of the Wilson Ornithological Society take quiet pride in our long and close association with Margaret Morse Nice, the only woman to have served as President of any of the three major American ornithological societies.

Although there are no specifications as to who may qualify for the Wilson Society's Louis Agassiz Fuertes Research Grants-in-aid, in practice most of them have gone to graduate students. In 1969 a member of the Society, believing that alternative sources of funds were usually available to students, decided to initiate and to fund a grant for which college or university-affiliated individuals would *not* be eligible, in order to provide a stimulus as well as some financial assistance to "amateur" researchers. No name could better symbolize the kind of person we hoped to reach through this grant than Margaret Morse Nice, and the officers of the Wilson Society were gratified when Mrs. Nice agreed to our using her name for this purpose. The original fund that established the Margaret Morse Nice Grant-in-aid has been depleted. Gifts to the W.O.S. earmarked for this fund would constitute a highly appropriate memorial to Mrs. Nice, and might well help to encourage a potential, emulator, of any age and of either sex, of her accomplishments.

—KENNETH C. PARKES.

### CORRECTION

An unfortunate printing error in the June 1974 *Bulletin* (86:181, line 40) resulted in an incorrect line displacing the proper one in The President's Page. The line should have read, "of the suggested changes: it had to be convinced, as stated in the *Supplement* itself,".