

Margaret Morse Nice



Margaret Morse Nice was an intelligent and committed researcher who contributed greatly to the study of ornithology. She was a quiet and soft-spoken person, but always self-assured if she was being undermined. She helped shape the research of ornithology with her keen observations and extensive research.

Mrs. Nice, nee Morse was born on December 6, 1883 in Amherst, Massachusetts to Anson D. Morse, a professor at Amherst College, and Margaret Duncan. Nice grew up with six brothers and sisters, Ely, William, Sarah, Katherine, Harold, and Edward.

At a young age, Mrs. Nice became interested in the environment and nature and took to carefully noting birds at the age of 13. She went to grade and high school in Amherst and graduated from Mt. Holyoke College in 1906. At Holyoke she studied several languages including, German, French, Italian, English, and Latin, the latter of which would help her with her ornithology career.

Later on in college, her interest in natural sciences became apparent though the teachings of Henrietta Edgecomb Hooker, Professor of Botany, and Mignon Talbot, Professor of Geology and Geography. In 1910, she published an article "Food of the Bobwhite," which made people associate her with the study of birds. By that time she had already showed keen skills in field observations and organizing data.

Mrs. Nice then entered Clark University of Worcester, where she married Leonard Blaine Nice. They moved to Boston, then to Oklahoma soon after, where Leonard taught at the University of Oklahoma. In Oklahoma, Nice became interested in child psychology, and even documented her children's behaviors. Mrs. Nice was also interested in the Mourning Dove and became even more involved with birds.

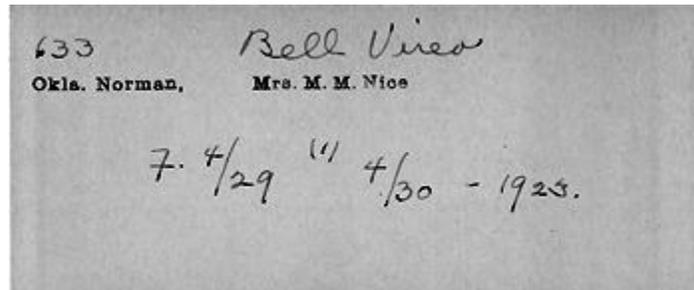
Mrs. Nice got her degree in zoology at Clark in 1915 because of her study, "The Food of the Bobwhite." In 1921, she published several articles about the Mourning Dove, and soon other articles about other birds in the wet-weather ponds and during winter. She published in several journals, such as *The Auk*, and *Oologist*. In 1924, her first publication came out called *The Birds of Oklahoma*, and was given great reviews because of the wide-ranging research.

They then moved to Ohio in 1927, where Leonard would teach at The Ohio State University of Columbus. Mrs. Nice continued on researching different species of birds, including Cardinals and Pileated Woodpeckers. She even returned to Massachusetts where she would study species such as Magnolia, Black-throated Blue, Blackburnian and Myrtle Warbler. She was especially productive in Ohio, because of the close proximity of the Olentangy River to her house. She was able to publish hundreds of articles and journals while in Columbus.

In 1931, she met Ernst Mayr at an American Ornithologists' Union (AOU) meeting, and was elected and became the first woman president of the fellowship, following her publications.

Finally, the Nice family moved to Illinois in 1936, where Leonard would teach at the Chicago Medical School. Mrs. Nice then did her fieldwork on the life of the history of the Song Sparrow. After banding and weighing a particular Song Sparrow, it died in her hands and she promised to never band another bird again. A friend, Dr. Thomas of Ohio Historical Society, persuaded her to continue because of the knowledge she would provide to the history of birds.

In later years, sadly Mrs. Nice's health began to deteriorate. She had several heart problems and eye problems that hindered her research. On June 26, 1974, Mrs. Nice died of Arteriosclerosis. Her research and time devoted to birds was a great contribution to the study ornithology, and provided a starting point in the history of birds.



Migration Card recorded by Margaret Morse Nice

This biography was written using the following resources:

<http://elibrary.unm.edu/sora/Auk/v094n03/p0430-p0441.pdf>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Margaret_Morse_Nice

BPP Intern, Kamli Sirjue contributed this biography to our newsletter, thank you Kamli!