



## ★ **Woman, Watching: Louise de Kiriline Lawrence and the Songbirds of Pimisi Bay**

### **Merilyn Simonds**

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*Woman, Watching* is Merilyn Simonds's account of the remarkable life and legacy of Louise de Kiriline Lawrence, the amateur ornithologist and author who has been called "the Canadian Rachel Carson."

Born into Sweden's landed gentry, Lawrence married a Tsarist soldier and followed him into the horrors of war. Captured and released by the Red Army, she settled in rural Canada, visiting her patients by dogsled as the only primary care nurse in a 2,500-square kilometer area. She later learned that her husband had been killed by the Bolsheviks.

A stint as the Dionne quintuplets' nurse brought Lawrence unwelcome fame, so she left for the blessed solitude of a primitive log cabin on Ontario's Pimisi Bay. There, for over fifty years, she kept meticulous records of the birds that visited her forested lands. She was one of the first to notice the drastic mid-twentieth-century decline of the songbird population, fifteen years before Carson's *Silent Spring* was released.

Simonds notes that, through a second marriage and another war, Lawrence published many articles in scientific journals and popular magazines. Her unique life histories of the birds that visited her domain helped in solving mysteries that confounded noted ornithologists, and her work earned her honors and acclaim.

Simonds was Lawrence's friend and neighbor during her later years on Pimisi Bay, and her own forays into birding appear in the book, together with recollections of sweet times with her mentor and friend. She notes that Lawrence, in her nineties and still curious, observed her own decline, writing of old age as "the ultimate time of learning."

A stellar, adventure-filled biography, *Woman, Watching* pays tribute to the indomitable, eccentric woman who once observed a red-eyed vireo for fourteen hours straight as it sang over twenty-two thousand songs.

KRISTINE MORRIS (March / April 2022)

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