



The Katharine Ordway
Natural History Study Area

Box 216
Inver Grove Heights, Minn. 55075
(612) 455-6204

ORDWAY BULLETIN
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MACALESTER
COLLEGE

located at 9550 Inver Grove Trail (Dakota County Road 77), Inver Grove Heights, Minn.

A TREE FALLS at ORDWAY.

A tree fell down one day last July. I know because I was looking out toward the woods that hot afternoon - it was 2:10 - and saw it pitch forward from its place on the hillside in the oak forest. It made no particular effect - it did not leave a big "hole" in the forest canopy; it was not a very big tree - and had I flicked my eyes at the moment of its demise I am certain I would have noticed no difference in the appearance of the forest, would have been unaware of the death of a creature. However, it did fall, silently on the hillside - for I was too distant to hear any sound it might have made. "Does a falling tree make any sound if there is no person there to hear it"????

But its fall had caught my attention and my thoughts. I found myself feeling the loss of a denizen of Ordway. Perhaps it needed a fitting obituary - let this be it. Indeed, let this be an obituary for all living creatures which disappear from our view unnoticed.

A few weeks later the fallen tree came to mind and I walked over to have a look at it. It was a red oak (Northern Pin Oak) and it had been badly diseased in its root structure so that it was really dead while still standing. It had only wanted a slight nudge from some natural process - probably a gust of wind in this case - to unbalance the forces which were continuing to keep it erect ... and it toppled downward, hinged at its base with the rotting remains of its root structure. Already shelf fungi had begun to make their appearance near the base of the carcass, sapping the nutrients from the already dead body of the plant.

Just today I had another look at the fallen tree covered with a half-foot of snow and invisible to my eyes except for the mound which marked its presence. Near the base of the fallen tree were the footprints of the deer mouse which abounds in that part of the woods and which have used the bulky mass for shelter and forage. On the downhill side, somewhat more sheltered is evidence that a cottontail rabbit has used it as its winter haven against the winds, a rather cozy spot for that creature. Once can take comfort in the cycle of death/life which the fallen tree represents, protecting other species and ultimately reverting to the earth components from which it came.

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rjc/al


R. J. CHRISTMAN,
Naturalist