



The Katharine Ordway
Natural History Study Area

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ORDWAY BULLETIN
No. 81

MACALESTER
COLLEGE

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

The COPPICES at ORDWAY - I.

As one enters Ordway alongside the entry roadway there is a thicket of saplings. This is the fourth growing year (1979) for this little community which has become so densely grown-up that it is not easy to walk through it even in the early spring when there are few leaves and very little undergrowth. A quick "census" of the clump indicates about 21 saplings per square meter.

The clump is the result of the seeding from a nearby tangle of Box Elders (*Acer negundo*), the most elderly of which has long since fallen to a horizontal position forming a crude and decaying arch from which nonetheless there springs a great deal of green-life each spring.

From this decadent patriarch have floated a myriad of samaras which the trees of the Maple family produce so prolifically. These little winged seeds detach themselves from the parent tree and spin to earth under the combined propulsion of gravity and the providential winds which carry them to sufficient distance so that they can take root away from the shade at the base of the dominating parent tree.

This particular coppice is from three to twenty meters from the fallen progenitor and is roughly oval in its dimensions, its long axis lying roughly parallel to the fallen body of the big tree. In the little grove which has sprung up so quickly there are two elms which were probably there first, judging by their size. The developing circumstances are such that the fast-growing Box Elders may shade out the Elms although that tree is a fairly good competitor for this type of situation since it tends to grow slender and tall and erect and this could achieve sufficient height to carry it above the shading influence of the other trees in its vicinity.

This dense growth has already had great influence upon the surroundings and the past winter has brought about a confusing maze of "bunny trails" from the rather large rabbit population of the past year or so. Leading out from the coppice and crossing the roadway at several points are the "main streets", leading to the sumac thickets where the rabbits prefer to do their winter browsing.

Warmer weather will find a host of migrating birds using the thicket for their temporary habitat and after their departure the summer residents will establish their territories therein. The Black-billed Cuckoo has nested in this tangled haven each summer for the past six years. The quiet shaded nook is ideal as a nesting-place for this mysterious bird.

This is one small locale where it is possible to watch and become interested in the remarkable regenerative powers which Nature possesses; to see the re-alignment of the natural factors; to observe the dynamic flow of the natural forces as an "empty space", where there had been only grasses before, becomes a mono-specific thicket in a comparatively short space of three or four years. What happens here next is going to be pretty interesting, maybe not completely predictable either. Continued observation will be fascinating as the coppice increases, flourishes and then declines.

22 February 1980

gw

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "R J Christman", with a horizontal line extending from the end of the name.

R J CHRISTMAN,
Naturalist