



The Katharine Ordway  
Natural History Study Area

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ORDWAY BULLETIN  
No. 103

MACALESTER  
COLLEGE

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

WASPS at ORDWAY.

No winter passes but that I have an experience or two with wasps who have taken refuge in the building from the winter weather. Here they remain torpid - at least, quiescent - for almost all the winter. Occasionally, though, they will take some cue - perhaps from the bright warming sunlight through the south-facing windows - to exercise some slight measure of activity. On such occasions they rise sluggishly from wherever they have perched - often the floor - and make for the sunlight, sometimes crawling lethargically across my desk-papers, also my hand if it is there. A time or two I have felt the "bite" of these somnolent winter hangers-on but each time it has been of my own doing in brushing against them or, as in one case, leaning against the window-sill and receiving a reminding sting in the belly from a roughed-up wasp who was reclining there.

The genus of wasps living hereabouts is Polistes - the "paper-making wasp". Running about 20-25 mm in length it may be black, brown or red set off by a few yellow markings about the abdomen. Its papier-mache home is a circular affair which looks like a chunk of honey-comb hanging downward, attached by a single column of remarkably small diameter. The eaves, particularly on the sunnier side of the building, are festooned with these clusters of cubby-holes.

The Latin word, polistes, means "peaceful".

February 22, 1982

gw/

R J CHRISTMAN,  
Naturalist