

MACALESTER COLLEGE

SAINT PAUL, MINNESOTA 55105

■ DEPARTMENT OF BIOLOGY

Ordway Bulletin No. 20

Subject: The PONDS at ORDWAY: II.) The TEMPORARY PONDS.

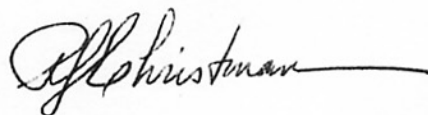
There are two temporary ponds at Ordway - that is, they are ponds during the spring season when they have received the waters of the thawing snows and the spring rains and thus are sometimes called "vernal pools"; by mid-July they have "died", gone completely dry and it is easy to overlook the fact that they ever existed. During their relatively short lives - four months at the most - these ponds are literally "jumping" with life for they are vital links in the chain-of-life of the amphibian denizens of Ordway. Here in early April the awakening toads and frogs lay their eggs.

The two ponds are within 200 feet of each other and of similar size - about 150 feet in diameter, being roughly circular. They are shallow cups which have been scooped out by glacial action, being about 5 or 6 feet in depression and when the spring waters have filled them they contain perhaps 10-15 inches of water.

By about March 20th the ponds are "open" despite shoreline ledges of ice and snow. At this time a sampling of the water discloses the emergence of all sorts of life in the form of various Plankton and Copepods and shortly thereafter the beautiful Fairy Shrimp (Eubranchipus bundyi), a small crustacean, which become the nourishment for the many amphibians which utilize the ponds for the vital parts of their life cycles. By the end of March the ponds are vibrating to the sounds of the Chorus Frogs (Pseudacris nigrita triseriata) and others and shortly one can find floating masses of their eggs on the surface of the ponds.

And so each spring the primeval story is repeated - the pond nurtures the pollywogs, which emerge from the pools as matured frogs and toads.....and then: As gradually as they came into existence the ponds cease once more to exist, degenerating first into algae-covered mudholes and then into the sere, grass-covered earth which will remain thus until the awakening of the next spring.

Yet when one visits the place in late summer or autumn he cannot fail to detect the existence of the ponds from the surrounding vegetation: a clump of willows, the long basal leaves of the Wild Blue Flag (Iris versicolor L.) and nearby a mammoth Cottonwood (Populus deltoides) - all of these indicate unerringly that this is indeed a pond community....but never in the world would a casual visit in the quiet and sombre autumn give one a notion of the noisy and wet conditions which will prevail in the following spring.



R J CHRISTMAN,
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