



The Katharine Ordway  
Natural History Study Area

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ORDWAY BULLETIN  
No. 105

MACALESTER  
COLLEGE

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

### BROKEN EGGS at ORDWAY.

In walking about the property it is not unusual to encounter broken egg-shells near the pathways. These are usually the result of predation of an inter-specific nature: Jays are perhaps the biggest culprits, supplementing their diet thus and also bringing some limitations to the viability of other species. Robins seem to be frequent victims of this egg-stealing and it is easy to contemplate that their open-type nests make them a little more vulnerable to this sort of piracy. Bluebirds, too, suffer from this type of predation although their nests tend to be a little less open and here at Ordway many of them nest in nesting-boxes, which ordinarily preclude access by a bird as large as a Jay. However, almost every year I have found evidence of this predation and last summer ('81) one complete clutch of four Bluebird eggs had been removed and dropped to the grass at the base of the fencepost (breaking only two of the four). I think it was a House Sparrow who was the culprit.

Egg-snatching by humans is also a strong factor in the setback of nesting birds and it is the cause for much personal annoyance when I find continuing evidence of this at Ordway. I suppose there is a natural curiosity to discovering a clutch of eggs but the rape of such is hard to justify. There are a few persons who collect eggs and there also some people, mostly young and inquisitive, who wish to incubate the eggs themselves and perhaps raise the offspring. However, most taking of eggs is wanton mischief. I would find it very difficult to be civil to the person(s) who took four eggs from the robin's nest in the tree at the front door of the building last summer. I had closed the entry gates so that cars in the parking-lot would not disturb the mother bird; we entered and left by the rear door for two weeks to safeguard the privacy of the mother robin only to have the eggs "lifted" one Saturday within two days of the anticipated hatching....

Such incidents never fail to produce a strong feeling of sadness mixed with annoyance. How can some creature wipe out another creature thus??? True, it is a "law" of nature but nevertheless it produces a poignant feeling to contemplate such an end to the courting, mating and nesting activities of a pair of any species which results in the production of eggs - certainly one of the most beautiful geometric forms in nature! Henry Thoreau observes in his journal (July 30, 1852): "What a gem is a bird's egg, especially a blue or green one, when you see one broken or whole in the woods! I noticed a small blue egg this afternoon washed up by Flint's Pond and half-buried by white sand and as it lay there, alternately wet and dry, no color could be fairer, no gem could have a more advantageous or favorable setting. Probably it was shaken out of some nest which overhung the water. I frequently meet with broken egg-shells where a crow, perchance, or some other thief has been marauding. And is not that shell something very precious that houses that winged life?"

R J CHRISTMAN,  
Naturalist

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st. jos.