

MACALESTER COLLEGE

SAINT PAUL, MINNESOTA 55105

■ DEPARTMENT OF BIOLOGY

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Subject: APRIL HARBINGERS at ORDWAY.

Any day now one or more signs will appear and the primordial succession of the seasons will be renewed. In spite of the disheartening relapses to the late winter storms, which included two late March blizzards this year, the cheering harbingers of spring will soon be observed.

Last Sunday, the day preceding the blizzard, the leaf-buds of the Red Elder (*Sambucus racemosa*) displayed their first swollen protuberances against the bleak snow-covered surroundings. Each year it vies with the Skunk Cabbage (*Symplocarpus foetidus*) for making the first such showing of the season. Last year they both appeared during the week of March 25th and this year's heavier snows have slowed only the emergence of the Skunk Cabbage for beneath the protective cover the first spadix-shaped blossoms are forming.

Among the birds the first appearance of spring visitors is very much influenced by the weather. Last year (1974) the dapper Red-winged Blackbird put in his first appearance during the third week of March (the 11th) but this year so far his cheery, somewhat unmusical voice has yet to be heard at Ordway; he is overdue. (Incidentally, it is always the male of this species which returns first.) During the first week of April we can reasonably expect appearances from the Flicker, the Mourning Dove and the Killdeer while the Song Sparrow's melodious voice will also return to us (exactly on April 1st last year).

The first Chorus Frog will put in his over-sized vocal announcements about the middle of the month (April 16th last year) followed shortly thereafter (on a sunny hillside) by the appearance of the first, lethargic Garter Snake. The Grey Squirrel has speeded up his many activities - but he has been with us all winter long. The day following the blizzard the tracks of a Raccoon were seen along the spring flowing into River Lake; apparently his somnolent wintertime is over.

So is ours....



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