



The Katharine Ordway
Natural History Study Area

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ORDWAY BULLETIN
No. 82

MACALESTER
COLLEGE

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

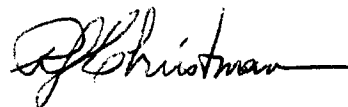
A HUNTER at ORDWAY - II.

He wore a rough, dark coat and sat near the small pond, appearing at casual glance to be a small blackened stump or a field boulder. He was intently watching the activity on the pond where a Grebe and two Mallards were puddling and diving for water-growth. His presence was no imminent danger to the birds for he was at considerable distance and discouraged by the shallow water from approaching any closer; yet he was aware of every movement of the creatures on the water, alert to this prospect for asserting his hunting skills, his "kill instinct".

He was a housecat (Felis domesticus), one of a group of too-frequent intruders into the natural scene. Sheltered and nurtured by some household to whom he is both a pet and a prized rodent-controller, such a cat is a continuing menace to the natural residents. The pressure of these raiders is observed mostly in those parts of Ordway which abut on residential properties and it is not often that the domestic cats penetrate very far into the forest or river bottoms; however, in the limited range where they do roam they carry out much predation.

This predation is not reasonable, not "allowable" in terms of "natural balance". The natural state of things implies that there will be preying by some species on others and this is reasonable and important to the natural scene. However, the kind of preying which occurs when domesticated animals are added to the scene is unreasonable and cannot be encouraged. In this sort of situation the one competitor is protected while the others must conform to the natural rules. It is not a fair match when a cat, fed and sheltered in a household, is turned loose on wild creatures. When one adds the further consideration that the wild creatures (mostly birds in the case of Ordway) are sometimes handicapped in the course of our studies (involving the use of traps and mist-nets) it becomes obvious that the scales are tipped unfairly against the wild creatures. Measures to discourage the free-ranging of cats are necessary here at Ordway lest they produce an inordinate unbalancing of our natural history study potential.

The Mallards moved into the tall water-grass and the scene became very quiet; the feline hunter stealthily moved away, heading in the direction of his domicile. It is very likely that he was not hungry at all but was "jus' doin' a little harmless huntin'". I felt certain that I would see him - or his footprints - again.


R. J. CHRISTMAN,
Naturalist

8 April 1980