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ORDWAY BULLETIN
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MACALESTER
COLLEGE

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

WILD PETS at ORDWAY

It happens occasionally that we become the reluctant recipients of "gifts" in the form of animals who have been taken into households from their wild haunts only to be given away when they become problems to the foster-parents. Such apparently well-meant acts cause us to think second thoughts about the current popular fad for "getting close to nature" by bringing wild things into our homes and exposing them to our "habitats" while "studying their behavior".

One is hardly going to observe wild things "doing their thing" when they are held in non-natural conditions. True it is that Konrad Lorenz and others have accomplished remarkable advances in learning by studying some wild creatures at close range. It should suffice to say that this is quite unusual - just as Konrad Lorenz is quite unusual, even rare; and one can only shudder to think of the unrealistic "natural" studies which have been inflicted upon nature's creatures by those of us who violate the wild principles. A short personal anecdote may serve as an illustration:

"Bubby" was a raccoon and for a short period was my companion. His life path joined mine at the beginning of one September when he became a "gift" from a household which had "adopted" him early that year; the imminent resumption of the school session might have been coincidental with his eviction. It is good that his foster-parents sought out Ordway as a new home for him as he had acquired so many "people" traits that he was really a sorry specimen to turn loose into the relentless natural world. The four or five weeks which followed were a continuous effort to re-train this cute little fellow so that he could take his place in that environment which was his birthright but from which he had been plucked and alienated. He persisted in the diurnal habits acquired from his protectors and also some atrocious eating-habits: hot dogs and marshmallows!! In a very real way he thought he was "a people". The tale of his re-education would warrant a separate telling but the sobering fact is that this animal should not have been taken from his surroundings; he did not benefit therefrom nor did the household learn much from their "observing nature at first-hand".

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources is opposed to the practice of "wild pets" and there are state laws which make such practice unlawful. The local zoo is the recipient of frequent offers of animals of a wide range which have been taken from their natural surroundings.

In general it is not in keeping with our policies to take "gift" animals. Taking 'coons as an example: It would not be a good thing to accept several of these animals to be released on our property being aware of their propensity for raiding neighboring garden patches and garbage cans; there is a limit to what the land will support and

that limit is best reached by nature's creatures themselves without meddling from mankind. Much education is needed along this line to awaken in all people the ethical judgment which would preclude their intruding unnecessarily into the "wild kingdom". Sometimes there are particularly obstinate cases: e.g., when we last talked with the woman who had gotten rid of "Bubby" she was intent upon locating a Woodchuck as a household pet!

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "R J Christman", followed by a horizontal line extending to the right.

R J CHRISTMAN,
Naturalist
Katharine Ordway Natural
History Study Area.

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