



The Katharine Ordway
Natural History Study Area

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ORDWAY BULLETIN
No. 83

MACALESTER
COLLEGE

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

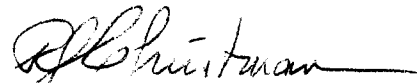
The METRIC SYSTEM at ORDWAY - II.

It is a pretty good idea to look back occasionally on something we have said or done and to re-examine it in the light of current conditions. In November 1973 (Ordway Bull. No. 16) we made some comments concerning the metric system and its use. The six-and-a-half years which have transpired allow us some distance at which to re-focus our attention on this matter.

Since first writing about it we have attempted to incorporate the use of the metric system into our daily activities at Ordway. The results are not particularly edifying and it goes to show that old habits die hard. We continue to take our daily temperature measurements on the Celsius scale but somehow we find ourselves still making mental conversions to the Fahrenheit scale of our boyhood. (It seems less cold to say "30°F" than to say "-1°C"...*) However, we continue to take barometric readings in "inches of mercury" whereas consistency should require readings in "millimeters of mercury", as designated in the metric system. Similarly we have tried to indicate distances in meters or kilometers with some degree of consistency; however, it is hard to believe that we will ever come to referring to acreages (acres) in terms of hectares (who would believe us or attempt to understand?).

We ask ourselves, then, Is it important - does it really matter? We believe that ultimately there will be the nationwide changeover to usage of this international system of weights and measurements. We continue, therefore, to use the metric system in our scientific observations - a bird's tarsus, culmen and wing-chord are all measured in millimeters; its weight in grams - and also we make other physical measurements, such as distance and weather, in metric units. We still wish, however, to remain viable with our friends and visitors and will make the necessary concessions to any such metric references. Let's see: 29.96 inches of mercury is equivalent to 759.5 millimeters of mercury; one inch of rainfall equals 25.4 millimeters thereof; a wind velocity of 10 mph is equivalent to 16 kilometers/hour (10 knots would be the equivalent of 18.5 kilometers/hour). It could get confusing!

25 April 1980


R. J. CHRISTMAN,
Naturalist