

MACALESTER COLLEGE

SAINT PAUL, MINNESOTA 55105

■ DEPARTMENT OF BIOLOGY

Ordway Bulletin No. 32

Subject: The RAILROADS at ORDWAY.

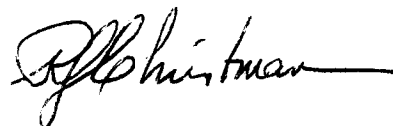
There are very few things which hold such fascination for most people as a railroad train. This is especially true for younger persons and the visits of school children to Ordway are often heightened by the spellbinding appearance of a freight train during a nature walk.

There are two railroad lines whose rights-of-way pass through the property and their intrusion offers both an annoyance and a study opportunity. Anything as noisy and ponderous as a freight train is certain to have an effect upon the natural surroundings. However, most plants and animals seem to adapt to these effects and the resultant circumstances are most interesting and are a graphic lesson available to all in contrasting the right-of-way area with the undisturbed areas.

Along the railroad tracks one finds many differences brought about by the track and by the cars which travel upon it. Here one will find, particularly during the winter season, the foraging Pheasants and Pigeons, who subsist largely upon the grain which falls from passing freight cars. The predatory birds, too, "zero in" on this as a habitat oft-frequented by prey, either small birds or mammals such as field mice. It is a real treat to see the Marsh Hawk make a low pass along the tracks in its hunting and the Red-tailed Hawk often perches nearby alertly awaiting the movement of a hapless quarry; the Crows are constantly on the alert for any morsels to be scavenged along the track.

Not all the predators are natural ones, though, and it is quite common to find domestic dogs and cats hunting the track and its fringe areas. Hunters, too, use the right-of-way as an approach and hunting incursions of the property are often carried out through entry along the railroads.

All-in-all the railroads are an interesting addition to the natural scene and an integral part of it. They are a part of the scene at Ordway, a part which is entertaining and interesting. Even this is apt to change soon if the Rock Island Line should pass from the scene; the daily morning passage of their "piggy-back" freight from St. Louis is something of a treat as it "balls-the-jack" downgrade at 50 mph. While its departure from the scene would enhance the "natural state" of things it still nags on one's consciousness that here is a thing of nostalgia which probably should stay around....



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

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