

# MACALESTER COLLEGE

SAINT PAUL, MINNESOTA 55105

■ DEPARTMENT OF BIOLOGY

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Subject: FERAL ANIMALS at ORDWAY.

When we contemplate various domestic pets we think of them with affection and consider them as friends or even "members of the family". It seldom occurs to us what happens to such an animal when it returns to a wild habitat. Such animals are referred to as "feral", meaning that they have reverted to their wild ways.

Whenever a domestic animal goes "wild" it becomes one of the factors in the natural equation and ultimately will achieve its own balance with the other natural components. It will become a predator, deriving its sustenance from other creatures which it kills and in turn it will become the target for other factors in nature - the weather, other hunters, etc. Unless a very large number of such animals is suddenly released in a limited area the impact of their presence is absorbed by Nature's resilience. There is one - and probably only one - such individual at Ordway, a now-grown cat (Felis domestica) which was first observed as a kitten early in the summer of 1972 at which time it frequently lurked near the Station building searching for what few orts might be thereabouts; in the current year he has not been sighted but as late as last October was frequently seen deep in the woods and along the railroad track. He apparently had become completely wild and sustained himself from his hunting.

The big impact on the surroundings, however, is produced by those animals who are not really feral but who continue to prowl and hunt despite the fact that they are nourished by their owners and therefore not dependent for their existence on what they kill. The obvious unfairness of a situation where an animal becomes a part of the natural community only to express its "hunting instinct" and withdraws at night to shelter and food provided by its human owner is a very unbalancing force in nature. Animals and birds which are destroyed by such animals are a needless sacrifice to the thoughtlessness of the owners who permit their animals to "run wild"; actually they are not running wild but only performing raids on the wild creatures, upsetting the balance of their lives and sometimes destroying them by killing them or ravaging their nests.

The policy at Ordway is to exclude domestic animals of all types, whether leashed or not. It is, of course, impossible to post the property against animals, who are incapable of reading or responding; such signs as are posted are for the purpose of communicating with the owners of such animals since they are the ones who have the responsibility for and the control over their pets.



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