



The Katharine Ordway  
Natural History Study Area

Box 216  
Inver Grove Heights, Minn. 55075  
(612) 455-6204

ORDWAY BULLETIN  
No. 94

MACALESTER  
COLLEGE

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

### NATURE'S CYCLE at ORDWAY.

On March 27th (1981) a grass-fire started along the railroad track and laid bare the grassy area lying in front of the station building. Denuded of its coverlet of dried grass and stalks the terrain stood out in interesting detail. Individual gopher mounds stuck out prominently; small depressions and little water channels which are usually obscured became intricately visible.

I walked over to the steep cutbank where a few years ago (Pull. No. 25) had stood a friendly-but-dying Box Elder tree. Cut down in its last moments by a strong windstorm (June 1973) its corpse had fallen down the steep bank and had been obscured by the tall grasses which grow so profusely there. Out of sight (and almost out of mind) this friendly hulk of the past had lain during nearly eight intervening years. However, I frequently remembered this beacon of the past. had often wished it would grow a replacement to harbor in its branches the bird visitors throughout the seasons.

Looking down the bank, now free of any covering grasses, I still had difficulty in believing how little remained of the old tree which had fallen there a few short years before. It was a remarkable reminder of the deteriorative effects of natural processes. "Dust to dust" is very dramatically illustrated here for there was little left of the ancient tree body, only pieces - two of them - of perhaps five feet in length. The small remaining volume of detritus showed the effects of fungus and bacterial decay and of grass-fire burns (about five or six during its repose there).

Somehow I derived a sort of comfort to think that this tree, which formerly had looked out on our surroundings and had given shelter to our denizens, was even now returning to the earth to become nourishment for the future growth of Ordway.

R J CHRISTIAN,  
Naturalist

6 August 1981  
/lac