



The Katharine Ordway  
Natural History Study Area

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ORDWAY BULLETIN  
No. 111

MACALESTER  
COLLEGE

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

#### A NESTING KILLDEER at ORDWAY.

From the window I could see the Killdeer, hunkering down on the parking-lot at the rear of the building. From the odd actions I deduced that the bird was intending to make a nest; there seemed, moreover, to be some sort of immediacy to its conduct, something of a hurry. After all, it was past mid-June and there had been a very hard rainstorm two days before, circumstances which might add up to a drowned-out nest, reason enough for the urgency to get a second nesting started.

What caused me a little consternation was the fact that a summer class was starting that very morning, due to arrive three hours later and slated to use that part of the property during the next six weeks. My misgivings were proven true when I observed the bird going through the motions of expelling an egg in the place she had scraped out for her nest - it was 6 o'clock in the morning. I surrounded the nest and its single egg with a flimsy barricade and instructed the incoming students to stay clear of the scene. For the ensuing month there was good cooperation and the students, observing from the windows, saw much of interest in the behavior of the nesting bird.

For the next  $4\frac{1}{2}$  weeks rather close scrutiny was given the nest and the parent birds who attended it. Often at night I would hear the call of one or the other as they were startled by some night creature or as they communicated with each other. On the eighth day after the initial egg was deposited there was a heavy rain with hailstones at 3 p.m.; the female stayed on the nest throughout this pelting. During the very great heat of the July weeks the mother bird would occasionally rise to a standing position and aspirate the eggs, cooling them by permitting air to move across them; this happened two or three times a day. Finally, on the thirty-second day after Egg No. 1 the parents showed some agitated activity, calling back and forth to each other. At 7:30 a.m. I checked the nest, found that only one egg remained and there was no trace of the other three eggs which had been laid. During this inspection the female put on her "broken-wing act", feigning injury to draw my attention to her and away from the precious egg. Within two minutes after I withdrew she returned to the nest. Late in the morning (10:55) she showed great excitement and left the nest, though remaining nearby. At 11:35 I observed that the parent bird had left the enclosure around the nest and that there was a newly-hatched chick inside the "stockade", trying to find its way out. I went quickly and banded the hatchling, whose legs are so well-developed from birth that it can walk very well. At 11:40 the nestling had disappeared but the mother bird was pulling the broken-wing act again and at 12:00 noon I observed the two of them together; an hour later the chick was in the grass about 40 feet from the nesting-site and was being brooded by the mother bird.

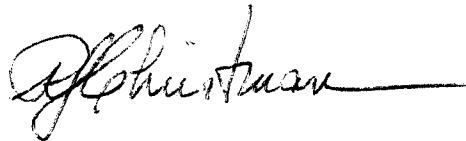
So the long vigil was over, culminating in a new generation. I felt some kind of satisfaction akin to accomplishment.

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Epilogue: The next day, late morning, I observed a young Killdeer running in the road leading to the building, about 100 feet from its birthsite and on the opposite

side of the building. Two adult birds were screaming in flight, sounding their alarm call to the youngster, pulling the broken-wing act and going into distracting postures. I picked up the baby bird and ascertained that it was indeed the one I had banded the previous day. Returned to the roadway the little fellow lost no time in propelling himself straightway into the tall grasses, following the screaming instructions from the two adult birds.

There are few things as cute as a day-old Killdeer!!

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

R J CHRISTMAN,  
Naturalist

August 30, 1982  
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