

# MACALESTER COLLEGE

SAINT PAUL, MINNESOTA 55105

■ DEPARTMENT OF BIOLOGY

## Ordway Bulletin No. 14

Subject: The WATERCRESS BEDS at ORDWAY.

Of the several habitats at Ordway there is one which is visited perhaps as often as any of the others and which has year-'round interest for almost everyone. Usually referred to as "the watercress beds" it is properly a spring-fed wetland and it is green throughout the year. Not even sub-zero temperatures of January completely finish the growth in this very interesting little spot, measuring not more than 60 ft. by 100 ft.

Nestled at the foot of a steep hill which overlooks the River Lake the Watercress Beds lie at lake level (plus 3 or 4 inches) and about 45 feet below the brow of the hill. The wetland receives the flow of water which springs from about four separate locations at the base of the hill. This water courses through the site and reforms into a single stream which trickles immediately into River Lake. The flow of spring water continues throughout the winter months and except immediately following a heavy snowfall the meandering course of the separate streams can be openly seen. There is only a slight abatement in the rate of flow during January and February.

In mid-February the bottom of the coursing spring waters begins to show evidence of the growth of its most vital habitant, the small, round, bright green leaves of the True Watercress (Radicula nasturtium-aquaticum L.). This will increase in growth, reaching its most succulent state by about the last week of March. Watercress is a clearwater plant which has a very shallow and flimsy root system. By the latter part of April it will begin its flowering - a tiny and inconsequential white flower which will produce equally inconsequential seed pods by early June and then sink into oblivion as the entire growth is overshadowed by the oncoming growth of other, taller-standing vegetation, notably Jewel-Weed (Impatiens biflora) and Wild Blue Aster (Aster sp.) in late summer; during early summer there is also a profusion of the Marsh Marigold (Caltha palustris).



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