



The Katharine Ordway
Natural History Study Area

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

ORDWAY BULLETIN
No. 96

MACALESTER
COLLEGE

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

FIREFLIES at ORDWAY.

As the hot days of late July and August develop, the sunrays warm the grass-covered slope in front of the building and at night the residual warmth in the locale causes the fireflies to become more active. Not only do there appear to be more of these wispy creatures but they move around more and show themselves much more than on the nights when the evenings are a little cooler. This variation in color and frequency varies from one species of "lightning bug" to another but temperature is a strong factor.

The particular species hereabouts is Photuris pennsylvanica but most of this family of insects are tropical or sub-tropical. P. pennsylvanica is about 10-12 mm. in length, pale gray above, sulfurous yellow below with long antennae and rather short legs. The female form has no wings; the wingless form is also known as a "glow-worm". Whatever else it might be, the glowing of these insects is probably a sex-attracting device; it is rather easy to attract other fireflies by displaying a bottled captive.

John Muir wrote about how he and his brother, David, were so impressed by this creature's glowing when first they moved to a farm in southern Wisconsin. It may be that it was non-existent in their native Scotland. Be that as it may the summer season is heightened in interest and color by these nocturnal illuminators who fill the meadow with their luminescing dots-and-dashes on hot August evenings.

Could they be sending messages??? Mysterious!

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R J CHRISTMAN,
Naturalist