



The Katharine Ordway
Natural History Study Area

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ORDWAY BULLETIN
No. 79

MACALESTER
COLLEGE

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

A HUNTER at ORDWAY (I).

It was just seven o'clock on an evening in mid-May and the slanting rays of the declining sun caught him much as the beam of a searchlight would have and for a half-minute he was dazzlingly limned against the greening meadow where he had paused for a moment. He was a Red Fox (Vulpes fulva) and he was intent on his hunting as if he had not been very successful during the day and was feeling the pressure of the onrushing darkness.

He was a fine young male with a particularly handsome coat whose fulvous color was accentuated by the evening sun's brightness to an almost coppery color. He stopped briefly, sniffed and turned back for two or three steps to investigate something and then set off toward a patch of trees in that typical sleuthlike gait with which foxes course their territory in search of food.

I had been aware that he was around. Only two weeks previously I had come upon the feathers and part of the carcass of a female Mallard near the Spring, almost a kilometer from the place where I now sighted him. He was busy at supplying his mate and offspring somewhere nearby.

In previous winters his tracks - or those of some precursor - often caught my attention as I walked in the silent, snow-covered woods. The footprints are very much like those of a small dog but somewhat daintier and they show in addition to the pad-marks and claw-marks the brush marks of the protective foot hairs. Quite unlike the domestic dog his tracks lie in an almost straight line, one ahead of the other rather than staggered. Because he is a meat eater and does not hibernate he is driven from his winter shelter by hunger and one is almost certain to find his tracks, zig-zagging among the trees as he courses the area for some hapless mouse or bird, whose demise is sometimes written with blood-stains and feathers in the snow. In April the male is usually hunting for more than one as that is when the young are born and he takes over the task of feeding both the female and their young, who remain in the den. I have never found an active den on the property nor have I ever had reason to think there was more than one active pair at any time.

As he turned away, the back of his ears each revealed a mark of a deep tawny hue, almost vee-shaped, setting them off handsomely. Then he was gone from sight in the lengthening grass.

R J CHRISTMAN,
Naturalist

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