

# MACALESTER COLLEGE

SAINT PAUL, MINNESOTA 55101

■ DEPARTMENT OF BIOLOGY

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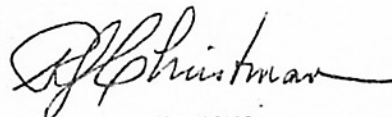
Subject: WINTER VOICES at ORDWAY.

The grasslands at Ordway abound with insects, a few of them spectacular, some of them annoying but most of them rather unobtrusive, living out their life cycles with little or no attention. Of all them the little black Field Cricket (*Acheta assimilis*) is one of the few which might be called "lovable" or invoke some feeling of comradeship from some humans. Beautiful he is not, nor gaudy in any way. It is his voice which lends some measure of endearment to him.

On a warm August night one can hear the meadows at Ordway alive with insect chatter- the buzz-zzz of the cicada and the chirrrrrp of the crickets. Someone with the bent of a physicist (and obviously with very little to do) calculated that one can determine the air temperature by counting the number of a cricket's calls in 15 seconds and adding the number, 40, to it, the total being the temperature in degrees Fahrenheit. Thus, for the person who cannot afford or borrow a thermometer it becomes easy to find out just how warm it is - providing he can afford or borrow a timepiece. One thing is certain - and dramatically obvious - the repeated chirping of the cricket on warm nights is very much more rapid than during the wintertime. Just hearing the rapid chirping convinces you it is hot!

This little fellow's voice is heard throughout the year - given proper circumstances. Each winter at least one of them finds haven within the building and there maintains an unobtrusive existence safe from the unbearable rigors of our Minnesota winter. Did I say "unobtrusive"? Well, that may not be quite an appropriate word because of his chirping voice, his repetitive chirp-chirp-chirrrpp.

It is not that he is garrulous - for there are long periods when one doesn't know he is anywhere about; it is more that he is repetitive but I like to think, too, that he is expressing some of his own contentment - he is warm and safe and who could possibly desire more contentment than that? Nevertheless, his concerts always come as a bit of a surprise - a pleasant surprise - since everything else is so bleak and quiet. And there, in the midst of the white, rigorous stillness is the cheery chirrrp. One cannot help thinking of the warm August nights when the meadow is athrob with the chirrrrps of this cheery fellow and his numerous compadres.



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