

**NATURE
NOW**

By Lydia
King
Fishes

(Editor's note: With this issue The Eclectic brings to its readers a new feature, "Nature Now", written by Lydia King Fishes. Formerly Mrs. Frieser, a member of the Michigan Audubon society, Cranbrook Institute of Science, and several related groups, has written several articles as well as this column which she began a year ago. She has given numerous lectures throughout the state and was for some time active in camp work in Missouri. Mrs. Frieser, a former teacher, has studied at Ashland college, Ohio, University of Wisconsin, Audubon Nature Camp of Maine, Vinal, Nature Guide school, Mass., University of Michigan extension school and has made many study trips around the United States.)

Life in the Marsh
Plants and animals live together in groups. All life-forms in such an association are present there, because they find available the food they need. The food supply is determined in turn by such basic factors in the environment as soil, sun and water.

All life-forms are intimately related and are dependent for survival upon each other and upon the conditions under which they live. Such an association is called a habitat. This term comes from the Latin word meaning "home."

One of the most interesting of these associations is the life-trend found in a marsh.
All winter life in the marsh has lain dormant; hidden under the frozen water, retreated to the security of earth in root-stock or bulb, hibernated in soft mud or resting quiescent in larval case, in cocoon or in the encased seed. Now in May-time, the marsh already is teeming with a life and activity all its own.

THE WATER itself is populated with myriads of microscopic plants and animals which furnish the food supply for many kinds of small insects and their larvae. Hovering over and resting upon its surface are flies, mosquitoes, water-striders, aquatic beetles, and a host of other insects which are a part of the food supply for the birds and reptiles which live in the marsh.

The masses of jelly-like eggs of the frog and toad have hatched and the young have absorbed their rudimentary tails. They have developed feet and lungs, so that they can forsake their aquatic for their terrestrial life.
THE DRAGON FLIES and damselflies, which began their lives under water, have left their gummy nymph cases on some dead and are saving about in the sunlight displaying their iridescent wings. They do not sew up little boys' ears or doctor snakes, but they do add exquisite color and motion to the daylight hours of the marsh.

Moths and butterflies are balanced with delicate feet and wings on the flowers whose nectar they are seeking. Earthworms and crayfish bore into the soft wet earth. Garter and water snakes and often the black snake inhabit the borders of the marsh or sun themselves on nearby logs.

Here dwell such rodents as the rabbit and the muskrat who enjoy the succulent greenery of the marsh.

THE MARSH is filled with aquatic plant life. Delicate liverworts, mosses and ferns vie for supremacy with the coarser horse-tails, sedges, and grasses. Wild iris and calla, pickered weed and mud plantain, arrowhead and skunk cabbage stand with their feet in the shallow water.

Marsh marigold lights the low ground with its abundance of pure golden bloom. Cat-tails and the hardy composites outline its margins. Such shrubs as alder, sumac and elderberry live on its fringes. The marsh is the home of the lady's slipper and many other of our wild orchids.
Birds are the daytime voice of the marsh. Of these the red-winged blackbird is the most showy in color and song. His nest of coarse grasses and cat-tails holds four blue-green eggs speckled with brown.

THE BITTERN and the blue heron live here in the larger stretches where water is deep enough to supply them with a dinner of fish. They freeze into a protective pattern thus making themselves almost invisible as they perch on a stiff and broken stem or branch.

Some ducks and geese nest in the low hummocks at the water's edge, others make only a temporary stopover on their way to more northern summer grounds. Hawks circle the marsh, flying low to pounce upon a wary load, frog, or snake.

Life in the marsh expresses itself in many ways. The law of the universe for survival: the seed must be set and the hungry mouth must be filled at no matter what cost. The mosquito larva which sits the microscopic plankton from the water is eaten by the frog, who makes a tasty bit for the garter snake, who in turn falls prey to the hungry hawk.

AT NIGHT the sounds of the marsh change but do not abate. The bullfrog blows out his baggy throat and releases his bellowing call. The lesser frogs and spring peepers add their pleasant voices. The night birds cry.

There is a little time of rest and silence before the happier voices of morning take over and another day begins for all that is alive in the marsh.

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