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California Ring-tailed Cat

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MALLARDS IN YOSEMITE

By Ranger-Naturalist Julian A. Howard

While camping recently in the vicinity of Merced Lake an observation was made which awakened my interest in the Mallard Duck (*Anas platyrhynchos* L.). Camp had been pitched near a quiet stretch of the Merced River a short distance above the High Sierra Camp. Just at dusk I heard the quacking and slight splash of ducks alighting on the river and cautiously walked over to investigate. The drake was almost motionless in the center of the river and appeared to be keeping a careful watch on both banks. The female, closely followed by five nearly half-grown ducklings, was swimming slowly toward the opposite shore where they waddled single file into the willows of a sandbar. The drake was not long in discovering my presence and after watching me for some minutes, took to the air.

Having thus obtained what appeared to be a nesting record for the mallard near Merced Lake, the writer began making inquiries concerning the presence of this duck in Yosemite. The bird records kept by Mr. and Mrs. C. W. Michael since 1920 were invaluable in this respect.

Occasional accounts of the mallard in Yosemite have also appeared in the Yosemite Nature Notes. This information was summarized by Ranger-Naturalist Enid Michael in 1931 who stated in a nature note that "Ducks are certainly rare birds in Yosemite Valley, and they are becoming more scarce each succeeding year. Five or six years ago mallard ducks were occasionally seen; in fact, two or three pairs of these birds nested each summer in the valley from 1920 until 1926. During 1927 a pair of mallards was occasionally seen but there was no nesting record. Since 1927 mallard ducks have been seldom seen."

Recent observations, however, seem to indicate that the number of mallard observations in Yosemite may be on the increase. The Field School class of 1938 found an abandoned nest and a pair with young at Swamp Lake during their research reserve stay there in the first week of July. On August 1, during the high country trip a pair was observed on a small trailside lake near Tiltill Valley.

B. C. Cain, Naturalist, Oakland

Council of Boy Scouts, told the writer that in July 1938 a nest was found containing approximately eleven mallard eggs. The nest was located near the junction of Cottonwood Creek and the Middle Fork of the Tuolumne River. Feathers were taken from this nest to Dr. J. G. Grinnell who made the identification. Mr. Cain also reports having seen nine adults, both male and female, at Dog Lake on August 8, 1939. Mr. Albert Duhme, Custodian of the Parsons Memorial Lodge observed seven adults in Tuolumne Meadows August 7, 1939. A group of five or six adults were observed by Mr. C. W. Michael upon several occasions during the month of August of the present year. In each case these mallards were seen in the marshy area of Tenaya Creek above Mirror Lake. Single individuals have been observed upon several occasions in

various places in the park during the past two or three years.

According to Grinnell and Storer (Animal Life in Yosemite, 1924), "The Mallard probably nests on the marshy lands bordering some of the smoother flowing waters at low elevations on the west slope of the mountains, and about the sage-bordered lakes at the east base of the Sierras." Although the mallard probably never used Yosemite to any great extent as breeding grounds they were not uncommon until a few years ago. There was apparently several years, beginning with the late 1920's, in which the presence of these birds in Yosemite was looked upon as a rarity. However, in recent years observations seem to indicate that once more the mallard is coming into the Yosemite region in larger numbers.

A NOTE ON A BLACK-NECKED STILT

By John C. Weaver

Having no particular training as an ornithologist, it is perhaps with undue presumption that I make record of the observation of a bird heretofore unknown on the floor of the Yosemite Valley. However, so distinctive is the appearance of the type of bird which caught my attention, that I am encouraged to believe that there can be little doubt as to its type.

About 400 yards east of the point where Sentinel Bridge spans the

Merced River, near the Old Village, the stream bends in a curving meander away from its south bank. On the south side of the Merced, at this point, a wide and sandy slip-off slope, now partially covered with clumps of marsh grass, has been formed. It was in the late afternoon of August 14, 1939, that I observed a long-legged wading bird near the water's edge on this sandy tract.

The two features of the coloring of this bird which were strikingly ap-

parent, were its white breast and its very red legs. A conference with Mr. C. A. Harwell, Park Naturalist, and reference to several volumes on the birds of the Pacific States, leads me to the conclusion that the bird must have been a Black-necked Stilt, *Himantopus Mexicanus* (Muller). Of all of the wading birds found in the Sierra and adjacent regions, no species other than the Black-necked Stilt has red legs, as was the case with this individual.

So far as I have been able to de-

termine, the presence of this bird has never been recorded in Yosemite before. However, this species is a common summer visitor in the San Joaquin Valley to the west, and one's credulity need not be unnecessarily strained by learning that an individual has strayed as far east as Yosemite Valley.

Hoping that this instance of an extension of range may be supported by future observations, I respectfully submit the above note.

THE EFFECT OF RAINY WEATHER ON THE FOOD HABIT OF SOME BIRDS

By Ranger-Naturalist Lowell Adams

Bird students often think of sunny days as being best suited for bird study. But rainy days often furnish more opportunities for observations than clear days.

For two months our bird feeding tray had been in place just outside our kitchen window. On many occasions Blue-fronted Jays, Western Robins, Short-tailed Chickadees and Black-headed Grosbeaks had come to feed. Brewer and Red-winged Blackbirds had foraged on the ground in flocks, but never attempted to feed at the tray. However, on Sunday, May 21, it rained nearly all day, and all day we had many more birds than usual to study. Jays, robins and grosbeaks were more numerous than before and, in addition, Red-winged Blackbirds and a pair of Western Tanagers came often to the tray, while

Chipping Sparrows foraged on the ground and in the Coffee Berry bushes nearby. Late in the afternoon a Sierra Chickaree came to eat some of the cake crumbs and buttered potatoes.



In the forenoon of the same day a Golden Eagle soared over Government Center not 150 feet from the ground. Possibly the low-lying clouds which enshrouded the tops of the valley walls had forced the eagle to seek better visibility far below its usual aery habitat.



A CHICKAREE PREPARES FOR WINTER

By Ranger-Naturalist Harold E. Perry

Because of the rather limited crop of Western Yellow Pine cones in Yosemite Valley this season, the Sierra Chickarees are devoting a great deal of time and energy to harvesting the cones of the White Fir. Usually it is difficult to find White Fir cones on the ground. Normally they break to pieces on the tree, the scales falling to earth, while the winged seeds go floating away some distance. Only when attacked by disease or when prematurely cut by squirrels does one ordinarily find an entire cone on the ground. This has been an exceptionally good season for such discoveries, for the chickarees are cutting them down in great numbers.

On a Nature Walk which I conducted from Happy Isles the morning of August 22, we saw many evidences of such work. In one place at the back of the parking area, several broken White Fir cones were to be seen, as were also the piles of cone scales where a chickaree had busied itself in uncovering the seeds which lie at the base of the scales.

Our interest was aroused. Several

chickarees were in the vicinity and they voiced noisy disapproval of our intrusion into their territory.

A short distance beyond, in one of the little streams flowing under the foot-bridge across the Happy Isles swamp, we were delighted to find seventy-five or more White Fir cones cached in the stream. Water was flowing over them, keeping



their scales tightly closed until such a time as the chickarees might be free to remove their seeds. Possibly that harvest may be near at hand. More probably the cones will be left

in damp storage until winter. At that time when food is scarce, when hunger might otherwise be abroad in squirrel-land, some far-seeing little chickaree will have a supply of nourishment at hand which will car-

ry it through the wintry depression. The cones can be brought forth, a few at a time, to dry in the winter sunshine, and an abundance of fresh seeds will be available when most needed.

BUCK PERFORMS "DERMATECTOMY"

By Ranger-Naturalist Julian A. Howard

Just at dusk, September 17, the writer heard a series of loud, crashing noises at the rear of the Rangers' Club. A cautious investigation disclosed a handsome three-point buck facing an old apple tree. As I watched the buck began thrashing about in the lower branches, obviously in an attempt to dislodge the shreds of "velvet" hanging from his antlers. His motions were so violent that, as I watched, I marveled that he did not emerge from the foray with an eye or ear missing. An occasional pause seemed to be devoted to attempting to remove the hanging strands with his mouth or by pawing at them with a hind hoof. After successfully removing a portion of the velvet, I was surprised to see the buck calmly proceed to eat it, then resume the thrashing process. His technique was most effective. He seemed to select a particularly strong branch and maneuvered it between his antlers, then began throwing his head from side to side, back and forth with a violent shaking motion until the er to the little squirrel who chose to "stance" was no longer effective. Many of the branches were broken

in the process, some rather large ones being thrown as far as 25 feet from the scene of action. Apparently being satisfied with his efforts he abandoned the attempt. An examination of the spot disclosed numerous shreds of "velvet" some of which were in quite a fresh condition.

NATURE NOTELETS

A Sierra Pine Marten (*Martes caurina sierrae*) sprang from an area of high grass near the garbage pits at Tuolumne Meadows, on August 2, and caught a Hudsonian White-crowned Sparrow (*Zonotrichia leucophrys leucophrys*) which was feeding at the edge of the grass. The marten bit the wings off and disappeared with the body.

A Southern Sierra Marmot (*Marmota flaviventer sierrae*) with two half-grown young was seen at timberline above the Lyell Base Camp on July 21. The young were about thirty feet from the parent when first seen but scurried to the parent at the first note of alarm.

M. D. Bryant.

GLACIER POINT IMPRESSIONS

By Ranger-Naturalist Harold E. Perry

Having been stationed at Glacier Point as a Ranger-Naturalist for a portion of the time this summer (1939), I am greatly impressed with the high quality of the reaction that comes to an individual as he gets his first view of Yosemite Valley, 3254 feet below him, and as he tried to comprehend the magnitude of the High Sierra stretching out beyond him.

Of course there are some persons who become physically ill as they approach the railing at the edge of Glacier Point. They quickly retreat a safe distance, where they slowly recuperate and gradually build up a desire to try it once more.

Then there are those few at another extreme who are not often on intimate terms with their innermost being—those whose vocal reactions are usually of a superficial, flippant nature. Their forced expressions relative to the size of the "big ditch" bespeak their own shallowness.

But the great majority of Glacier Point visitors experience a breath-taking adventure. They are mentally and spiritually moved to their depths. Frequently their lips are sealed by a knowledge of the inadequacy of words. They are the ones who write the record of the day in memories that will never fade. For the moment they rise out of themselves almost completely, and they seem quite closely attuned to their Infinite. To such as these, Glacier Point is a challenge—a challenge to understand, to comprehend the Na-

ture of Things.

For one visitor, Glacier Point was almost too much. After gazing for some time in silent wonderment at the magnitude of the situation he finally burst forth with, " 't ain't so." His powers of comprehension were overcome.



A reaction of a more poetic nature was the one voiced by Dr. Aurelia Henry Reinhardt, President of Mills College. Park Naturalist C. A. Harwell, who was with Dr. Reinhardt at the time, reports that after drinking in the majesty of the scene in silence, her first words were, "No

one could ever again be mean or petty after looking down upon this view. No, nor afterward remembering!"

Glacier Point is a source of great

stimulation to the vast majority of its visitors. May there be a yearly increase in the attendance of those who are open to its challenging immensity.

THE WEASEL PUTS ON A SHOW

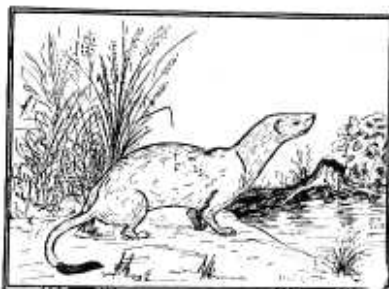
By Ranger-Naturalist Enid Michael

On the morning of August 15 when I stepped out of the tent there was a stranger in camp. There was a weasel in the woodpile, in fact there appeared to be a family of young weasels in the woodpile. As I walked alongside of the woodpile a weasel head popped up here, and everywhere, but never did I see more than one head at any one time and after watching for some time I finally became convinced that all the heads that popped up to stare with beady eyes belonged to the same animal.

This little animal, about the body size of a meadow mouse but twice as long, was as much interested in me as I was in it. It wanted to look at me from all angles. When I stood still it stood still, we had a grand chance to examine one another. The weasel's upper body was a sort of brownish gray, its belly and four little feet were pure white and its bushy tail was tipped with black.

The weasel was seen on six successive mornings. We came to consider it as a friend and nicknamed it "Snowy-toes". It was not the least bit shy, two different mornings it accepted a mouse from my hand. It was the most active, alert and acro-

batic animal I have ever seen. The speed with which it could race through the intricate interstices of the woodpile was most amazing, its long slim neck and beady eyes gave it a reptilian appearance.



One morning after eating a mouse the weasel was in a most frisky mood. It came out from the cover of the woodpile into the open where a number of jays were feeding on the ground and apparently, just for the fun of it, promoted a game of tag. The jays entered into the spirit of the play, but nevertheless took good care not to be tagged. The weasel would leap toward a jay, the jay would leap into the air. A second leap would carry the weasel upward in pursuit of the jay; the jay always just out of reach. The weasel when it reached for the jay would often turn a perfect back-flip, always to

come down lightly and gracefully to land on its four white-booted feet. When it back-flipped in the air its belly would flash snow white. It really was a bi-colored animal, the upper body brownish gray, the under body pure white.

Jays usually make a great fuss when they discover a weasel, but in the case of Snowy-toes it was different, for the jays set up no chorus of scolding when it appeared. Seemingly they considered it an interesting but harmless youngster. I myself was not so sure that it was harmless for I know the weasel to be a very tough animal.

NATURE NOTELETS

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By Ranger-Naturalist C. W. Schwartz

We know that our campfire programs at Camp 14 offer attractions to guests of Yosemite, but are we aware of the non-human visitors at our entertainments? The California Toad, (*Bufo boreas*), which spends its evenings hunting food in the form of insects, also attends. However, it is not the entertainment which interests it but the abundant supply of insects which in turn have been attracted by the bright lights. On the night of June 14 I enjoyed watching a fat female toad snapping at crane flies and beetles which were hovering around the flood lights. After awhile I picked up the toad, examined her, then let her loose. Apparently frightened by this treat-

ment, she took refuge in a crack at the base of the platform. But I'm sure this smart toad didn't starve as a result of my curiosity.

* * *

On the evening of August 27, 1939, as I was driving out of Camp Curry parking area I saw what at first appeared to be an alley cat in front of my headlights. After looking more closely I noted the long, banded tail, white underparts and darker upperparts and then recognized the animal to be a California Ring-tailed Cat (*Bassariscus astutus raptor*). This animal is more typical of the Upper Sonoran zone but it occasionally wanders up into Yosemite Valley which is in the Transition zone.

Vincent Mowbray,
Yosemite Field School, 1939

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MOUNTAIN LION SEEN

District Ranger John W. Bingaman.

On the night of June 9 while driving along the Wawona Road just north of Alder Creek I saw a full grown mountain lion along the roadside, no doubt stalking a deer. The light from my car partly confused it. It seemed not in any great hurry to disappear but ran about fifty feet alongside of road before going down over the steep bank. It was a fine specimen and looked in excellent condition. Its range is probably throughout the South Fork Canyon, living on the numerous deer in that locality.



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Dan Anderson