

# YOSEMITE NATURE NOTES

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W. B. Lewis, Superintendent.

Ansel F. Hall, Park Naturalist.

## THE DOODLE-BUG OR ANA-LION

While climbing dusty trails nature hikers often rest a moment to watch the ant traps found in the fine dusty soil along the bases of boulders and rocks. These crater-like pits are shovelled out by a grotesque little hump-backed larva who insists on backing about one's hand when lifted out of his pit. If a little dirt is placed on the hand he immediately backs under it with all his six-legged speed, but not before one has observed the long pincher jaws. Those who have watched, know how the jaws work, for the blundering ant who slides down the pit is welcomed and received by outreaching jaws and promptly devoured. If he escapes and struggles up the steep, sliding walls the ant-lion throws a shower of dirt at him and generally brings down his prey in an avalanche.

The ant-lion can be seen throwing dirt with his head and the pit itself is dug in this manner. The walls are just as steep as the soil will permit and so in different locations the traps are of different depths. The size of the works depends on the size of the worker.

The little trapper may have poor success and hence grow slowly, but sooner or later he becomes full grown and then makes a sand-covered silk cocoon, sleeps, transforms, and emerges, a four winged shining creature of the air.

## WHY DO WE SEE SO FEW MAMMALS?

A common question asked the nature guides is: Why do we see so few mammals in Yosemite? Of course the disappearance of the gray squirrel accentuates the scarcity of mammals to be seen in the daytime. However, it is not so much that a real scarcity of mammals exists as it is that most mammals forage at night and therefore are not often seen. Had we eyes that could see well at night, a search would disclose an abundance of mammals, in fact, perhaps, even a greater population per unit area than is found with birds.

## MYSTERY SKIN Baffles Scientists

For two years persons visiting Yosemite have been guessing as to the origin of a beautiful pelt with marvelously soft fur that is now on exhibition at the Yosemite Museum. Dealers in furs, and even scientists, have been at a loss to definitely name the species of animal from which the pelt was obtained. One of the former said that if it were his he would sell it as a baby sea otter (sea otters, by the way, command fabulous prices) and a visiting scientist ventured to suggest that the animal might have been a hybrid between an otter and a fisher.

This satin black skin has remained a mystery until recently when Chief Ranger Forest Townsley laughingly told how it was obtained. It seems that a number of house cats have escaped and now run wild in Hetch Hetchy Valley. Two years ago a big old "Tom" was shot there, and as an experiment Chief Townsley had the hide tanned and died black. If only the Chief had kept his secret the "mystery skin" might have retained the enormous value placed upon it by connoisseurs --- but the joke was too good to keep.

## THE KINGFISHER

The days of the "horse rattle" are not shrouded in the past so long as the Belted Kingfisher lives along mountain streams for his calls sound like that noise maker of our father's day which was called the "horse rattle." Vivid in coloration, ornamented with a crest, and extraordinary in habits is the kingfisher. The large bill is useful in capturing the fish which make up this bird's food. The young birds which now are seen along the river were reared in a tunnel dug into some bank, a unique nesting site for a bird. Train your eye to see a kingfisher dive for a fish and tune your ear to hear him "giggle" as he flies up or down stream, and a new worth while sensation is yours.

## BIRDS UNUSUALLY SILENT IN AUGUST

Everyone who has kept a canary knows that it does not sing during the moulting season. Likewise wild birds during their August moult are unusually silent. Where field trips in June netted a list of twenty species of birds noted by callnote and song, trips in August reveal half that number. The songs of the Yellow Warbler and more rarely those of the Sierra Creeper are the only ones commonly heard at this season.

## SPIREA

Spirea (*Spirea densiflora*) is one of the most delightful shrubs of the Sierra Nevada. The many leafy stems are crowded close together forming a dense bush. July finds these bushes all rosy with bloom. No shrub

in the Sierra can show any more fresh and charming beauty than this shrub with its fluffy flower clusters.

We import from foreign countries most of the shrubs that adorn our gardens and often value them not so much for their beauty but rather for their curious shapes and remote origin. Here is a native of our own Sierra with sprays as feathery and sweetly tinted as those of any aristocratic exotic. Why not plant *Spirea* in our gardens?

#### WESTERN PENNYROYAL

One very pleasing member of the mont family is the Western Pennyroyal (*Monardella Lanciolata*). It is found in all the lower valleys and plains of California and is common in the Sierra Nevada up to 4,000 feet. This low bushy annual grows best in warm sandy soil and its shiny green leaves appear early in spring. About the time *Lissingia* begins to bloom abundant flower-heads appear on *Monardella*. The sound of many buzzing bees, the sight of rich purple blossoms and a pleasing fragrance bring to the traveler memories of many pleasant days spent in the open with Western Pennyroyal as a roadside companion. The crushed leaves of the Pennyroyal if rubbed over the hands and face, are said by some, to bring out an odor that will keep the mosquitoes away.

#### SCARLET MONKEY-FLOWER

The Scarlet Monkey-flower (*Mimulus cardinalis*) must have its feet in the water to live, yet it is not commonly found in a swamp nor along a river. It is a plant of the Mountain Spring. Where the pure spring water trickles over a bank among the stones, the red *mimulus* may grow. The leafy stems of the scarlet monkey-flower, succulent and rapid in their growth, produce through the spring, summer, and fall, a continual flower show. The traveler who rests at the cardinal flower's spring will remember it and return. The large, bright red flowers look wonderful in this place of dark green leaves, moss and ferns. The sound of trickling water is mingled with the vibrant buzz of the iridescent hummingbirds, who find in these scarlet cups unlimited refreshment. There is a fine colony of these flowers to be seen on the little stream near the zoo.



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Dan Anderson