

# YOSEMITE NATURE NOTES



Vol. X

MARCH, 1931

No. 3

# YOSEMITE NATURE NOTES

THE PUBLICATION OF

THE YOSEMITE EDUCATIONAL DEPARTMENT

AND THE YOSEMITE NATURAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION

Published Monthly

Volume X

March 1931

Number 3

## Our Yosemite Bears

C. A. HARWELL  
Park Naturalist

Yosemite now has but one kind of bear, the American black bear (*Ursus americanus*), so no matter what colored bear we see, whether brown or black, he is a black bear. At the present time in Yosemite, the brown, or cinnamon-colored, bears are more common than those pure black, perhaps three to one. A brown mother bear may give birth in one year to two cubs, one of which is brown and one of which is black, so these color phases are just like blonds and brunets in our own families. Of course, grizzly bears were once found in Yosemite but the grizzly bear of California, was a larger and fiercer animal than the black, and so after the coming of the white man lasted only long enough to become our California State animal and to have his picture on our great seal and to give the name to this great valley. Yosemite, in the Miwok Indian dialect, means big grizzly bear. The number of bears in Yosemite in the 1139 square miles of national park is estimated at 300. On the floor of the valley in summer we must have about 40 bears because as many as 20 show up at the bear feeding platforms at the regular feeding time 9:30 each evening. In this same area during the daytime more than 20 have been seen.

Of course, we naturally expect such animals as ground squirrels and chipmunks and snakes to hibernate when winter covers the valleys and mountains with a blanket of snow, but we are surprised to find that this large animal, weighing up to 400 pounds, has adapted himself to hibernation. On the first of December we quit feeding the bears, because a few days after that the last of them have left the floor of the valley, perhaps traveling up some of the canyons or high up in the talus slopes looking for some place where a hollow tree, a fallen tree or large rock cave, will give them a dry place to spend the winter. They scoop in a few leaves and pine needles and lie down neither to eat or drink for about four months. That is why it is that in late November these animals are really "hungry as bears." The mother bear must especially put on additional weight because she gives birth to her young in the month of February, while in this hibernation sleep. The usual number of cubs is two, although one or three is not uncommon. The cubs are very tiny at birth. They are about as big as a chipmunk and weigh less than a pound each. They nurse from their mother the first six months and will travel with her at least their first year. Bears are

solitary animals. They usually travel singly. They hibernate singly except a mother bear may take her last year's cubs into a hibernation den with her or see that they are put away some place near. The male seemingly has nothing to do with his family.

It happens during every winter that some bear or his tracks is seen here in Yosemite. These are isolated cases. I think what has happened is that his hibernation cave proved to have a leaky roof or he has been disturbed by some other animal, so he wanders out seeking new shelter.

### THE BEARS IN SPRING

Our bears come out of their hibernation caves usually by the middle of March. They are careful how they break their long hibernation fast. We start feeding them at the regular platforms April 1. Even then few of them come in to eat our food.

They are carnivorous animals, flesh eaters, but vegetable matter forms a large part of their diet. They are fond of berries, dig roots from the ground and eat tender plants. They catch mice and frogs in the meadows. They very dexterously break open rotten logs to get termites or ants. Sometimes they catch a fish at the river. We seldom see the new cubs until late May or June. The mother is so careful of them. The first thing they must learn is how to climb a tree and to obey their mother's silent but very positive commands. Bears are good climbers. Their claws are very sharp for digging and climbing. They can climb any tree from a mere sapling up to one so large they can't possibly reach around it. Their claw marks are found on many of our Yosemite trees. Great scratches in quaking aspen groves are especially interesting. They spend quite a bit of their

time during the days up in the trees resting or just staying out of reach. Perhaps they are in search of acorns or other food materials.



### BEARS IN SUMMER

Our Yosemite bears become a problem when summer comes because they are hungry and they like our foods.

They like to use our roads and trails and, seemingly, like to be near man. Then our tourists are all anxious to see the bears. If the park rangers did not interfere, bears would line themselves up in strategic points along our park highways like newsboys in a city, and beg for food. As too many of our tourists have found out, it is dangerous to feed bears from the hand. The bears are only thinking of food, while the tourist is often thinking of the photograph he is getting. The bears get impatient and reach out, scratch or bite the person who is too near. Feeding bears from the hand is strictly prohibited in Yosemite. Another trouble is that bears often break into automobiles or camps where food is stored. Just the same, bears are our most interesting animal

hibit, so we give them good protection. Of course, we try to keep them all out of the camping area, so with an ingenious bear trap and by use of dogs keep them near the bear feeding platforms at Ill Capitan.

By summer our baby bears have grown to be fine, woolly fellows about 14 inches long and standing a foot high. Their cuteness gets them and tourists into trouble. Bears like our trails, so are often seen by hikers. They never attack a person, so there is absolutely no danger. They leave the trail as the hiker approaches. These glimpses of bears are all the more interesting in the out-of-way places.

#### THE BEARS IN FALL

During September, October and November the bears are becoming very hungry again because their hibernation season is approaching. Their two most favored foods, manzanita berries and acorns, are then ripe and usually fairly abundant. Now they come in larger and larg-

er numbers to our bear feeding platforms, where such delicacies as bread and meat scraps from hotels are fed them every night on cement trays under great electric flood lights. The Merced river separates the feeding of the bears from an audience often numbering as high as 700 people, where a park naturalist tells the story of this most interesting animal. The bear is a good swimmer. He likes the water, and at this season is often seen in the river or in natural pools. As winter approaches, his coat of fur becomes heavier and more glossy. He is then in his best physical condition.

The open hunting season for bears is from November 15 to February 28. Every fall some of our Yosemite bears wander beyond our park borders, where they may be shot or trapped. Their skins make good rugs. Fortunately, at that time, most of them are hidden away in hibernation, where they are safe from hunters and trappers.

## THE MAN AND THE MOUSE

Charles Michael  
Assistant Postmaster

He was a kindly man and a true nature lover. Albeit, his wide mustache could bristle on occasion. While quick to anger, he possessed a keen sense of humor and was quick to cool down.

I was passing his camp near Stoneman bridge on the floor of the valley one morning late in fall. He called to me and I could tell by the tone of his voice that he was stirred up about something. He held a pair of tattered golf stockings in his hand and as I approached, he said, "Look at what that damned mouse did to my hose."

The stockings were a complete

wreck; chewed full of holes. As he contemplated the ruin, there came a slow smile to his lips, his face lighted up and he said, "My, but that mouse was a pretty little devil. I am glad he got away." Then smilingly he continued, "It's going to be a cold winter. That mouse will need a warm woolen bed. These stockings are no good now. I'll just tuck them back in the corner where the mouse will find them again. And besides if I let him find this old pair of stockings he may not need my new ones."

He was a kindly man and a true nature lover.

## Eastern Hikers Plan Yosemite Invasion; Sierra Club Scheduled

GEORGE C. CROWE  
Assistant Park Naturalist

The American Nature Association's Vagabonds, numbering 20, will visit Yosemite for the first time this summer. These hikers are ardent followers of the Western trails, though most of the members reside east of the Rockies.

At the suggestion of Dr. Harold C. Bryant, assistant director of national parks, the "Vagabonds" will approach Yosemite from Lake Tahoe, entering the park by Tioga Pass, August 5. From there they will hike by gradual and easy stages to Glacier Point, saving the climax until the last, and first viewing the glories of Yosemite from above.

On the thirteenth the party will go down into the valley and view the beauty from below.

Richard W. Westwood, chief of the editorial staff of Nature Magazine, will be in charge of the party, and Mrs. Westwood will accompany him.

Park Naturalist C. A. Harwell will meet the "Vagabonds" at Mono Lake and accompany them throughout their trip.

### SIERRA CLUB OUTING

The Sierra Club will tramp Yosemite trails this summer. Under the able leadership of Francis D. Tappan, the party will start from the Soda Springs headquarters of the club in Tuolumne Meadows about July 10, traveling down the

new trail through the Grand Canyon of the Tuolumne, past the Waterwheel Falls, which will be at their prime, Muir Gorge and White Horse Rapids, to Pope valley, where the club will stay for two days. The next camp will be at Benson Lake, where the party will remain for several days, and side trips will be taken into the northern portion of the park. The return will be made by way of Rodgers Lake and Matterhorn Canyon to Soda Springs, about July 24, completing the first two weeks.

The party then start south over Vogelsang Pass into Merced canyon, visiting the Lyell Fork of the Merced with its attractive but seldom visited meadows, and will cross into the San Joaquin basin by way of Iceberg Pass, and then on to the Rainbow Falls and Devil's Postpile region.

Several days' stay will be made at the Garnet Lake campsite which proved so attractive on the 1929 outing, giving another chance to explore the Mount Ritter and Minaret region. Return will be made to Tuolumne Meadows over Donchue Pass, enabling the party to leave the Soda Springs about the 7th of August, completing the second trip in two weeks.

A ranger-naturalist will accompany the Sierrans a portion of the time.







## YOSEMITE TREES

### LAURELS AND MANZANITAS BLOOM

Ranger Naturalist Enid Michael

February in the Yosemite Valley was a most delightful month. There were bright, sunny days with cloudless blue skies; there were days when great, cumulus clouds puffed up behind the rim crags and drifted lazily across the valley, and there were days when dark, ominous clouds crowded over Cathedral Rocks and raced all day to the northeast. Mostly these storm-threatening clouds sped on to spill their moisture beyond the valley. On several occasions scattered through the month there were afternoon showers and three times during the month there were days of rain. The few inches of snow that fell on the twenty-first melted quickly away.

So little snow have we had this winter that old flower stalks still stand in the meadows and after a night of heavy frost it is a treat to wander across the meadows when frost flowers bloom fresh on every dry flower head.

At the end of the month all trails to the rim were possible to foot travel.

Early in the month laurels and manzanitas were blooming on the warm south-facing cliffs. The lau-

rels bloomed very early in the month and were days ahead of the manzanitas. On February 22 were found the first blooming annuals: two crucifers, a peppergrass and a mustard.

### ANOTHER BIG TREE FALLS

C. C. Presnall,

Assistant Park Naturalist

Visitors to Mariposa Grove next summer will see another fallen sequoia, which was blown down during the severe windstorm of November 22, 1930. The fallen big tree was first seen by Rangers Bill Reyman and Jerry Mernin, who returned on November 25 from a patrol trip to the grove.

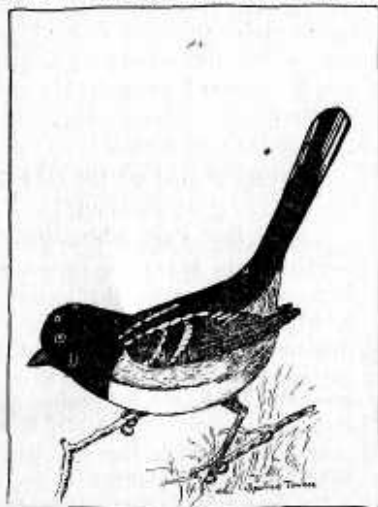
They reported that the fallen tree, a 15-foot specimen, is located just across the road from the Galen Clark tree. In falling many cones and small branches were broken off. Some of them were gathered by the rangers and sent to Washington to be used as Christmas decorations at the White House.

This is the first time since 1927, when the huge Massachusetts Tree crashed to the ground during the winter, that a Sequoia has fallen in the Mariposa Grove. No one heard it fall. Similarly, no one was in the grove when this smaller, unnamed tree fell last November.

## JANUARY WITH THE BIRDS

Enid Michael, Ranger-Naturalist

Again this winter the Sacramentos towhees make their home in the ceanothus patch beside the post-office. Every morning they come to meet me when I go out to scatter crumbs. The towhees have a cocky manner and as they hop about at the edge of their beloved brush patch they flit their tails with saucy arrogance. They feel secure with a thick brush cover close at hand. And no wonder the towhees



feel secure, for they possess an amazing talent for dodging quickly through a maze of interlacing twigs. In his home thicket the towhee knows every passageway through which he may slip. I have seen a towhee come into the upper branches of his thicket and laugh in the face of a sharp-shinned hawk. And when the killer hawk was taunted into action, the towhee would dive into the thicket and easily elude his enemy. And besides around the thicket, but more in the open, are likely to be jays and juncos. This scattering of birds may often prove a fender between

hawk and towhee.

On the morning of January 18 a strange junco was seen. On the ground near the museum there was a flock of perhaps 40 juncos. With this flock of Sierra juncos there were three or four slate-colored juncos and one lone gray-headed stranger. This stranger stood out absolutely distinct from all the other juncos. His general color was blue-gray and there was no contrast of color except a reddish-brown patch on the back and the usual junco flash of white tail feathers. There was not the least suggestion of a cowl, which is a very characteristic mark of our common juncos. This gray-headed junco appeared softer and more fluffy than the juncos with whom he was associated. This junco was probably *Junco caniceps*, a Great Basin form and a rare visitor to California.

January 25 was a dull gray morning, but warm, and the thawing earth was springy underfoot. The feel of spring was in the air, yet sere and tired lay the meadows, spotted here and there with ragged snow patches. No, the balminess was not of spring, for still in the dead of winter were cottonwood and oak, showing not as yet the least flush of reviving hope.

Pretty and interesting things were seen today. A Western bluebird fluttering over a pool of enchantment. He was hovering low over the pool, so that I could look down upon his lovely blue back, and below his rosy breast was reflected in the still water.

A proud and handsome ring-necked duck, with his three modestly garbed ladies, floated on the calm surface of the back-water pool.

In search of a luncheon of grubs the great pileated woodpecker

whacked away on a dead stub and sent chips and bark flying. And as She hammered away his fiery crest flashed in the rays of the afternoon sun. Then he flew away, showing great white patches in his black wings, and as he flew he shouted his high-pitched, ringing call. A thrilling bird, and there is something wild and free about his loud-shouted call notes.

As I strolled up the valley the sun sank behind Cathedral Rocks, slowly dropping the curtain on a perfect day.

The spell of fair, spring-like weather lasted until January 29,

then finally there came a change of weather and the month came to a close as it started, with two rainy days. No snow came to the floor of the valley, however, during the last storm.

All in all, January was a mild month, with very little snow or rain and many bright, sunny days. There was practically no snow on the north side of the valley at the end of the month and all trails to the "rim" were open.

The Red-breasted sapsucker, the last bird listed for the month, brought the number to 32, which number is two above the January

## THE INDIAN CAVE

Floyd E. Dewhirst

Untenanted it stands, its roof with  
smoke all blackened,

The ash of burned-out fires its  
yawning doorway litters.

If it could only speak, what tales  
that mouth might whisper

Of days when "Redmen slept  
within its dark recesses!"

From out the crowded group which  
crouched beneath its portals,

Went forth the haughty brave in  
quest of game and honors.

Armed but with bow and knife, he  
dared, alone, to follow

The grizzly to its lair. If he re-  
turned, a victor,

This cave, with shouts of joy at his  
success, rang gayly.

How many times, instead, deep  
walls of grief resounded!

Around the fire, within, the men oft  
met in council.

To smoke the pipe of peace, or  
plan for hostile forays.

The children, on yon slope, engaged,  
in mimic battles,

While squaws, upon this rock of  
hard, unyielding granite,

Wove baskets in the sun and ground  
their meal of acorns.

The women from their work have  
ceased, but left behind them

Mute tokens in this rock, their  
granite acorn mortars.

These braves are, long since, gone.  
their names have vanished  
with them.

Of their bright council fires, but  
soot and ash still linger,

Their cave deserted now, its wall,  
with dim old scratches,

Speaks of a day long past, recalls a  
race departed.



## Yosemite Bird Report for January, 1931

**Ring-Necked Duck**—One male and three females probably present daily from the seventh until the end of the month, as we could always find the little band of four birds when we went looking for them. On one occasion two males and five females were seen.

**Mallard Duck**—On January 11 and 12 five birds were seen, three males and two females.



**Great Blue Heron**—Possibly three birds present during the month. On a trip either up or down the river we usually managed to scare up one bird, occasionally two.

**Sharp-Shinned Hawk**—A lone bird noted on three occasions.

**Red-Tailed Hawk**—A lone individual January 16.

**Golden Eagle**—Twice during the month two birds were seen. Judging by the yelping call-note one was probably a young bird.

**Sparrow Hawk**—A lone bird noted on five different occasions.

**Horned Owl**—We were serenaded by a pair of these birds the first two nights of the month.

**Pigmy Owl**—On January 23 a pair was seen, and on the 29th a lone bird.

**Belted Kingfisher**—No change in status. Always to be found along certain stretches of river.

**Hairy Woodpecker**—Not numerous, but noted daily. Never more than two birds to a mile of walk.

**Willow Woodpecker**—Rare, but after the middle of the month we could always find one when we made a special search.

**White-Headed Woodpecker**—A pair present daily about the mouth of Indian canyon. Seldom noted elsewhere.

**Red-Breasted Sapsucker**—A beautiful male bird seen January 27.

**Pileated Woodpecker**—A lone male noted on four occasions.

**California Woodpecker**—Common in all the Kellogg oak groves on the north side of the valley.

**Red-Shafted Flicker**—Not numerous. There were days when we failed to note a single bird.

**Blue-Fronted Jay**—The most common bird this month. Likely to be found in any section of the valley.

**Cassin Purple Finch**—A flock of 20 noted January 11, and present for a week thereafter. We expect to find cassin's in the valley after a storm, but this time they appeared during fair weather.

**Pine Siskin**—A flock of 30 January 25. Twice later a little group of five or six was seen. The large flock was feeding on cottonwood buds.

**Slate-Colored Junco**—No doubt a few present throughout the month.

**Sierra Junco**—Flocks of from 30 to 40 birds in three different sections of the valley.

**Gray-Headed Junco**—A lone bird that we believe to have been the gray-headed junco was seen January 18.

**Sacramento Towhee**—From January 3 until the end of the month four birds were present daily in a ceanothus thicket near the postoffice. Also at least two in the ceanothus thicket near the zoo. Not noted elsewhere.

**Hutton Vireo**—Lone birds, or pairs, noted on several occasions.

**Canyon Wren**—Lone birds likely to be seen in any of the talus slopes on the north side of the valley. Song heard the last five days of the month.

**Sierra Creeper**—Noted daily. Likely to be found in any section of the valley.

**Red-Breasted Nuthatch**—In two different localities a pair of these birds were always to be found, but otherwise not noted.

**Mountain Chickadee**—Rare. A pair probably present daily about the mouth of Indian canyon. Seldom seen in any other locality.

**California Eushtit**—Two flocks probably present throughout the month. Only noted about the mouth of Indian canyon.

**Plain Titmouse**—A lone individual was seen in the ceanothus patch near the zoo on January 8.

**Ruby-Crowned Kinglet**—Flocks of 15 or 20 birds to be found in a number of localities, and they will be found in the same localities day after day.

**Townsend Solitaire**—Rare. Only noted on the oak-covered talus slopes on the north side of the valley.

**Western Robin**—From the fifth until the end of the month a lone bird came daily to beg raisins. On the first day of the month and on the last day of the month six robins were seen.

**Western Bluebird**—A number of wandering flocks present throughout the month.





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Dan Anderson