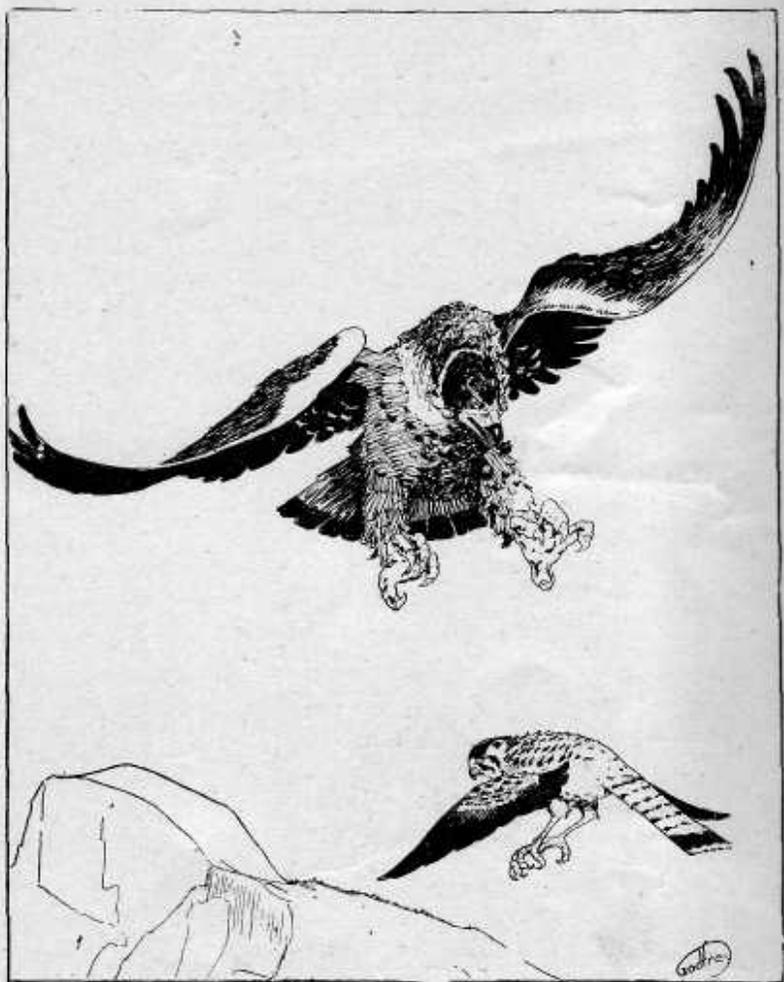


# YOSEMITE NATURE NOTES



AUGUST, 1931.

Volume X

Number 8

# Yosemite Nature Notes

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## MOTORING TO GLACIER POINT WITH A NATURALIST

RANGER-NATURALIST COPE JENSEN

The interesting automobile trip from Yosemite valley to Glacier Point is doubly attractive to those who watch keenly for moving objects along the roadside. That portion of the road leading from Chinquapin to the point is especially suited to the inquiring eye and mind of the naturalist, as witness the following random observations made while motoring over the route on a July day.

Many deer, chiefly does, were seen along the road, but at Peregoy Meadows a fleeting glimpse of a large buck mule deer was enough to cause the driver to stop. Four other bucks were then seen, all being large four-pointers, and by careful stalking it was possible to obtain some excellent motion pictures of the group. We congratulated ourselves upon obtaining these pictures, since the deer that do not feed on scraps around the various camps are rather shy and are often magnificent specimens. Proceeding toward Bridal Veil

creek the party obtained a close view of a mountain weasel with head erect proudly carrying a Tahoe chipmunk. It leaped along with a galloping gait and soon passed out of sight.

### A RARE OWL

A few miles beyond Bridal Veil creek we made a most unexpected and notable observation. A great gray owl was discovered by Don Butterbaugh while he was gathering red fir bark for the firefall at Glacier Point. The owl flew quickly off behind a dense clump of firs, so we had only a glimpse of this rare bird, which had not been reported in this locality for four years. It was near this same spot that the great gray owl in 1915 was first discovered nesting south of Canada. Grinnel and Storer record the discovery in "Animal Life in the Yosemite," saying it was made at "7400 feet altitude, within one mile south of Ostrander Rocks."

**BRUINS WITH YOUNG**

Two mother "hold-up" bears, each with two cubs, were observed between Ostrander Rocks and Washburn Turn. They were exceedingly tame and quite aggressive in their quest for candy and cookies, but were rather poor in spite of their concentrated diet—or perhaps because of it.

At the garbage pits about a mile from Glacier Point a gray fox with a crippled hind foot hobbled across the road to seek seclusion in the underbrush.

While passing the Glacier Point stables a donkey, saddled and tied, brayed his loudest, as if saying, "You haven't seen anything yet—take a look at me!"

**High Sierra Watercolor****BAYLOR BROOKS**

Ranger-Naturalist

Not least among the priceless experiences awaiting him who visits the extensive high country adjacent to Yosemite Valley is the spectacular view from the saddle between Mt. Dana and Mt. Gibbs of an unnamed lakelet lying at the head of Gibbs canyon some two thousand feet directly below.

Hikers pausing at this point for a brief rest, as well as riders leaving their mounts before ascent of the last few hundred feet on foot, though enthralled by the grandeur of the eastern vista, with Mono lake, the craters, and the distant ranges, lying as in a world of prospective miniature below, never fail to remark at this tiny lakelet. On cloudy days as well as bright this little lake is a veritable gem in water color, displaying vivid blues well edged with greenish gray.

**SECOND ONE LIKE IT**

There is another such lakelet smaller yet than Gibbs canyon lake lying just at the foot of the Dana

Glacier and at the head of Glacier canyon. This second gem is so small that it receives no mention on the map of the region, yet it is well remembered by those who have looked down on it from Dana's crest. Both of these lakes, well called Cirque lakes because of their position in the carved amphitheatrical basins left by an ancient ice mass, exhibit striking color. In fact it is this feature that lends much to their interest.

The reason for this color has been variously described. Distant Mono owes its color, as seen from distance, to sky reflection in its turbid waters, but these tiny lakes are independent of that source. Some have thought it due to the asserted purity of alpine waters, but this seems not the case. Though the water is essentially pure in the sanitary sense, it is pervaded with rock particles of size even finer than dust. It is this fact and not the purity which is believed to account for the color of these lakes. Light reflection and refraction by these minute particles may also account for the deep blue color of massive ice as seen in glaciers or icebergs. It is a well known fact that ice bodies as they move exert a grinding force upon the rock, and upon their melting the fine particles as well as the large would be dropped. Thus the source of these lakes.

**A VISITOR'S OPINION**

This was the suggestion of George P. Merrill, late of the National Museum, who many years ago visited the Dana Glacier and described the lakelet and its peculiar color as due to the fine silt held in suspension and which when submitted to microscopic examination proved to be minute fragments of silicate minerals.

That such is true in explanation of all high country watercolor needs yet to be shown, but it at any rate seems a very plausible explanation and detracts not in the slightest from the appreciation of the fact of the striking color of those lakes and lakelets.

## ASCENTS OF MT. STARR KING

C. C. PRESNALL, Junior Park Naturalist.

For 54 years Mt. Starr King, towering 9081 feet into the air, just three miles south of Half Dome, has defied the attempts of mountain climbers to attain its summit, but this summer two daring youths, Warren Loose of Fontana, Calif., and Eldon Dryer of Pomona, Calif., made the ascent with the aid of rubber-soled shoes. Within a month several others also made the climb.

The first ascents, in 1877, were made from the southeast side, with the aid of eye bolts and ropes, but all the ascents this year have been made from the northeast side. Loose and Dryer carried a rope, which was used in a body belay at the most dangerous point. A later party found that patches of inner tubing sewed to trouser seats were a great aid. At best, the climb is a hazardous one, due to the lack of hand or footholds on the smooth slope, which is a little steeper than the cable climb on Half Dome, although less than half as long. Anyone contemplating this climb should be sure his nerves are steady and should not attempt it alone.

## EARLY ASCENTS

In 1877 the mountain was climbed by George G. Anderson, who was the first man to climb Half Dome. He assisted four others to the summit of Starr King: J. G. Lambert, J. M. Hutchings, S. A. Walker and Mrs. A. L. Sweetland. They found two monuments on top, indicating previous unrecorded ascents, and erected a flagpole to mark their

own achievement. Remains of this flagpole were found by Loose and Dryer, who made a permanent record of all ascents in the Sierra Club register which they deposited on the summit. Mr. Hutchings, in his book "In the Heart of the Sierras," states that the two men who built the monuments were George S. Bayley and E. S. Schuyler. He also claims that his wife and daughter Florence were assisted to the top by Mr. Anderson, but this is not mentioned in his manuscript which is on file at the Yosemite Museum.

## THOSE WHO'VE DONE IT

The following list of ascents of Mt. Starr King previous to August 1, 1931, is complete in so far as we can learn at present:

1877 (?)—George S. Bayley and E. S. Schuyler.

August 23, 1877—George G. Anderson, J. S. Lambert and J. M. Hutchings.

August 24, 1877—George G. Anderson, S. A. Walker, J. M. Hutchings, Mrs. A. L. Sweetland, with possible addition of Mrs. Hutchings and Florence Hutchings.

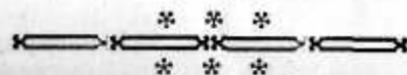
June 25, 1931—Warren Loose and Eldon Dryer.

July 3, 1931—Harry Hopkinson.

July 4, 1931—Warren Loose, Eldon Dryer and Judd Boynton.

July 23, 1931—John Emlen Jr. and Wilfred Frost.

July, 1931—A Sierra Club member, name not yet known.





## YOSEMITE ANIMALS

### HIKING WITH THE BEARS

Ranger-Naturalist Lloyd Sweetman

It is not presuming much to say that the most interesting animal in Yosemite is the *Ursus americanus*, better known as the black bear. Greatest excitement prevails when a visitor to the park spies one of these animals along the roadside. To secure a snapshot of a bear is to have something most interesting to show the folks back home. However, the prize sight of them all is to see a mother bear with her cubs slowly meandering about the valley.

During July on one of the daily guided hikes to the rim of the valley a party which was climbing to Eagle Peak enjoyed an interesting experience. We had climbed the first zigzags to the foot of the upper Yosemite Falls and were starting to climb the second series which led to the brink. To the right, a short distance from the trail, we caught sight of a large brown bear climbing upon a rock to find out what all the excitement could be. As we watched, two little cubs about the size of a full grown Spitz dog stretched their little legs and slowly climbed up next to their mother. What a sight! Here was a mother bear with her brown cub and a black cub far from the usual

stamping ground about the feeding pits. Imagine the joy among those who had never seen a bear in the open! But while we stood there watching the family climbed down from the rock and started up the side of the mountain, much to our disappointment.

#### THE WHOLE FAMILY

But our excitement was not yet over for, as we rounded one of the many turns several minutes later, there in front of us stood the mother bear flanked by her cubs and still as death. We stopped. In a moment she decided that all was well and again started off up the mountain by a sort-cut. Again, as we came out of the sunlight into the shade, we were suddenly taken aback by the quick movement of the mother bear coming at us from the brush. Evidently she had crossed the trail ahead of her cubs and we had gotten between her and the little ones. This is always unsafe. However, one of the girls in the party let out a yelp like a puppy and we clapped our hands and Mrs. Bear let us continue on our journey intact.

Upon one of our encounters we

saw the mother bear standing high upon her hind legs eating fruit from the coffeeberry bush. Beside her, stretching as far as possible, were the little cubs following the example of their mother. "Clowns of the forest" is most certainly a suitable name for these animals.

The sight which we shall not soon forget was the one encountered about 20 minutes later. After our last encounter the bear had evidently cut up the side of the mountain, for as we again caught sight of them they were slowly climbing along the trail in front of us, the mother wobbling along with a cub on either side. It reminded one of the End of a Perfect Day or, perhaps better still, "the end of the bears." Their steady roll from one

side to the other was enough to make us scream.

Our last sight of these interesting animals was just as we reached the top of the zigzags. We heard a growl and then a yelp and looked back in time to see the mother give the little black cub one of the cleverest cuffs on the ear one could hope to see a mother deliver. The mother had uncovered a delicacy of some kind by stripping off the bark of a dead stump and the little fellow had helped himself to it before the mother had time to examine her find. After this exertion they needed a rest, so over to the spring they went, drank their fill and sat down together in the shade while we passed on our way to the beautiful meadows and Eagle Peak.

## Wilderness Neighbors of the Ahwahnee Hotel

C. C. Presnall, Junior Park Naturalist

A striking contrast between effete civilization and primitive wilderness was recently noted in Yosemite Valley when a gray fox was caught within a few rods of the sumptuous Ahwahnee Hotel. A box trap had been set there to capture a troublesome bear, but the attractive bait caused the capture of a sly creature whose presence so close to the hotel had been little suspected. The morning after the trap was set Chief Ranger Townsley observed that the trap door was closed and upon investigation, found that he had captured not a bear but a gray fox. An examination of the animal and close observation of its actions after liberation showed that it was a female with a litter of young concealed somewhere in the rocks back of the hotel. An attempt to find the exact location of the den was unsuccessful.

The easy trapping of this fox would indicate that there are probably several others in the same territory, and such is, indeed, the case as shown by my observations of fox tracks in the winter-time. It is doubtful whether the guests of the Ahwahnee as they dance and dine magnificently, realize that another kind of night life is going on just outside the hotel. Foxes and bears walk quietly by in search of food. A host of meadow mice come out to feed among the flower beds. Softly and stealthily the owls and ring-tailed cats come out to feed on the mice. Along nearby stream banks weasels and shrews, bloodthirsty little beasts, prowl in search of their prey. A doe and her fawns sleep peacefully in an adjacent meadow while farther down the valley a coyote tips his nose towards the stars and barks at El Capitan.



### A WATER-OUZEL IDIOSYNCRASY

Ranger-Naturalist Carl  
Sharsmith

One is accustomed to think of the water ouzel as a gleaner of the stream beds, searching for its food among the shallows and riffles of the mountain streams. It is hard to imagine an ouzel imitating the food-getting habits of the fly-catcher. One was observed, however, by the stream which empties into Merced lake, flying into the air as high as 40 feet and snapping at insects in gathering food to feed a youngster nearby. This instance is of sufficient rarity to be worthy of note.

### "AUGUST NOTELETS"

Ranger-Naturalist Enid Michael

**RUFOUS HUMMERS**—During months of July and August, Rufous hummingbirds are present in the high gardens along the main crest of the Sierra, but in all our years in the Yosemite we had never until this year seen Rufous hummers on the floor of the valley. Normally, by the first of August, the flowering season is practically over on the floor of the valley—that is to say, there are no great gardens to attract the Rufous hummingbirds returning from their summer breeding grounds to the north. This year, however, in the Ahwahnee grounds, protected from the deer, there was an acre of blooming evening primroses, and somehow, the hummers got word of this wild flower bloom. An August 2, two

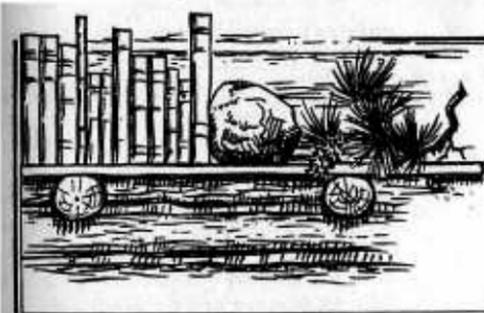
male Rufous hummingbirds were found in this garden; there were also black-chinned and calliope hummingbirds. Ten days late the blackchins and the male Rufous hummingbirds were gone and the garden was in possession of a great company of female Rufous hummers. The female Rufous hummers banded together to drive the few remaining calliopes from the garden and when there were no calliopes to be harassed, the Rufous hummers satisfied their belligerent souls by fighting among themselves. On August 15, it was estimated that there were at least 100 female or young Rufous hummingbirds present in the garden. By August 23, the calliope hummers were again in command of the situation and only a straggling few Rufous hummers remained in the garden.

**WILD CANARIES**—By now the evening primroses were beaded with seedpods all up and down their stems and hundreds of green-backed goldfinches came here to feast. The protected wild flower gardens about the Ahwahnee Hotel have brought prosperous times again to certain kinds of birds.

### PINE GROSBEAKS

C. C. Presnall

On August 7 a number of California pine grosbeaks were seen along the McGee Lake trail by Ranger-Naturalist Thaxter and his party of six-day hikers. This bird is rated as one of the rare species in higher elevations of Yosemite National Park.



# Book Notes

## Books Needed

RANGER-NATURALIST C. H. ONEAL

The Yosemite Museum Library has this summer undertaken a real program of organization and classification. From a humble beginning made through the foresight and efforts of Stephen T. Mather, former director of national parks, our collection has been built up to its present proportions of about 3000 volumes. The Yosemite Natural History Association, especially through the efforts of its organizers, Ansel F. Hall and Dr. Carl P. Russell, has been the principal contributor of books. Large gifts have been received from Mr. and Mrs. James H. Schwabacher and Mr. and Mrs. Herbert Fleischhacker of San Francisco. We greatly appreciate the many gifts of books we have received.

Mrs. Ruth Casaday, on leave from the Oakland Free Library, is serving as librarian and is organizing and cataloging the books. Library of congress cards are being used with the Dewey classification system of call numbers. A simplified Newark charging system will be used when books are loaned.

### A NEED LONG REALIZED

The need for a systematic library in Yosemite has been felt for some

time in order to furnish ready information to the park naturalist and his staff, to students in the field school of natural history, to visiting scientists who frequently make protracted sojourns in the park in pursuit of special investigations, to the visiting public which is rapidly becoming more "nature minded" and to the 400 or more permanent park residents as a part of their community life.

### MORE BOOKS ARE NEEDED

During a recent visit Dr. Ray Lyman Wilbur, Secretary of the Department of the Interior, suggested that many people have private libraries containing books of Yosemite interest which are not being used. Are you one of those fortunate individuals? Wouldn't you like to see those books placed in circulation where they would be appreciated? If so, you have the opportunity.

Send to the Yosemite Park naturalist, C. A. Harwell, for a frank tag. When it arrives, do the books up in a package, attach the tag, mail the package and rejoice in having done a good piece of public service.

## THE TYPE WANTED

Importance is placed on the early history of California, especially Yosemite, while nature study books are also needed. Books on the human history of Yosemite are especially wanted. The struggles of the early settlers, the frantic search for gold by the '49ers, and the hardships of early travel seldom fail to interest people. The writings of Galen Clark, John Muir, J. D. Whitney and many other early timers teem with living interest.

Books that deal with the origin, habits, customs, legends and warfare of the Yosemite Indians quicken the pulse of nearly every reader. The spirit of the redman is alive in this valley.

The administration and history of

national parks and monuments are vital. Writings that give intimate touches of the early struggles by Theodore Roosevelt, John Muir and others to establish national parks are most welcome.

The park through the naturalist service is creating a growing interest in nature study. General nature lore by reliable present-day scientists is eagerly seized. Books on the classification and habits of flowers, birds, animals and fish are in much demand.

Today is a fine time for you to look over your book shelves. You will welcome the additional space and the library will appreciate your gift. Books in use open up the wonders of the universe, those on shelves mildew under the dust. Won't you send your contribution?"

## NOTELETS

A Sierra least weasel (*Mustela muricus*) was accidentally caught in a rat trap at Glacier Point (7214 feet) on August 11 by Ranger-Naturalist Cope Jensen. To the best of our knowledge this is but the third definite record of this tiny carnivore within Yosemite National Park. The measurements of the animal, a male, are as follows: Total length 223 mm., tail 57 mm., hind foot 27 mm. C. C. Presnall

**SQUIRRELS.**—With the floor of the valley overrun with ground squirrels valley residents marvel at the scarcity of hawks. With the exception of a few sparrow hawks, there are no hawks to take a daily toll of the smaller mammals. Possibly food may be had more easily in other sections of the country, but this seems hardly likely. E. Michael

A rare Spotted Bat (*Eudermia maculata*) was accidentally collected in Yosemite Valley on Aug 17 by Robert Selby, Museum Custodian. Only four other specimens are known to science. It is a small black bat with three white spots on the back. The ears are over half as long as the body. Full details will probably appear in an early issue of the Journal of Mammalogy.

C. C. Presnall

In a recent census of water ouzel nests along the Merced and its tributaries, it was found that Tenaya canyon offered the most favorable nesting sites for this feathered inhabitant of the foaming rapids. In the box canyon of Tenaya creek five ouzel nests were found within a distance of half a mile. All were deserted, but showed signs of having been occupied this spring.

C. C. Presnall

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Dan Anderson