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The Thrill of Hunting With a Camera

By C. C. PRESNALL, Junior Park Naturalist

Hunting with a camera may sound tame, but it is far more thrilling and calls for much greater skill than the old scatter-gun sport. True, a camera makes no noise, nor does it indicate hits or misses until after a session in the dark room, yet no one can question its pre-eminence in sport after having seen such camera classics as those produced by the Johnsons. Successful wild animal photography demands wide knowledge and keen observation of animal habits, and the best a man can muster in stealth, quickness and nerve.

That's what I read in a book once, only it forgot to say that camera-hunting also demands all of a man's spare cash, judging by my own amateur, film-wasting efforts. It's quite a thrill, all right, to sit three hours in a snow bank waiting for a bear who appears to late in the afternoon that an under-exposed film is the result. When you discover that your ears and toes have been over-exposed, that's another kind of a thrill; it must be—nothing could tingle more.

BRUINS SHY IN WINTER

Yosemite bears are supposed to be so tame that they will pose nicely for pictures, and then take the camera apart in their eagerness to see the result. That is during the open season for tourists. When winter comes, the bears go. Then the would-be photographer must bribe the sleepy bruin with chicken bones and bacon rinds to persuade them to pose in the snow instead of hibernating in caves as all respectable bears do. Those that accept the bribe are not respectable. They first allow their seducer to suffer slow death by freezing, then dash out for some bait, and as quickly run away. The film shows an excellent view of the north end of a bear going south. Or perhaps one big black fellow stays in the woods until dusk, and then comes out to the bait line, secure in the knowledge that the flashlight powder has been left in camp.

No, photographing wild animals isn't what it's cracked up to be. Even the squirrels show their utter lack of respect by climbing over the camera lens, and then retiring rapidly to the top of the highest tree with the proffered peanut, and as for securing a good photograph

of a bird—but why rave on? There are some compensations, such as in the case of a certain coyote seen near El Capitan one morning.

SNEAKING UP ON COYOTE

I first spotted him 150 yards away, as I descended the talus near Eagle Creek. He was busy with something in the snow and didn't see me, so I ducked behind some rocks and commenced a rapid detour to get down wind from him. That maneuver being successfully completed, I started a slow advance directly toward him, moving cautiously from tree to tree. He remained occupied with what I later found to be a bone retrieved from the bear feeding platform nearby, but became suddenly alert when I advanced to within 50 yards. A long wait was

necessary before it was safe to venture across the open space between my sheltering tree trunk and a low ridge that extended quartering toward the coyote. Finally gaining that cover, I crawled carefully to a point opposite the animal and about 20 yards from where he had been last seen. Now for the critical moment. Setting the shutter I slowly rose to look over the ridge—just in time to see the coyote whirl and dash off to cover. Apparently the slight click of the shutter had been enough to warn him, and he had undoubtedly seen the top of my head before I saw him. Although failing to get a picture, I at least had the immense satisfaction of stalking to within camera range of a coyote, which is one of the most sagacious animals in Yosemite National Park.

Sierra Creeper

By ENID MICHAEL
Ranger-Naturalist

The Sierra creeper (Certhia familiaris zelotes) is a little brown bird with a white throat and breast. Like other small birds, he is busy from daylight until dark, apparently forever searching for food. Long have I wondered if this incessant search for food was necessary to keep the appetite satisfied and the body nourished.

As is well known, the creeper has a peculiar method of feeding, and its activities are confined almost exclusively to tree-trunks. While the nuthatches, also trunk-feeding birds, travel with equal ease either up or down the tree-trunk, the creeper always works upward. The creeper is a deliberate and systematic gleaner; he works up the tree-trunk by a series of hitches, pausing often to peer into a crevice in the rough bark. His white breast acts as a reflector to throw light into the dark cracks, and his long, curved bill forms an efficient pair of tweezers to pick out mites of insect life. That no morsel of food be overlooked, the creeper often drops back to the base of the tree on which he

is working to slowly work upward again; often he spirals the tree; occasionally he drops back a few inches, tail first, but head first never. His long tail, with stiff, pointed feathers, works very well as a brace in his upward course, but should he travel head downward, this same long tail would prove a handicap, to tilt his body into an awkward position.

NOT BOTHERED BY COLD

The Sierra creeper, winter and summer, is found commonly in all sections of the valley. During the winter months bird life is concentrated about the warm alluvial fan that spreads out at the mouth of Indian Canyon. The Sierra creepers, however, apparently take no part in the cross-valley migration that takes most of the resident birds to the warm side of the valley. Their peculiar feeding habits assure them sustenance in any given section throughout the year, and they seem immune to cold. The shadow of the great wall means no inconvenience to them, for during the daylight hours they actively tread up the great tree trunks in search of food and at night they tuck themselves warmly away in some snug-fitting burrow of pine or cedar bark. Like chickens, they come home each night to roost.

THEY PAL WITH KINGLETS

While quite independent in their manner of living, the creepers are not unsociable, and during the winter months each little band of golden-crowned kinglets is likely to be accompanied by a creeper or two, the creepers feeding on the tree trunks, the kinglets feeding in the outer foliage tufts, but all birds moving in company through the forest.

Although the Sierra creeper is one of the more common birds of the valley, it is seldom seen by the casual observer, for its color scheme so well matches the bark on which it works that it is rendered quite inconspicuous. Besides, it is a small bird and its wiry notes are pitched so high that they are likely to escape the untrained ear.

The creepers are early nesting birds in Yosemite, and it is believed that they often rear two broods of young in a season. A slab of bark sprung loose from a dead or dying tree offers a site suitable to the nesting needs of a pair of creepers. To best suit the creepers the crack that leads behind the bark must be narrow, and the space between bark and tree trunk limited. Strips of cedar bark and twigs are wedged into the crack to form a foundation for the nest proper. The cup of the nest is lined with soft material, such as shredded inner bark fiber and feathers. The shape of the nest is determined by the shape of the crack, and, naturally, it is nearly always flat with a crescent-shaped hollow to cradle the eggs. The average height of the creepers' nest above the ground is probably 10 feet. They nest as low as two feet above the ground and as high as 40 feet. The suitable crack determines the elevation and also the species of tree, for the creepers have a catholic taste in the matter of nesting-sites. An unusual nest was noted this spring: The birds had tucked their nest in a crevice where the bark hung loose from a horizontal branch. This nest was 40 feet above the ground, and, instead of the usual narrow gravy-dish type of architecture so favored by the creepers, it had the cup-shaped form common to so many other species of birds. Young creepers left this nest on June 12, which was rather late in the season for creepers.

First Snow Gauging Trip Of Year.

The snow gauging patrols which are made regularly each month during the winter by the Rangers of Yosemite National Park, in cooperation with State Snow Gaugers, offer an excellent opportunity for observing a little known phase of the natural history of the Park. Last year the writer was privileged to accompany one of these expeditions to Tuolumne Meadows and in January of this year he joined the party that covered the southern patrol to Chinquapin, Peregoy Meadows, Deer Camp, Johnson and Crescent Lakes Buck Camp and Moraine Meadows. This regions seems to be especially rich in bird and animal life, hence many interesting observations were made, some of which will be recorded in the March issue of Nature Notes.

Observations throughout the trip were made more complete by the assistance of my companions Assistant Chief Ranger John Wegner and State Snow Gauger Sam King. The work of a snow gauger is arduos at best and is so all absorbing that many details would escape the attention of one man working alone.

Animal and bird life seemed to be but little affected by this unusually severe winter with its exceptional snowfall. The region over which we traveled, between 5000 and 9000 feet elevation, had been blanketed in snow since November 14 and at the time we visited it (Jan. 20-27) we found in certain spots over nine feet of hard packed snow containing an unusually high percentage of wat er, one measurement showing the equivalent of 45 inches of rainfall. To date this is the heaviest snowfall in Yosemite since 1906, although the total of both snow and rain was heavier in 1916.

The Yosemite School of Field Natural History

C. A. HARWELL, Park Naturalist

The Yosemite School of Field Natural History is a summer school for the training of naturalists, government ranger-naturalists, and teachers of natural history, where emphasis is placed on the study of living things in their natural environment.

PURPOSE

Its aim is to train students to study and interpret living nature, that they may better enjoy life and also lead others to similar profit and enjoyment, thus making an educational contribution to the conservation of natural resources.

The establishment of the Yosemite School of Field Natural History resulted from a demand for a training in field studies and a desire on the part of the National Park Service and the California Fish and Game Commission to establish a training school for ranger-naturalists, teachers of natural history and Boy Scout and Camp Fire Girl leaders looking toward better knowledge of wild life and its conservation. This school seemed a natural outgrowth from the now well-established Yosemite Ranger-Naturalist Service. Students of past seasons have made good use of their training during succeeding years and many have found places as naturalists or nature councilors in summer camps and in National and state parks.

LOCATION

With easy accessibility to its extensive fauna and flora, typical of five life zones, and its unique geology, Yosemite National Park constitutes an ideal location for a school of field natural history.

Headquarters are maintained at the Yosemite museum, a National Park Service institution. Its extensive collections are available to students, and its library, lecture room and well equipped laboratories afford the best facilities for intensive work.

TERM- The session will open June 23 and will terminate August 10 thus coinciding with the University of California summer session at Berkeley. The high mountain field trip begins August 3 and ends August 10. This matchless excursion terminates the work of the season.

This will be the eighth session of this popular school in the mountains.

REGISTRATION AND MATRICULATION- The number of students in each summer session is limited to 20. Students are accepted on the basis of written application, showing training, experience and other qualifications for this course. Application blanks are sent on request. Four years' college work or the equivalent are required.

SMALL EQUIPMENT FEE- Text books, stationery, drawing materials and laboratory supplies are provided by the school. Expense is thus limited to a $5 registration fee to cover sundry materials, such as reference books, collecting apparatus, etc., and to the student's transportation, food, housing and clothing.

Further information will gladly be supplied by the National Park Service. Inquiries should be addressed to the Park Naturalist, Yosemite National Park, California.

For the 1932 session 26 applications have been received, but others are asked to apply since final selection will be deferred until April 1.

Feeding Habits of the Woodpeckers in the Yosemite Valley

Enid Michael

Pileated Woodpecker (Phloeotomus pileatus ableticola—The pileated woodpecker is a rare bird on the floor of the Valley; in fact, at the present time I believe that there is not a single bird here. However, in times past we have had opportunity to study their feeding habits.

In foraging the pileated woodpeckers here in the Valley show a preference for cottonwoods — at least we have discovered them at work most often in this species of tree. They do, however, we have learned, have a catholic taste and on occasion they may be found in any sort of tree. In all trees, no matter of what species, they usually work in dead wood, although at times they may be found working in the beetle-infested bark of living trees. They use their powerful bills both as a wedge and a chisel. In the cottonwoods, using their bills as a wedge or a pry, they often send thudding down chunks of bark a foot long. In the dead wood they chisel away with heavy and deliberate blows until they can wedge the bill to pry off a slab. When a slab of bark or wood is pried off exposed insects or larvae, licks up the pileated examines the spot for what is to be had, and once more sets to work. In a rich-paying section of wood a pileated will oft dig a cavity three inches deep and a foot long. Everything that a pileated woodpecker does is done on a large scale. He may be known by the size of the chips he leaves under the tree, or he may be known by the sound of his heavy hammering. And his drumming roll-call is louder and more deliberate than that of any other woodpecker.

The daily forage beat of a pair of pileated woodpeckers may cover a distance of eight or ten miles. A pair that formerly hunted together

here in the Valley had a patrol that led from Mirror Lake to the bear pits; the round-trip distance is at least eight miles. They would arrive at our camp before 9 in the morning. First they would visit the great yellow pine with dead spike crown, and then they would drop down into our cottonwood grove where they would whack about for 15 or 20 minutes. Next they would probably visit the cottonwood grove below the village, a half-mile away. In this fashion on they would go working their way down the valley. Late in the afternoon we would hear their far-shouted call notes, and looking up we would see them winging their homeward way. After the old [illegible]

lost his mate his habits were not so regular. His forage lanes led devious ways and we could never tell where to find him.

One winter this lone male spent nearly all of his time working in a group of four dying Douglas firs. Here he did a prodigious work, chiseling off bark from top to bottom of all four trees. He did this work neatly and by chiseling off the ridges of the bark he left a layer of inner bark planed to a uniform smoothness.

Having a neck long in proportion to his great body, the pileated woodpecker gets a long swing and he can strike a blow of amazing force. A man swinging a geologist pick through an arc of about eight inches would perhaps fairly duplicate the noise and the strength of a hard-working pileated woodpecker.

The pileated woodpecker is not entirely a meat-eater, for he has been seen to feast on the ripe berries of Cornus nuttallii.

California Woodpecker
(Melanerpes Formicivorus Bairdi)

The feature that sets the California woodpecker apart from all other woodpeckers, and the feature for which he is justly famous, is his acorn storing habit.

Owing to their foresight the California woodpeckers have more leisure than most birds. In the fall of the year they gather and tuck safely away a store of acorns to tide them over the winter. When the harvest days are over they have time to play, or to loaf in the sunshine, which they frequently do. Here in Yosemite valley these wise and thrifty woodpeckers have more leisure than ever now that they have adopted up to date storing methods. In times past, before the valley was made bigger and better by the promoters of the tourist trade, the California woodpeckers had certain "cupboard trees" where holes were drilled to receive snugly each single acorn that was to be stored. To drill a hole for each individual acorn was a prodigious task; a task that is not now necessary under the present storing methods.

All the buildings of the va... are either roofed with shakes ... shingles. Where the shingles ... shakes lap together along the edg... of the roofs or at the eaves there are crevices which the woodpeckers have learned to utilize as storage bins for their winter supply of acorns. It would be difficult to store full round acorns in the cracks between the shingles but the woodpeckers obviate the difficulty by hulling the acorns and poking them away half at a time. Man moves into Yosemite valley and cuts down the woodpecker's storage trees; the woodpecker retaliates by pounding acorns between the

shingles of man's dwellings.

The California woodpeckers are not particularly shy, that is, they may be approached closely when busy among their beloved oaks. But they are suspicious birds by nature and not inclined to respond to the friendly overtures of man. We did, however, manage to get on somewhat friendly terms with one pair of California woodpeckers. These birds came often to the feeding table to eat suet, but never were they able to quite overcome their suspicion, and always did they approach cautiously, making many false starts before finally coming to the feeding table. But once on the table they would hold their own against all comers until they had their fill of suet.

In spring it is a pretty sight to see the California woodpeckers leaving the orchard with cherries in their bills. The cherries just match in size and color their glorious crown patches. Later in the season they come to this same orchard to feast on apples.

If the flicker is considered as an omnivorous feeder, how about Melanerpes? He has a much more varied diet. He not only eats more kinds of fruit, but he also sucks eggs and occasionally eats young nestlings. He is a great flycatcher, too, and he does not hesitate to tackle big game. Once he was seen to take on the wing a western wood pewee.

In early spring when the snow first melts away the California woodpecker is often seen feeding on the ground in the manner of a flicker. When feeding on the ground he eats greens, bits of shattered acorns, ants, spiders and any other sort of insect that happens to come his way.

OUR NEW ASSISTANT PARK NATURALIST.

C. A. HARWELL
Park Naturalist

Mr. Matthew Edwin Beatty on January 6, joined the National Park Service family in Yosemite to take the position of Assistant Park Naturalist which was vacated last March 15 by the transfer of George Crowe to be Custodian of Devils Tower National Monument in Wyoming.

Mr. Beatty graduated from Oregon State College in 1924 with a B. S. degree in Mining Engineering. After graduation he represented the Oregon State Chamber of Commerce at Portland in their tourist bureau. For the past five years he has been in the employ of the Shell Oil Co. at Los Angeles. During most of that time he had charge of from five to twenty men in the field on geological work.

We in Yosemite are glad that Mr. Beatty heard there was to be a Civil Service examination for this position; we are glad that he passed and that he was willing to give up his interesting mining career to accept this position. It is good that his major field of interest is geology because in Yosemite the understanding of the story of the granite and other geologic factors is of prime importance to our Museum and Naturalist progam.

Mr. Beatty's experience in printing is also to our advantage because the Assistant Park Naturalist is responsible for the publication of these NATURE NOTES once a month. We hope that all our readers upon their next journey to Yosemite will visit the Museum and become better acquainted with our new Assistant.

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