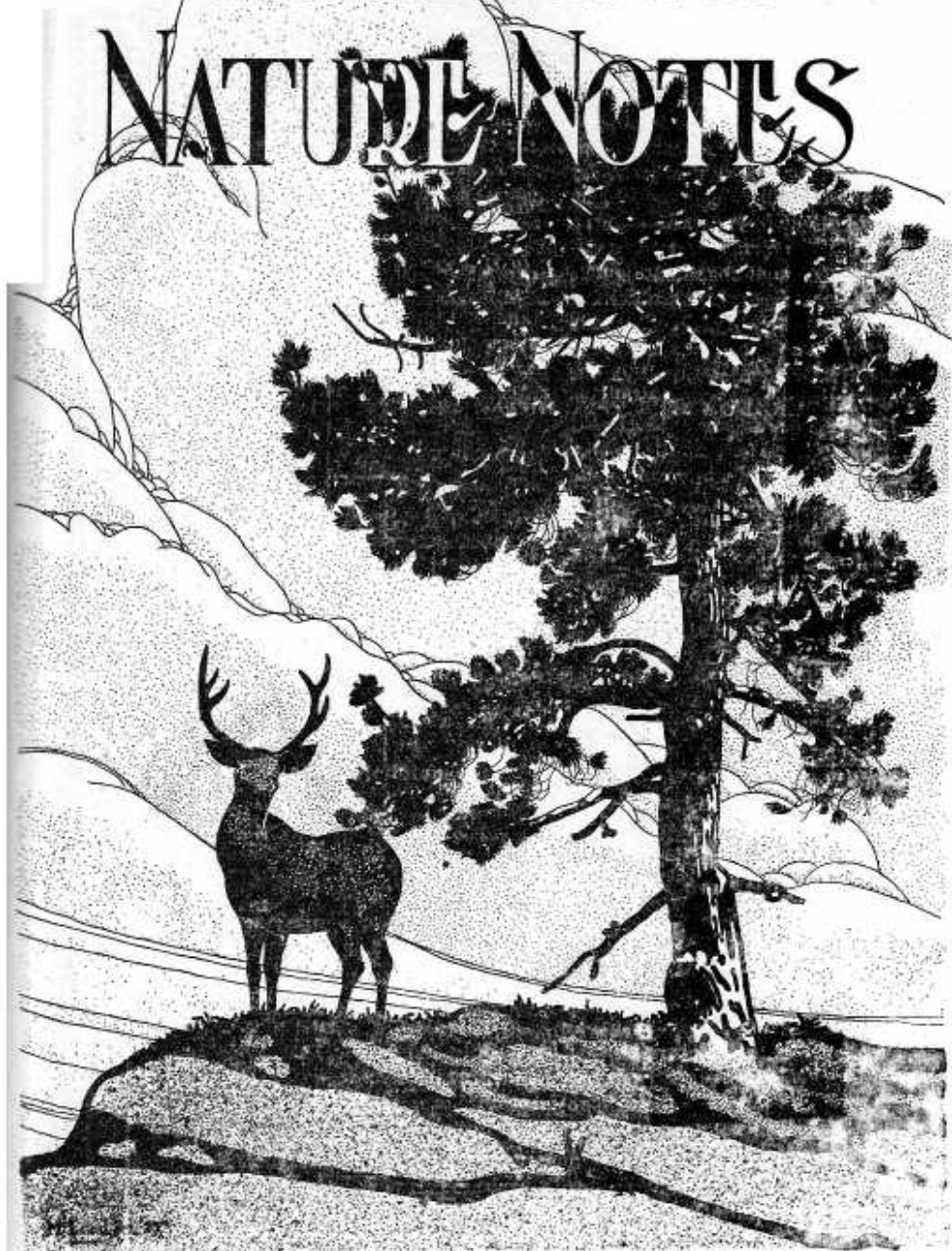


YOSEMITE NATURE NOTES



Vol. XI

September 1932

No. 9

Yosemite Nature Notes

THE PUBLICATION OF
THE YOSEMITE EDUCATIONAL DEPARTMENT
AND THE YOSEMITE NATURAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION
Published Monthly

Volume XI

September 1932

Number 9

A Coral King Snake of Peculiar Coloration

By L. M. KLAUBER

Curator of Reptiles, San Diego Society of Natural History

Recently on a trip to Yosemite I was interested in seeing, among the captive snakes on exhibition at the Museum, an adult coral king snake (*Lampropeltis multicincta*) with none of the familiar red in its coloration, the pattern consisting entirely of black and white rings. Only in three of the mid-dorsal rings were there vestiges of the missing color in the form of three narrow grayish streaks faintly marring the black. I am told that these two-color coral king snakes are not uncommon in the Yosemite Park area.

It is worth noting that the usual keys, such as those of Blanchard and Van Denburgh, fail when applied to a snake such as this, for they differentiate the *getulus* group from *triangulum*, *elapsoides*, *pyromelana* and *multicincta* by the presence or absence of the red. Thus if this specimen be worked out by the key it will be determined as being Boyle's king snake (*lampropeltis getulus boylii*).

It so happens that the scale formulae of *multicincta* and *boylii* overlap so that some characteristic of pattern must be adopted to sep-

arate them.

As one examines a series of *L. g. boylii* and *L. multicincta* a number of points are noted in which the two differ. The dark rings of *boylii* vary through all shades of brown, but are never as dark as the black of *multicincta*. The light rings of *boylii* widen conspicuously on the sides, particularly when reaching the ventrals, while those of *multicincta* widen little, if at all. The snout of *boylii* is light or of light scales mottled or edged with darker; *multicincta*, on the other hand, has a black snout, rarely with a light spot on the top. Perhaps the most definite way of segregating the two is to employ the color of the anterior supralabials as an alternate key character, thus:

(a) Some red in coloration or with anterior supralabials black, *L. multicincta*; (aa) no red in coloration and with anterior supralabials light, with or without dark edges, *L. g. boylii*.

It should be understood that such a key would be applicable only to California king snakes; it would fail if applied to *L. pyromelana* of Arizona.



YOSEMITE TREES

A Timberline Giant

By RANGER NATURALIST

CARL SHARSMITH

The white-bark pine (*Pinus albicaulis*) is the timberline tree of Yosemite National Park. On the exposed and wind-swept alpine slopes of timberline the trees are characteristically dwarfed, with low, twisted and often prostrate trunks. Several trunks may occur from a single base, and the whole tree, though only six or eight feet in height, may spread out over the ground so that it is several times broader than high. Frequently the trees form such dense, low and flat mats that they can be walked over with comparative ease. At its lower altitudinal range, which is usually not below 9500 feet in Yosemite Park, the white-bark pine sometimes reaches a height of 40 feet. Trees as large as this only grow in the more protected places, and in such situations the trunk of the tree is often single, though two or three trunks may come from a single base.

PURE STANDS

Above 10,000 feet altitude the trail to Mono Pass and Bloody Canyon passes through pure stands of these timberline trees. Directly in the pass on the canyon slopes above the trees are mainly dwarfed and prostrate mats, similar to those de-

scribed above. Due to the strength of the prevailing westerly winds, they bear limbs only on their eastern side. On the less exposed hill-slope above the South Fork of the Tuolumne river, about one mile before the pass is reached, the trees grow upright and to a height of about 20 or 30 feet. At 10,500 feet altitude, and at the point where the Parker Pass trail branches off, stands a huge white-bark pine. It is so distinctive, and so much larger than any other white-bark pine I have seen in the park, that careful measurements were taken.

TEN TRUNKS

Ten trunks arise near the ground from what seems to be a single base, most of the trunks measuring from two to two and one-half feet in diameter. The diameter of the whole tree at the base is 10 feet, while the diameter of the largest trunk is three and one-half feet. Critical scrutiny led to the conclusion that it is all one tree, and not several trees which have grown together at the base. These measurements far exceed the size-limitations usually given for this species. To my knowledge this, considered as a single tree, is the largest white-bark pine yet found in the park.

A Walking Stick and a Record

By H. A. ANDERSON

Ranger Naturalist

A bend in the trunk of a young Sequoia gigantea standing about 35 feet west of the Haverford Tree in the upper grove was pointed out by Ranger Henry Skelton (retired) July 29, as the place from which Galen Clark, discovered of the grove (1857), cut himself a walking-stick either in the year 1858 or 1859. Mr. Skelton reports that Galen Clark, in 1903 or 1904, told him of having removed the top of the tree, 45 years before, and commented upon its growth during those years.

Clark had pulled the young sapling over and cut his cane at a point 21 feet above the ground. No abrupt decrease in size occurs above this point, but the new lateral branch, which took up the terminal growth, still shows a bend of a few inches where it changed directions to assume the lead position.

The tree was measured by a government engineer, August 2, and found to be 131 feet tall. It has thus made a length growth of 110 feet in the 73 or 74 years, or has averaged practically 18 inches per year after the tree was over the 20-foot stage. The diameter of the tree above the butt swell (three feet above ground) was found to be three feet, six inches.

IN LOW PLACE

This young tree stands in a low place, in a thicket of creek dogwood, with good water and drainage conditions and is in excellent loamy soil, rich in humus. It seems very typical in vigor as compared with other trees of its kind in similar locations. It is common observation that the trees have their slowest growth in the years of infant struggle before they have overtopped the nearby brush, or other

small trees, and after they have reached their full height at maturity at from 900 to 1000 years.

Now, that we have the present check upon this tree's rate of growth, it should be interesting to measure it at intervals during its life time until it reaches that slowing down of maturity. These future measurements will be left to later generations of Park Service engineers. Just as Galen Clark, the first guardian of the grove, and Henry Skelton, the first ranger in the park, have passed their observations on to us, we leave our records of 1932 for those who follow

BRIEF NOTES

By C. C. PRESNALL

Junior Park Naturalist

Accidental visits paid to Yosemite valley by birds not usually expected here are a matter of frequent occurrence and much interest. On June 4, an immature gull was seen on a large river pool near Camp 16 by Ranger Billy Nelson. Campers reported that the gull had been there for a week previous. Several persons studied it through glasses during the remaining two days that it stayed on the pool, but no one was able to determine whether it was a California gull or a ring-billed gull, since the juvenile plumage of the two species is very confusing.

The first fawns of the season were, as usual, reported by Ranger Bill Reymann, who is stationed at Chinquapin, where deer are numerous. He saw a pair of fawns on June 25, which is considerably later than last year.

Freshly fallen snow in mid-July was one of the thrills enjoyed by Yosemite visitors on the night of July 12. Early risers at Camp Curry exclaimed at the white covering seen on the higher rims of the valley, and campers in Tuolumne Meadows reported two and one-half inches of snowfall during the night.

A bobcat was seen near Camp Curry one night in early July by Mr. Sonn, the birdman. The cat came prowling close to Mr. Sonn's camp, apparently attracted by suet put out for the birds.

this spring and reached a length of one and one-half inches. Most of the grayling, of which 45,000 were planted immediately after hatching on June 19, 1930, seem to have moved down into the stream below the lake. Both the lake and stream, located at about 9000 feet elevation, contain abundant food, which will, in Mr. Topp's opinion, assure rapid natural reproduction in all the adjacent waters. In order to give the fish every opportunity to succeed, Chief Ranger Townsley has agreed to keep the area closed to fishing for several years.

The native haunts of the Montana grayling are limited to the tributaries of the Missouri river above Great Falls, where it is famous as a game fish of fine appearance and delicate flavor, some times attaining a weight of over two pounds. There are but two other species of graylings in North America—the Arctic grayling, the Michigan grayling. The family to which they belong, Thymallidae, is closely related to the Salmonidae (trout and salmon), and the grayling in habits and external characteristics closely resembles a trout. The chief marks of distinction are the iridescent silvery gray color and the extremely long and high dorsal fin.

MONTANA GRAYLING PROVE SUCCESSFUL IN YOSEMITE

By C. C. Presnall,

Junior Park Naturalist

Disciples of Izaak Walton will rejoice that a successful planting of Montana grayling has at last been made in California waters. Repeated attempts to introduce this desirable fish have failed until this year, when the Yosemite Fish Hatchery reported unusual success in planting the grayling in one of the high lakes of Yosemite National Park. A recent examination of this lake showed that the fish planted there two years ago were not only growing at an amazing rate but were already reproducing successfully.

As reported by Peter Topp, foreman of the Yosemite Fish Hatchery, who visited the lake in company with Ranger Sam King on August 11, the fish had attained a length of 13½ inches and weight of ¾ of a pound. He also saw many young grayling that had hatched

This first successful planting of Montana grayling in California will be watched with great interest by sportsmen throughout the State, and doubtless other high lakes and streams may be stocked successfully by following closely the procedure developed in Yosemite by Mr. Topp.

* * *
* * *

Largest Trout Caught in Yosemite

By C. C. JENSEN,

Ranger-Naturalist

When a fisherman trying his luck in that portion of the Merced river that flows through the Yosemite valley is approached with the greeting, "How many?" the answer is often a smile or the raising of a number of fingers on one hand. Such response is especially true when the water in the river is high, for enough natural food is being carried to keep the fish plentifully fed. Then, too, hundreds of fishermen gamble their skill along the easily accessible portions of the river and gradually take the gluttonous fish who are not content with their natural food supply. However, away from the beaten trail, the streams and lakes of the "back country" afford ample sport for both the skilled and novice fisherman at all times during the season.

In some of the larger holes in the Yosemite valley region are one or more large fish that "look like submarines" as they swim up to the fisherman's hook and then nonchalantly swim away. Many have tried in vain to take these monstrous, well-educated trout, and each year supposedly the same fish are seen in the same locality.

A TWELVE-POUNDER

Regardless of the general rule the tables are occasionally turned. On Sunday, July 17, at 4:30 p. m., F. Hatch of Paso Robles, Calif. entered the Yosemite Museum with the largest trout ever recorded in Yosemite. With the modesty and unboastfulness of a good sportsman Mr. Hatch presented his catch to the museum as a specimen with the comment, "Here's a big fish if you want it—I like the small ones better for eating."

Guesses of from eight to 10 pounds went awry as the trout, a Loch Leven, tipped the scales to 12 pounds and 9 ounces. The total length was 27½ inches. The writer opened the fish with the idea of examining the stomach contents in order to learn what types of food a trout of this size was taking. It was entirely devoid of food, but had evidently been in the habit of digesting angler's bait as evidenced by the presence of a No. 8 long-shank hook which was deeply hooked through the central part of the stomach. The trout was a female laden with five ounces of roe, the largest egg of which measured 2 mm. in diameter.

This specimen was taken below the Giant Yellow Pine with light tackle, a single gut leader, and a No. 6 hook baited with angleworms. Mr. Hatch had previously taken four 12-inch trout from the same locality.

BIG ONES SEEN

Several large fish have been caught in Yosemite waters, but the last one exceeds the others in weight. At the present time the following specimens are on display at the museum.

European, weighing 9 pounds 3 ounces, length 29¼ inches, taken by Albert Skelton, June 5, 1924.

European, 9 pounds 15 ounces, length 28¾ inches, bait No. 4 (salmon eggs), taken by U. N. Gilbo, June 5, 1924.

Loch Leven, 5 pounds 14 ounces, length 24 inches, bait No. 6 (angleworms), taken by Dick Noall, June, 1932.

Loch Leven, 12 pounds 9 ounces, 27½ inches, bait No. 6 (angleworms), taken by F. Hatch, July 2, 1932.



YOSEMITE ANIMALS

A Cony on Half Dome

By LARRY F. HOSBROOK,

Field School, 1931

Late in the evening of July 15, 1932, when the writer and a friend climbed Half Dome to enjoy an unobscured and unusual view of the firefall, both were quite surprised to find a Yosemite cony in the slight depression on top of that isolated and seemingly barren mass of granite. The animal's presence was first denoted by the characteristic "check-ik" alarm note which a person seldom, if ever, confuses with that of any other living animal once

stalk after stalk of grass and rapidly dispatched them in true rabbit fashion.

The hour was 7:45 p. m., dusk was rapidly falling and the cony was evidently hungry, checking his meal only long enough to hop from one small clump of grass to another. The writer was now alone with the cony. By direct approach the distance was reduced to 18 inches and still the little "haymaker" held his ground, keeping his compact little body taut and ready for instant escape should a quick, unguarded motion be made by his observer. For 15 minutes the cony stayed within a five-foot radius, darting under his rock protection only once during that time. Not until 8 p. m., when darkness had fallen, did the animal dash under his rock shelf to return no more from the scant protection which it afforded.



the call is heard distinctly and identified.

The two observers approached to a distance of 15 feet and watched the little animal as it nipped off

Several days later Ranger-Naturalist Adrey Borell reported having seen one cony on top of Half Dome and one in the saddle at the base of the cable. Although the loose rocks which conies frequent are scarce on Half Dome's sheer walls, there are weathered crevices up its sides which could afford pro-

tection for the hurried movement of a small cony, the rat-brown color of which blends in so evenly with the gray-brown granite.

Why conies should be seen and reported from Half Dome this year for the first time is only a matter of speculation. No cony haystacks have been reported there yet, and it is doubtful that the sparse growth of plant life will be sufficient to maintain one cony throughout the fall and winter. Should a whole family seek existence on that windswept granite dome it is more than likely that they will fail. Subsequent years, however, will determine whether Half Dome is to be inhabited by the cony or not.

SIX-DAY HIKERS SEE MOUNTAIN LION

By B. A. Thaxter,
Ranger Naturalist

How many people have ever really seen a mountain lion in his native wilds? Reports frequently come to us here in the Yosemite that hikers on some of our most traveled trails have seen one of these big cats. As a matter of fact, however, these reports can almost never be substantiated. A deer may jump in the brush by the trail-side—a flash of reddish brown may be seen—and someone comes in and reports having seen a mountain lion without having seen anything more than this flash of color. But we do know that there are a few of these beasts in Yosemite. We estimate there are about 15 in our 1169 square miles of park. They are on very infrequent occasions seen by some fortunate hiker. Such an

experience was recently the writer's.

On August 19, 1932, I was leading one of our regular parties of six-day hikers on the trail across from Glen Aulin High Sierra Camp to Tenaya Lake. We left camp at 1 o'clock and at 3 o'clock had reached the highest point on the divide between the Tuolumne and Tenaya Lake. We had noticed at this point a number of large, cat-like tracks in the dust and had commented on their apparent freshness. A few hundred yards farther on as we swung around a bend in the trail we came upon a mountain lion sitting on a large boulder per-



haps 50 or 60 yards away. One glance at us and he was off, and two or three bounds took him out of sight.

GRINNELL'S DESCRIPTION

"In general appearance," says Grinnell, "the mountain lion, save for its far larger size, is much like

a domestic cat. The head is short and massive, the forelegs are of heavy build, the body rather slender, and the tail long and cylindrical with an even covering of hair clear to the end, but with no 'tassel.' The mountain lion is several times the size of a large mountain coyote or a Sierra Nevada wolverine."

Ours was a large cat that looked six or seven feet long and weighed possibly from 125 to 150 pounds. Its color was a rich reddish brown and we particularly noticed how blunt and square cut the end of its tail seemed to be.

Grinnell and Storer, in their "Animal Life in Yosemite," say "The northwestern mountain lion, which is also known as cougar, panther and puma, is the second largest carnivorous mammal in the Yosemite region, being exceeded in size only by the bears. The mountain lion is large and strong enough, no doubt, to prey upon human beings if it so chose; but instead of being the terror of the country, as are lions and big cats in other parts of the world, our lion has practically never been known to attack a person and, indeed, very seldom does it come to notice at all. Many persons, even woodsmen and hunters, long resident in regions where mountain lions occur, have never so much as caught sight of one. And in spite of the hundreds and even thousands of persons who camp each summer in the moun-

tains, no one has been reported to have been molested by lions."

TO A SQUIRREL

By Beth Allen

(During the summer of 1932 the author of the poem below went on several of our guided nature walks, special bird trips and hikes in Yosemite and learned to understand and sympathize with nature. One day, when some friends found a squirrel lying dead on the highway near Camp 16, Yosemite Valley, they gave it a fitting burial. This ode was written for the little creature. Miss Allen is a junior in a San Francisco high school, yet the poem is far more remarkable than the work of most adults.—Ranger-Naturalist Walter W. Bennett.)

Life has sweet joys for lesser things
In sun and shade and placid days;
The heavens smile on tiny wings,
And fill the heart that soaring
sings,

And guard the busy ways.

A blessing lies on small bright eyes,
And workers small that toil;
With beak and jaw and furry paw
Obedience is taught to Law
In His own mountain soil.

So, fittingly, unto that earth
Has come a creature small
To pause for rest—and then new
play

In mountains of Eternal day
Where Love is Law for all.





Digitized by
Yosemite Online Library

<http://www.yosemite.ca.us/library>

Dan Anderson