

# YOSEMITE NATURE NOTES



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# Yosemite Nature Notes

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## Naming an Indian Child

By RANGER NATURALIST B. A. THAXTER

On Sunday afternoon, July 16, the visitors to the Indians at the rear of the museum nature garden were greatly interested in observing an Indian naming. A little 18-month-old Indian boy from Santa Barbara, whose parents have relatives here among the Yosemite Indians, was brought to Le-mee, the recognized leader or chief of the remnants of the Yosemite. After a few introductory remarks in English, Le-mee called for the infant, who was brought by his grandfather to the foot drum on which the Indians dance.

At once Le-mee, in full regalia and paint, began a weird song accompanied by the shaking of the split-stick or clapper rattle. Then the cocoon rattle was used and occasionally a whistle or flute decorated with feathers was blown. A part of the ceremony consisted of the rhythmic dance as the song continued. Feathers were shaken around the child's head and he was tickled on the neck and face. Near the end of the ceremony the head was rather roughly grasped and

kneaded for a number of seconds.

To the onlookers the most remarkable thing about the whole affair was the demeanor of the child. We all felt sure that the youngster would be frightened by the grim painted face of Le-mee and by the loud singing and stamping and shaking of musical instruments. But not so. The little fellow stood straight as an arrow, apparently fascinated by the whole performance. Never once during those eight or 10 minutes did he take his eyes from Le-mee. We could see him blink when the feathers struck him in the face, but that was all. He seemed to exhibit much of the stoicism we have been accustomed to attribute to the Indians of earlier days. Perhaps it was a racial inheritance. At any rate he acquiesced himself through the entire ceremony which would certainly have been a most trying ordeal to the ordinary white child, that at its conclusion Le-mee simply said, "His name is Che-ne Me-che La-ma-Little Straight Tree."



## Black Bears as Mothers

By RANGER NATURALIST B. A. THAXTER

Euractos was a little bear who  
 would not mind his ma;  
 She'd cuff him and she'd spank him,  
 and she'd slap him with her  
 paw.  
 He'd go out nights and prowl the  
 camps and steal all that he  
 could,  
 Till some rangers caught him in a  
 trap and taught him to be good.

Most mother bears take very seriously the business of raising their young offspring to bruinhood. The cubs are born when mother is hibernating, and for about 10 weeks they know of nothing but their den, mother and dinner. Weighing scarcely a pound at birth, blind and almost hairless, they grow rapidly and on first setting out to see the world weigh perhaps five or six pounds apiece.

After the mother brings them out of the den she seems to spend much of her time suckling them and looking after their wellbeing. She licks them, fondles them with her paws, plays with them, and is very solicitous for their comfort. The mother easily impresses upon her youngsters the necessity of obeying parental authority. We have seen a

mother spank and soundly cuff her cubs because they did not go up a tree quickly enough after she had ordered them to do so.

Seton, writing about the black bear in his "Game Animals and the Lives They Live," says "The determination to bring the young up right, no matter how much spanking is needed is common to most mother bears, but is very variable individually. I have known an old bear to punish her young ones severely merely because she, herself, had at that time lost her head in a sudden alarm and behaved foolishly. We look not in vain among our own kind for parallel cases."

When the young have once left the den they probably seldom ever return to it. The old bear sets off on her summer travels and after this sleeps whenever and wherever her fancy dictates with her little ones cuddled in her arms or lying snuggled close up against her body. In spite of her care, however, as the cubs grow in size they usually dwindle in number. As Seton writes, "Accidents will happen, and little bears get coughs and colds, or disobey their mothers and come to grief. Consequently, while three little bears are often found in

the mother's den, rarely more than two are seen roaming by her side in summer; and autumn, in many cases, sees the number reduced to one."

When one watches the little fellows here in Yosemite crossing the much-traveled roads in front of rapidly moving automobiles, and stuffing themselves with all kinds of sweets which thoughtless tourists give them, the wonder is that the mortality among them is not greater. In this park as in other parks nothing gives the tourist apparently more pleasure than to watch a mother bear fondle her cubs and to see them play with each other. On July 4, while on duty near the bear-feeding pits, it was the pleasure of the writer to observe intimately two mothers with their families. One was a large brown bear with two black cubs. She would sit down with her back against a tree and play with the youngsters for minutes at a time. Occasionally she would suckle them, and then the little ones would romp and play together. Once they both climbed up to the top of a small incense cedar, too small for mother to climb, and disported themselves among the topmost branches that seemed altogether too weak to hold even their light weight. The mother watched them for some time and then apparently getting anxious about their safety, ordered them down. She walked around and around the tree for some time looking up at them, but they paid no attention to her at all. Finally she stood up on her hind legs, reached up as high as she could, and grasping the trunk with both front paws, slowly bent the tree down. When the top was about four feet from the ground she shook them both off and then wandered away, with them

gamboling by her side.

The other mother, too, was brown, and she had three brown cubs—one of them, through some accident or other, was lame. A great many sightseers were following her around, taking pictures of her babies and probably annoying her a great deal. The cubs were very friendly and would come up to the ranger and chew the buttons on his coat and the straps on his puttees and beg him for something to eat. The old bear did not seem to mind this at all, but when people flocked around too close in order to get pictures, she showed her disapproval by growling and smacking her chops, and would threaten to charge at times, though she never actually carried out her threat. Finally she got them away from the crowd, waded out into the Merced river and sat down with the water up to her neck, and then one by one proceeded to give the cubs a bath.



When this was over (and the young really seemed to enjoy it) they returned to the bank to be further annoyed by the interested spectators. At last, in disgust, and giving us a "dirty look" over her shoulder, she went down to the river again and swam to the other side. The little lame one she carried on her back. It looked to us who watched from the bank as she swam away from us that he was hanging on the hair at the back of her neck. The other two cubs swam without difficulty, one on each side of the mother, keeping close to her till the far bank was reached. The current carried them all down

stream perhaps 25 yards from where they went in, but the little one on the down-river side was never more than a foot or two below mother. When they landed they all shook themselves like dogs and then shuffled up the steep bank.

Whether or not cubs swim instinctively or have to be taught to swim, the writer does not know; but he does know that these little four or five-month-old cubs had no difficulty at all in swimming the Merced just below the bear pits on this particular July day.

### WILD LIFE AT CHINQUAPIN

By Ranger Sam King

To the casual observer, Chinquapin is probably the least interesting place on the Wawona road. This is because of the road construction which has been going on for the last two seasons, making it necessary to erect a group of temporary buildings which, of course, are not pleasing to the eye. However, Chinquapin is teeming with wild life comparable to any other area in the Yosemite National Park. Those of us who come to Chinquapin each season look forward to seeing our pet doe Minnie, her sister Lily, and Bucky, a splendid specimen of a buck, come to the camp in search of hand-outs and salt. Then, too, we watch for last year's bears, especially the cubs, to make their appearance, to see whether or not Mother Nature dealt kindly with them during the winter months.

This year, like the previous season, our animal friends all made their appearance, and old acquaintances were re-established. Every evening the boys gather sweetmeats from the commissary for their particular pet. For this they

deserve a palm because, for the most part, they are men who have seen the rougher side of life; nevertheless, they all share one thing in common, a genuine fondness for the wild animals which inhabit the park.

### ENTER TRAGEDY

So everything was serene, until the night of July 5, when a tragic drama was enacted. I was sitting at my table about 8 o'clock in the evening reading the rangers' Bible (Montgomery Ward's catalogue), when I heard a fawn, blatting in a most peculiar way. There was a plaintive note in its call, as if to say, "Come quickly or you will be too late." Grabbing my flashlight, I started in the direction from which the call was coming. As I passed Al Meaglias' cabin, he joined me, saying: "Gee, something is killing a fawn. Let's go!"

As we approached the scene of disturbance, we saw Minnie running up and down the road in a terrible state of agitation. About this time we again heard the blat of the fawn, not more than 15 feet above the road. At this juncture Al jumped up the bank and I followed in turn. Again we heard the fawn, this time farther away and much fainter. This was the incentive for us to renew our pursuit in earnest. Words fail to describe the veritable jungle of manzanita and chinquapin brush through which we had to pass, on what we still hoped was an errand of rescue. "It's a bear," cried Al, and sure enough, Mr. Bruin had the fawn in his jaws. Dropping it, he emitted the characteristic chomp, chomp of a bear. Now we were so close that Mr. Bruin decided to leave his kill and scamper off through the brush. With the aid of our flashlights we found the fawn quite lifeless, death

being due to a broken back.

The little fellow was not more than a week old and no larger than an ordinary jackrabbit. Even though Mother Nature had provided him with a protective color scheme and a lack of odor, it proved inadequate. As we made our way out of the brush, Minnie would stop her endless running long

enough to cast a wistful look in our direction, wondering, no doubt, whether or not we had rescued her offspring alive. She continued her endless search during the night and the following day. Even now (two days later) when she comes to lick salt, she will stop, prick her ears forward, and look in the direction where her fawn was last seen alive.

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## Befriending the Grouse

By Ranger-Naturalist H. A. Anderson

L. J. Holland, stationed at Mari-  
posa Grove Lookout, north of the  
Yosemite Valley rim, recounts an  
interesting story of the taming of  
a mother Sierra grouse and her  
chick in the summer of 1931.

"Late in July while scanning the  
horizon at 5:30 one morning I ob-  
served a mother grouse with one  
chick. Undoubtedly the remainder  
of her brood had been caught by  
some natural enemy. Had the eggs  
been destroyed there probably  
would have been a 100 per cent  
clean-up. The wildness of these  
two grouse also indicated encoun-  
ters with predaceous hawks or  
mammals.

"At sight of me the two birds  
took wing. I left some barley for  
them on the ground, which they  
returned for. The next morning I  
fed them again, but they were very  
easily frightened. On the seventh  
morning I had both feeding suspi-  
ciously from my hand.

"Later I discovered their great  
fondness for grapes and had no  
trouble getting them to fly to my  
shoulder for the fruit. Upon hear-  
ing my call she often would fly at  
least a hundred feet to my shoulder  
while the chick would walk up  
within a few feet of me and fly  
to the perch beside the parent.

"One morning while doing my  
'daily dozen' by the radio I induced  
the mother to sit on my closed fist  
and be lifted according to the  
count. This became a regular  
thing and the birds gathered each  
morning for the exercises which  
came before they were given their  
breakfast.

"The mother would often sit on  
the stove pipe with one eye cocked  
skyward, watching for hawks while  
her offspring was feeding from the  
ground.

"About October 1 the two birds  
left together and I saw no more  
of them until June 2, 1932, when  
the mother returned alone. She re-  
cognized my call and immediately  
flew to my hand and resumed her  
exercises, or perhaps it was mine.

"Six days later she returned with  
two other adult grouse which  
seemed to be mated. They became  
quite friendly before I was trans-  
ferred to another station on  
June 11."

The confidence shown in man by  
wild life is seldom realized by those  
who have not advanced with friend-  
ship toward the birds or mammals  
in the wild state. Visitors are con-  
stantly marveling at the tameness  
of animals within the park. The  
same may be found wherever  
similar confidence may be justifi-



## How Fast Do 'Big Trees' Get Big

By H. A. ANDERSON, Ranger-Naturalist

The annual top growth of young Sequoias varies more than the casual observer would notice. A small tree a little over three feet high in front of the Mariposa Grove Museum is known to be at least 22 years old. Another, within 150 yards, has grown at an average of 18 inches in height per year for the last 75 years. The difference in growth rate can be accounted for by the more favorable moisture supply and the better physical condition of the soil where the faster growing tree stands.

The absence or scarcity of young trees in the old established groves of Giant Sequoia is accounted for by the difficulty a new seedling has in becoming established. The stored food within a seed of *Sequoia gigantea* is less than a quarter inch long and the diameter is less than that of a common pin. To live, the seedling must both establish its tiny root in favorable soil and its tiny needle leaves in light before the stored food is exhausted.

### IN FIGHT WITH RIVALS

During the past six years I have had an opportunity to wander over

much of the Redwood Mountain Grove in Tulare county. Under the thousands of giant trees I have found only one little Sequoia less than a foot in height. It was growing in a rotted fir log. In one portion of the grove, Whitaker's Forest, where sugar pine was cut in the late seventies we find a fine growth of young Sequoias between 40 and 100 feet high, competing with incense cedars yellow and sugar pines and white firs of similar age, all reaching for their places in the sun. The beautiful spired tops of the young Sequoias show them to be more than holding their own in the struggle toward dominance in the grove.

### FAVORED BY BURNED AREAS

In the Fresno or Nelder Grove in Madera county the California Milling Company cut big trees for lumber in 1888. The exposure of new ground surface by logging operations and later by fire has resulted in a fine new stand similar to that in Whitaker's Forest. One tree on a dry hill in one of the abandoned roadways stands 56 feet high and is 17 inches in diameter.

at four feet above the ground, which is just above the butt swell. This tree cannot be more than 44 years old. One tree, damaged by a falling giant in the winter of 1931-32, shows 28 inches of diameter and a ring count of 32 years, at several feet above the ground. This tree was located favorably for water supply. A steady diameter increase of almost an inch per year is recorded for the last 24 years. No growth difference is shown for years of light and heavy precipitation. This growth is more rapid than any I have seen in the heartwood cross sections of older Giant Sequoias.

In the broken ground along the roadside in Mariposa Grove hundreds of young trees have started since the logging operations ceased since 1925. Some of these scarcely increase their height an inch a year, while one more favorably situated made an increase of

22 inches in its most favorable year, 1931. One tree in seven seasons from seed stands six feet seven inches high on the grade between the four Sentinel Trees at the entrance of the Lower Mariposa Grove.

In conclusion, we may safely say that the Giant Sequoia, under favorable conditions for reproduction, in its native habitat, will grow as fast or a little faster than other competing species where they are starting from seed together. As mentioned above the small size of the seed makes reproduction difficult excepting where the thick mantle of forest duff has in some way been removed enough to allow the seedlings to establish. This may be done by logging, road work, etc., by fire and by deposits of silt along small streamlets. In the various groves all of these causes have operated in the establishing of new stands of young trees.

## Last Indian Cremation in Yosemite

By ASSISTANT PARK NATURALIST M. E. BEATTY

The Yosemite Indians, in common with some of the Miwoks, most always cremated their dead instead of burying them. This custom is not practiced by the present Indian generation, the last cremation ceremony in Yosemite having been around 1873.

Charles Leidig, the first white boy born in Yosemite Valley, on a recent visit to the valley related to the writer an interesting description of this last cremation. The cremating grounds were directly across the road from the old Leidig Hotel, located near the base of Sentinel Rock, and so the Leidig family were compulsory witnesses to the ceremony.

The occasion was the death of a nephew of Chief One-Eye Dick, accidentally killed while hunting. The funeral pyre was constructed about four or five feet high from various small trees and limbs. The body of the deceased was placed naked on the framework with only the feet bound together with willows. The chin was held in position with a short stick braced against the framework. The only ornamentation were beads and ferns placed on top of the corpse. Oak and pitchy yellow pine were placed underneath for fuel and at a given signal the funeral pyre was ignited, more fuel being constantly added until the



flames leaped 15 or 20 feet in the air.

This ceremony continued for four days and nights, accompanied by a continual chorus of crying and wailing. Also two circles of dancers, women joining hands and forming the inner circle and the men forming the outer circle. As soon as one dancer fell exhausted, another would be ready to step in and take his or her place.

Another feature of the cremation was the burning of nearly all the deceased personal property clothing, baskets, bows, trinkets and pelts. In case of a dog or horse, they might possibly kill and burn them separately at a different location. After the ceremony, the close women relatives covered their faces, hands and bosoms with pitch mixed with ashes from the bones as a symbol of mourning. They kept this period of mourning for a year,

at which time another fire was built and the last remaining personal property of the deceased burned. The mourners were then bathed and purified although in many cases the pitchy substance remained in evidence for several years. This marked the completion of the funeral ceremony.

Another curious custom that varied greatly among the different tribes was the assignment of the widow to the deceased's brother. This is supposedly true with the Piutes. The Yosemite Indians are supposed to have kept the widow in seclusion for a year, not allowing her to come out of her dwelling except at night, then with a cover over her face.

Since this last cremation, the old Yosemite Indians have been buried in the cemetery across the road from the museum and the custom of cremation has become a thing of the past.





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Dan Anderson