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Autumn Days in Yosemite

(By Charles W. Michael)

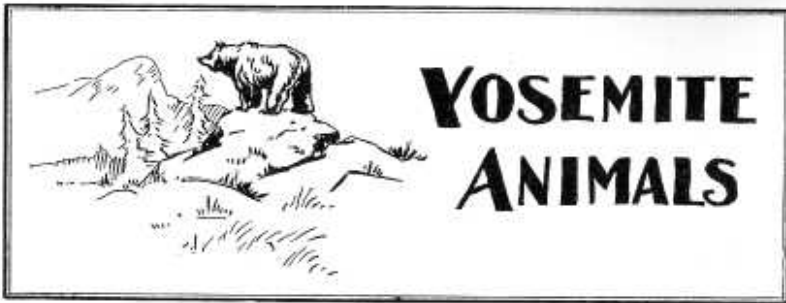
September days are lovely in Yosemite Valley. Silent reflective pools mirror the majestic cliffs. Ouzels feed along the riffles that link the placid pools. Dragon-flies hawk over the brown meadows and a lazy breeze brings to life the Pussy willow clumps and change them from green to silvery gray. Swaying cottonwoods sparkle their leaves in the sunshine. The Maples on the far talus slope are changing from green to gold. Except for the breeze song in the tree-tops the valley is silent. Birds no longer sing. The winds wander aimlessly about the valley, stirring first one wood into song and then another. A Kingfisher rides the river lane, but even he is silent. He flies low over the

water and as he passes me he dodges and I see his reflection take a great leap. The Great Blue Heron comes into view, slowly winging up the river. His wingbeat is slow and heavy and his broad wings appear to bend to the task. He is probably on his way to Mirror Lake where in the shallow waters of the fast receding pools he can spear a fish at will. A doe and her twin fawns browse along the river margin.

Now the wandering wind sparkles its dancing way across the pool the reflected pictures are lost in a wrinkled mirror. And too, the silence is broken by the plaintive call-notes of a Black Phoebe.

The Valley as a whole is taking on the supreme peace that comes with October days.





A Fawn's Hiding Place

(Ranger-Naturalist D. C. Smiley)

It is common knowledge that a doe, deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*) hides her fawns in secluded places while she is off in a neighboring locality feeding. In Yosemite Valley the fawns are most frequently found in the high grass and brake ferns of the meadows. A variation from the usual hiding place is a matter of interest.

The writer was exploring along the talus slope south of Mirror Lake at 7:00 p. m. on July 15. A fawn bounded from its hiding place where it was curled up at the base of three talus boulders. The question arose as to why the fawn or the mother had selected this spot instead of other seemingly desirable places in the vicinity. A close examination showed the spot to be well adapted for hiding purposes, since it combined an unusual number of desirable features.

First of all, the place was physically well constructed for hiding. An area one and one-half feet square and on a horizontal plane was sur-

rounded by talus boulders on three sides leaving the top and downhill sides exposed. A predator, approaching from the uphill side would have difficulty in jumping down on the fawn due to the close proximity of the rocks. The fawn could command a view for one hundred feet down the slope and would see an enemy approaching in time to make his escape. Due to the steepness of the slope and the horizontal position of the hiding place, a predator could see only a small upper portion of the fawn, including the head. The place, then, was advantageously constructed and strategically located.

A second factor of importance was the ruptive, camouflaged coloration of the locality. An analysis of the slope showed the place to be the focal point of contrasting colors in rocks and vegetation. There were black mosses (*Grimmia*), colors from dark green to light green and tan in the one moss genus *Campothecium* whose curly surface

blanketed large areas on the granite blocks. Also on the rock surfaces were crustose and foliose lichens varying from light green to gray. Littering the ground were many tan effects such as slender grass stems (not abundantly, needles, of the Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga taxifolia*), the tiny globular staminate flowers of the same, and several dry leaves of the broad-leaf maple (*Acer macrophyllum*). The light brown fawn with its ruptive white spots found in this environment a background which resembled its own.

One additional structure added to the nesting spot as a desirable hiding place. Stretched above the small platform of soil and debris upon which the fawn had been lying, there was a gauze-like canopy of spider web. Twenty-one Douglas fir needles were scattered over the canopy. When the breeze came up, a possible significance of the needles became apparent. Their movement would stimulate the eye of the predator to focus on the plane of the canopy and the fawn below would go unnoticed. A strange thing about the canopy was the fact that the fawn seemed to take pains to preserve it. Had he stood bolt upright on the platform the web would have been destroyed. Instead he took a sliding jump as he came from the place of concealment and thereby left the canopy intact.

A further use of the spider-web canopy to the fawn may have been to keep out the mosquitoes which

were abundant.

A combination of the three factors: of the hiding place, its coloration, and its spider web canopy would seem to make the ideal hiding place for the fawn.



WILD LIFE OBSERVATIONS

RATTLESNAKE EATS CHIPMUNK

On July 7th a rather large Pacific Rattlesnake was killed on the El Capitan Trail some two miles above Gentry. The snake showed a large bulge indicating a recent meal so we opened the stomach to determine what his kill had been. Within the snake was found a good sized chipmunk that had been swallowed head first. This observation merely confirms again the knowledge that the chipmunk probably provides the chief item of food for the rattlesnakes found in the higher elevations.



Bird Notes

September Bird Report

Seventy-eight species of birds were observed in Yosemite Valley by Charles W. Michael, ornithologist, during the month of September. This number is eleven above the September average based on the thirteen years Mr. and Mrs. Michael have been keeping records.

Acorn Shortage Affects Birds

It looks as though many of the Blue-fronted Jays and the California Woodpeckers would have to leave the Valley this winter. Most of the Band-tailed Pigeons have already gone. The acorn crops on both the Kellogg oaks have a slim crop, but certain trees that seldom fail have no acorns at all this year. Chrysolepis oaks that bear any fruit at all are few and far between, although I did find one fine old tree with bumper crop. Also the yellow pines are mostly without fruit, only scattered individuals are bearing cones. The crop of coffee

berries is long since gone. On the other hand, cedars, white firs, and the dogwoods are bearing exceptionally heavy crops of fruit. Never have I seen any of these trees so fruitful as they are this year.

—Charles W. Michael

A Rare Valley Visitor

In the early morning of October 17 after the heavy rain in the Valley and snow fall around the rim the day before I saw a fairly large hawk beating back and forth low over the old Elk Paddock. By its mannerisms I felt certain that it was a Marsh Hawk, *Circus hudsonius*, but I couldn't be sure until it wheeled and its white rump patch was exposed to view. Perhaps the storm in the high country and driven it to lower altitudes by blanketing the meadows with snow. This is only the third time that the Marsh Hawk has been reported in the Valley; the other two records being May 16, 1919 and Sept. 26, 1917.

—Claude A. Wagner, Jr.

Flower Seeds For Sparrows

The Evening Primrose and sunflower areas of the Ahwahnee and Museum gardens are furnished food for the sparrow tribe. Through the month of September Green-backed Goldfinches were present in large flocks in both of these gardens and during the last week of the month of September, White-crowned Sparrows were present in numbers in the Museum garden. Never have I seen so many White-crowned in the Valley before. On the morning of September 24 when the pack train passed along the back road I counted 58 White-crowned Sparrows leaving the sunflower hedge.

—Charles W. Michael

New Birds For Yosemite

On July 23, Joe Dixon, Field Naturalist for the N. P. S., reported seeing several young Red-eyed Ducks on Table Lake in Pleasant Valley. The presence of young at this season is fair indication of a breeding record.

On Sept. 30, Mr. Dixon also observed a Virginia Rail on the river bank at Rocky Point in Yosemite Valley. This is a new record for this species in Yosemite National Park.

Western Goshawk Observed

The Western Goshawk is one of the seldom seen birds of the Yosemite region. We, therefore, considered ourselves fortunate on July

7th to observe a young Goshawk at very close range. Traveling with a rather large party along the El Capitan Trail in the basin of Ribbon Falls, we were attracted by a complaining cry issuing from the thick branches of a young Red Fir. We approached the tree and found the young Goshawk perched on a small limb some twenty feet from the ground. The white fluffy feathers on either side of the rump and the broadly streaked breast identified it as a young Goshawk. We observed the bird at close range for some time. The young bird keeping up a continual complaining. Finally the young hawk took flight although it could be seen that he was not as certain in flight as an older bird might be.

Ranger Naturalist, Reynold Carlson

Swan In Yosemite

On Sept. 7, 1934 Mr. William Kat in company with Dr. James Asa White reported seeing a swan on a lake near Seavey Pass.

Before they could get close enough for identification of species, the bird flew away with the typical swan flight characteristics.

NEW BOOKS

The Yosemite Museum now offers for sale two additional books:-

CALIFORNIA INDIAN NIGHTS ENTERTAINMENTS by Gifford & Block. Price \$6.00

OH RANGER! - by Albright and Taylor. Revised edition price \$2.00

DISTINCTIVE BEHAVIOR OF COMMON YOSEMITE BIRDS

- HAWKS** and **EAGLES** with long strong wings are most often seen in air circling and soaring.
- GROUSE** and **QUAIL**, brownish birds of good size, feed and nest on the ground.
- PIGEONS** of size of domestic varieties fly above trees in rapid direct flight. Large flocks in fall of year.
- OWLS** more often heard than seen as most of them forage at night. Have large eyes, brownish coloration, flight noiseless.
- POOR-WILLS** fly up from roadside at dusk, catching insects on wing and back to ground.
- SWIFTS** are swiftest fliers which dart high in air about cliff walls capturing insects on wing.
- HUMMINGBIRDS** are the smallest of birds with iridescent plumage which buzz about flowers extracting nectar and tiny insects with their long needle-shaped bills.
- KINGFISHERS** fly or perch above water to plunge beneath surface to capture small fish in their long bills.
- WOODPECKERS** with long, strong bills, climb up and down the trunks of trees bracing with their tails and tapping the bark vigorously.
- FLYCATCHERS** sit erect with drooping, teetering tails, watching alertly for insect prey upon which they pounce in mid-air, afterwards returning to their perch.
- SWALLOWS** with long pointed wings, skim through the air in graceful and long sustained flights.
- JAYS** are good-sized blue birds, with raucous call and bold behavior, inhabiting open fields and wooded areas. Very common about camps.
- CHICKADEES** and **TITMICE** are small, noisy, active, restless birds feeding largely in foliage or on inner limbs. They have fluffy, grayish plumage and short straight bills, with which they often hammer seeds with woodpecker-like blows while holding them with their feet.
- NUTHATCHES** are smaller than woodpeckers and have much the same habit of climbing up and down tree-trunks but with a freer wig-wagging motion, often descending head downward.
- CREEFERS** as the name implies, creep upward on the trunks of trees and the larger limbs, searching for insects in the crevices of the bark.
- DIPPERS**, (Water Ouzels), of dark slaty gray plumage are seen dipping into rushing streams for food or bobbing up and down on mid-stream rocks.
- WRENS** with tails erect, slip mouse-like about brush heaps,

crevices and bushes, though often perching in sight while singing; scolding notes distinctive.

THRUSHES, with the exception of the **ROBIN** and **BLUEBIRD**, are very plainly dressed and have spotted breasts. They run about on the ground stopping suddenly in listening attitudes.

KINGLETS, tiny, chubby birds with large eyes, move restlessly about in foliage, ever keeping on the move.

VIRECS are chubby, large-eyed birds, the color of foliage. They are at home in the boughs of trees and sing freely as they glide in and out among the leaves to feed.

WARBLERS are small, tireless, gaily-colored explorers of the twigs of trees and bushes. A few exhibit flycatcher-like habits.

BLACKBIRDS have bright plumage and usually inhabit open fields. The sexes differ in coloration. Winter flocking is the rule.

TANAGERS remarkable for the brilliant plumage of the males, are birds of the coniferous forests during the summer.

SPARROWS and **FINCHES** have stout seed-cracking bills, feed on or near the ground, seldom fly high or far at a time, and are for the most part fine songsters. Juncos and Grosbeaks belong in this group.

Claude A. Wagner
NEW JR. PARK NATURALIST

By **C. A. Harwell, Park Naturalist**

The Yosemite Naturalist department welcomes a new member to its ranks. Claude A. Wagner Jr. was appointed Junior Park Naturalist, Museum Preparator, September 15 as a result of competitive Civil Service examinations held last October. Mr. Wagner is a graduate of the University of California, class 1933, with major in Forestry and minors in Botany and Zoology. During the summer of 1932 he was a student in our Yosemite school of Field Natural History. He served the past two summers as Ranger at Muir Woods National Monument, so comes to us well equipped in the basic sciences and with good Park Service start.

His assignments here will include responsibility for the accessioning, classifying and care of all gifts and loans to our Museum, the preparation of exhibits; the care of our research collections, and participation in our naturalist program of lectures and guided field trips.

Adrey E. Borell who held this Junior Park Naturalist position since October 1933 was recently transferred to a technical Wildlife position in Zion, Bryce and Grand Canyon National Parks. He is stationed at Grand Canyon.



SNOW PLANTS IN SEPTEMBER

(By Ranger D. D. Jacobs)

Mariposa Grove

On September 3rd while going up the small creek which furnishes the water supply for the Ranger Station at the Mariposa Grove, I was astonished to find three small Snow Plants peeping timidly through the duff of the forest floor. Normally, these plants make their first appearance during April and are often found in shady, cool places as late as July 1st.

The Snow Plant (*Sarcodes sanguinea*) besides being one of the earliest of spring flowers is one of the most unusual. The plants are a brilliant red with thick asparagus like stalks that shoot up like magic through the carpet of needles of the yellow pine forest. Thickly clustered around the stalk are little bell-shaped flowers of the same fiery red. These flowers identify the plant with the Heaths having blossoms similar in shape to the heathers, and manzanitas. Especially noticeable is the absence of green leaves and stems.

The name snow plant reflects the popular belief that they spring up in the midst of snow banks but in reality they grow at the edges of these or in moist places left by the melted snow. Occasionally they do appear to be growing out of a snow bank when a late snow fall covers them after they have once started growing.

A possible explanation for the late season blooms in this particular spot may be the fact that the creek dried up early in the season due to the dry year and later water from another source was diverted into the dry creek bed. The resulting moistening of the soil together with warm sunshine thus starting the plants to grow.

Due to their great beauty and rarity the snow plant is protected both by State and Park regulations.

WILD LIFE NOTELETS**SIERRA FLYING SQUIRREL**

The Sierra Flying Squirrel, although fairly abundant in Yosemite, is seldom seen by visitors to the valley because of its nocturnal habits. Little is known of its nesting habits but it is believed that hollow trees and possibly abandoned woodpecker holes provide most of the nesting places. It was interesting then to find that a nest had been located in the witches broom of a Western Yellow Pine. This large witches broom hung down over the main highway being some eight or ten feet above the edge of the main road from the postoffice to the Ahwahnee Hotel. The animals had occupied this spot and constructed their nest in the center of this growth. It could not be ascertained whether or not a family had been raised there this season.



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Dan Anderson