

YOSEMITE NATURE NOTES



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Around the Year in Yosemite

By Harold E. Perry

Each of the four distinct seasons contributes generously toward making Yosemite Valley one of the outstanding spectacular areas of the world. It is becoming increasingly popular as an all-year playground and those who are familiar with its grandeur in only one or two of the seasons do not know Yosemite intimately. It is not enough to enlist in the army of tourists who, during the summer months particularly, make a frantic endeavor to see everything, yet have no time for the soul-developing experiences which come from communing with nature. It is difficult to ensnare the sublime in Yosemite while traveling on an over-crowded schedule. Better fortune attends the efforts of that person who quietly searches out the secluded haunts of beauty and returns again and again to witness her varying moods.

Yosemite is a busy and gracious hostess in summer. She is assisted on all sides by nature's most favored ambassadors, each of them seeming to be on dress parade. The mammals, the birds, the flowers, the trees are vibrant with messages that thrill the heart of every lover of the out-of-doors. Throughout

each day happiness is abroad. The cares of city life are far away for the early morning hiker whose shout of freedom echoes and re-echoes in its descent to the valley below. Likewise, weighty and depressing problems, whether personal or national, seem trivial as the camper's goodnight song fades into the realm of happy memories and pleasant dreams.

But to know Yosemite only in summer is hardly enough.

When the shadows lengthen towards autumn and the guests of the valley hasten back to duties of home, school and office, he who is fortunate enough to remain behind discovers a new tone in Yosemite. The bustling activity of summer gives way to silent trails, drowsy waters, flaming dogwood, frosty meadows, and general preparation for bleak days to come. A feeling of peace and harmony enters into his relationship with nature.

To keep company with Yosemite in winter is to experience the thrill of a new world. The majestic walls of the valley, robed in ermine, play hide-and-seek among the clouds and present ever changing scenes to the happy pilgrim who seeks

communion in that dazzling shrine—Sunshine, moonlight, twinkling stars, and blustering storms all vie with one another in presenting fantastical portrayals of winter's fairyland.

With the approach of spring, life begins to stir in every shrub and tree and flower. The whole valley becomes attuned to the rhythmic step and the spectacle of creation unfolds anew. The presence of spring in the Yosemite region is first noted in the Merced river canyon. As the motorist travels along the river after descending Briceburg Hill, he is greeted by flash after flash of rich orange coloring which fairly sweep up the mountain sides. The first view comes to him most unexpectedly and the succeeding displays around each turn in the highway add to his exultation. That California has done well in choosing the poppy (*Eschscholtzia californica*) for its State flower is the opinion of every tourist through the Merced canyon in spring.

However, the California poppy is not the only flower to be seen even though it is the most vivid. Whole banks of baby-blue-eyes (*Nemophila menziesii*) bring a restful glow to soften the ever changing landscape. As they lift their dainty faces out of the surrounding grass and catch a delicate reflection from the sky above, they herald the arrival of spring in a quiet but impressive manner. As one continues to drive along the river, his attention is drawn repeatedly to vast sheens of white extending up the hillsides. Closer inspection reveals the presence of myriads of tiny pop-corn flowers (*Plagiobothrys nothofulvus*) their white heads nodding roguishly at every passing breeze, for they too

are happy that spring has come their way. Brilliant beacons of red-bud (*Cercis occidentalis*) mark the course of the Merced river along the bottom of the canyon while a few of these colorful shrubs, more venturesome than the rest, wander a short distance up the southern slopes and do much to enliven the variegated greens about them. If one is blessed with time and the inclination to wander through these Upper Sonoran gardens, he can find many kinds of flowers equally attractive, though less abundant than the ones forming the magnificent carpets.

When spring approaches Yosemite, her course is plainly marked even to her resting places, for there she spreads her influence to the tops of the surrounding hills. During the time that she lazily winds her way up the canyon, she gathers strength for a strenuous climb through the last rocky gorge into the valley. Upon reaching it, she quietly unfurls banners of dogwood (*Cornus nuttallii*), azalea (*Rhododendron occidentale*) and countless other blooms. Her warlike breath disperses the last snows of winter and her magic touch awakens slumbering waterfalls. The winter birds take on new activity as the season for home making draws near and feathered adventurers from southern warmth begin to answer the call of the Sierra. Even the bears shake off the effects of their long winter sleep and prepare for a brisk season of companionship with summer visitors. An army of tourists again takes up the march to its favorite playground, but only those who have witnessed the pageantry of its changing seasons are truly intimate with Yosemite.

Annual Yosemite Bird Census

By M. E. BEATTY
Assistant Park Naturalist

Every year at Christmas time the National Audubon Society sponsors a nation-wide bird census. The purpose of this census is to accurately record the fluctuation of bird life during one fixed week at as many stations across the country as possible. Results compiled for a number of years are of great value to the National Audubon Association and others interested in bird study and bird protection. An unusual increase in one species might indicate some control necessary or great scarcity of another species might point to the need of better means of bird protection. Through the co-operation of local bird societies, interested groups, or individual ornithologists over the country a rather complete census can be made each year.

The naturalist staff of Yosemite National Park has contributed to this work during the last three years. The latest census was taken December 20, 1933, with following results:

Yosemite Valley, Yosemite National Park, California (Mirror Lake to El Portal), 8 a. m. to 5 p. m. Clear; seven inches of snow average; wind, none; temperature at start 30 degrees, at return 38 degrees. Fifteen miles, four observers working singly in four-hour shifts. Observers: Park Naturalist Bert Harwell, Assistant Park Naturalists M. E. Beatty and A. E. Borell and Museum Assistant Raymond Gilmore.

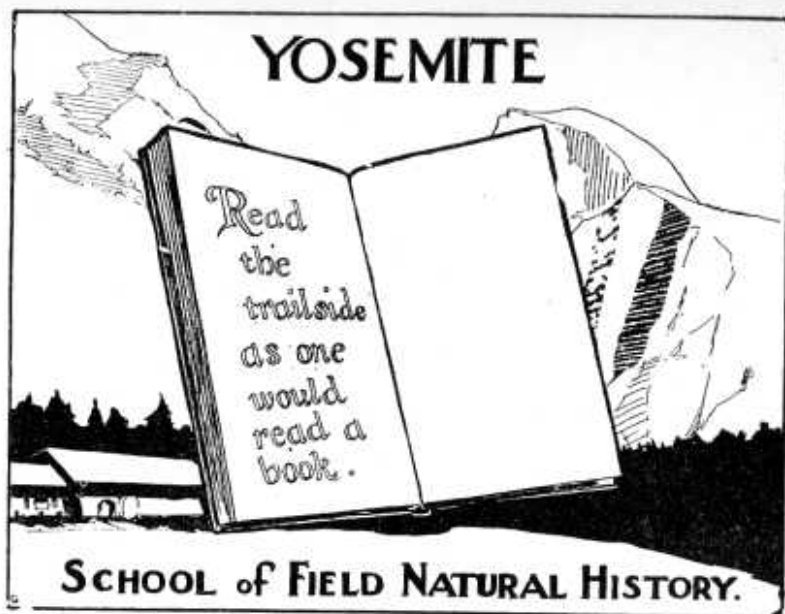
A total of 40 species, 449 individuals as follows: Sharp-shinned hawk, 1; Western red-tailed hawk, 4; golden eagle, 1; valley quail, 8; mountain quail, 36; Western belted

kingfisher, 2; red-shafted flicker, 10; Western pileated woodpecker, 1; California woodpecker, 48; Mottled woodpecker, 3; Northern white-headed woodpecker, 1; black phoebe, 1; blue-fronted jay, 54; California jay, 20; short-tailed mountain chickadee, 10; plain titmouse, 6; slender-billed nuthatch, 1; red breasted nuthatch, 4; Sierra creeper 10; pallid wren-tit, 3; dipper, 5; dotted canyon wren, 1; rock wren, 3; California brown thrasher, 1; Northern varied thrush, 2; hermit thrush, 1; Western bluebird, 13; Western golden-crowned kinglet, 3; Western ruby-crowned kinglet, 9; Audubon Sacramento spotted towhee, 40; Sacramento brown towhee, 20; Thurber junco, 57; Gamble sparrow, 20; golden-crowned sparrow, 4; fox sparrow, 8; song sparrow, 2.



Red-shafted Flicker

On the previous year's census taken December 20, 1932, only 24 species were recorded as El Portal was not included in the territory covered. The greatest variation noted these three years is in golden-crowned kinglets. This was the most numerous species encountered in the census of 1931. This year but three individuals were found in the much larger territory covered.



1934 Session Announced

By Park Naturalist C. A. Harwell
Director of School

A seven-week course of intensive study of the interrelations of nature, of field methods in natural history subjects, of means of interpreting trail-side phenomena and of study of national park service methods will be conducted in Yosemite this year for the tenth consecutive summer, from June 25 to August 10.

This school conducted by the National Park Service has become well known, so that now there is quite a competition for the 20 places available each summer.

Our principal purpose is to train students in the methods of interpreting living nature. The work is almost entirely conducted in the field, using the Yosemite Museum as headquarters for necessary lec-

ture and laboratory work. Graduates of this school make use of the training given here in various ways. Twenty-four graduates have been employed by the National Park Service as temporary or permanent naturalists. Many more have served in local or state parks or in connection with special camps and expeditions as nature councillors or nature guides. Numbers of our field school graduates have found that this course has enriched science teaching, lecturing and writing. All are firmer lovers of nature and better conservationists. Friendships established here prove valuable and lasting. An alumni association holds reunions in various parts of the country from time to time.

Each class is limited to a group

of 20, 12 men and eight women. A minimum of three years of college work or its equivalent is required and preference is given those majoring in natural sciences. Special consideration is given to those applicants whose interests offer the greatest contribution in the various fields of nature education.

STAFF

The regular naturalist staff of Yosemite National Park will be assisted by a number of outstanding scientists during the session. Dr. Harold C. Bryant, assistant director of the National Park Service, in charge of the branch of education and research, will work several days with the group. Joseph Dixon, field naturalist, N. P. S., will direct a survey in our wilderness research reserve. Dr. Ernst Cloos of Johns-Hopkins, Dr. Elliott Blackwelder of Stanford and Dr. Ralph Chaney of the University of California will instruct in geology.

SCOPE OF THE WORK

Though specific instruction is offered in geology, botany, forestry, ornithology, mammalogy and entomology, it is our purpose to supplement university training in these branches by giving special emphasis to the interrelations of living things as they are found in nature.

The Yosemite National Park, comprising 1179 square miles of the western slope of the Sierra, embrac-

ing five life zones, offers a rich field for such a course. The class will camp a week on the edge of our research reserve area to carry on careful surveys of the flora and fauna of certain specified localities.

Ten days of the course will be occupied by a pack trip for collecting and research in the remote northern sections of the park. Student participation in the organizing and carrying out of such field studies and trips as these offers a training of very practical benefit.

The field school students organize and conduct nature lore campfires each week, to which visitors to the valley are invited. They are given opportunities to participate in the regular naturalist program of lecturing and guiding and are invited to prepare nature notes or articles for scientific journals. The entire course is practical, rich in subject matter, stimulating and profitable.

NO TUITION FEE

No tuition fee is charged the students of this National Park Service school. A special camp site is reserved for the group, where personal tents may be put up or equipment rented at nominal rates. Students do their own cooking, usually in groups. An equipment fee of \$5 is charged each student for use of materials furnished.

Application blanks and any further information will be furnished on request.





Pioneer Shrines in Yosemite

By GRACE NICHOLS
Field School, 1933

No sojourn in Yosemite can ever be complete without visiting some of the scenes made famous by the men who pioneered in the valley—Muir, Hutchings, Lamon, Clark, Le Conte and others who were associated with them. The West is as yet too young and new for most of us to have any adequate conception of the debt we owe to pioneers such as these who devoted their best years unselfishly to discovering the incomparable beauties of the Yosemite region and making them accessible for the pleasure and enjoyment of all who should come after them.

1. JOHN MUIR

Best known among this group is John Muir, and justly so, for without his ardent championship of the project it is extremely doubtful that the measure to create a national park from the Yosemite country would ever have been successfully carried out. His first association with the valley was in connection with a sawmill which was erected by J. M. Hutchings near Yosemite Falls in 1869 for the purpose of making into lumber a number of pines, some of which had been uprooted in a severe storm some years previous.

Muir ran the sawmill for some months, living in a cabin which faced the lower Yosemite Fall. This

cabin, which he planned and built for himself, was of unique design. The best description of it that we have was written by Muir in a letter to one of his friends:

He says: "This cabin, I think, was the handsomest building in the valley and the most useful and convenient for a mountaineer. From Yosemite creek, where it first gathers its beaten waters at the foot of the fall I dug a small ditch and brought a stream into the cabin, entering at one end and flowing out the other with just enough current to allow it to sing and warble in low, sweet tones, delightful at night while I lay in bed. The floor was made of rough slabs nicely joined and embedded in the ground. In the spring, the common ptarmigan pushed up between the joints of the slabs, two of which, growing slender like climbing ferns on account of the subdued light, I trained on threads up the sides and over my window in front of my writing desk in an ornamental arch. Dainty little tree frogs occasionally climbed the ferns and made fine music in the night, and common frogs came in with the stream and helped to sing with the Hylas and the warbling, tinkling water. My bed was suspended from the rafters and lined with Illice drus plumes, altogether forming a delightful home in the

glorious valley at a cost of only \$3 or \$4, and I was loth to leave it."

The site of this cabin is now marked by a bronze plaque on a glacial boulder.

During the spring and summer of 1872, after he had left his employment in the sawmill, Muir constructed a second cabin. It was situated in a clump of dogwood near the Royal Arches on the bank of the Merced "at a point where the river approaches closest to the Royal Arches and in a bold curve swings southward again across the valley." No vestige of this structure remains, nor is its site marked in any way. Near by in a tangle of alders and azaleas, on a spit of land formed by the confluence of Tezaya creek with the Merced, there are the remnants of an ancient log structure which is supposed by many to have been the second Muir cabin. This, however, is not the case, for the building in question was a sheep corral erected by James Lamon some years before Muir took up his residence in that part of the valley.

It was while dwelling in the valley, first in the cabin by Yosemite Fall and later beneath the Royal Arches, that Muir carried on his extensive studies of glacial action in the Sierra region, feasting his soul meanwhile upon the sublime beauty of the alpine landscape, which he so vividly portrayed in his writings and which has led others to share his passionate love for the "Mountains of Light."

2 J. M. HUTCHINGS

To J. M. Hutchings belongs the distinction of having organized the first tourist party to visit Yosemite. This party, which consisted of Hutchings, Walker Millard, Thomas Ayres and Alexander Stair, entered

the valley in the summer of 1855 guided by two Indians. There they spent "five glorious days in luxurious scenic banqueting." Returning to the valley in 1864 with his family, Hutchings purchased a claim and a frame building which was subsequently known as Hutchings House, where, for the succeeding decade, he presided as "host" to a large proportion of the people who visited the valley.

Speaking of his early experiences in his book, "In the Heart of the Sierra," Hutchings says: "Accommodations in the valley were found to be very limited, as they consisted of a two-story frame building 60 by 20 feet, having two rooms, an upper and a lower. Its doors and windows were made of cotton cloth. Verily, a primitive beginning for novices in hotel keeping. When our first guests arrived the ladies were domiciled upstairs and the gentlemen down. This arrangement we felt not only had its inconveniences, but was contrary to law, inasmuch as it sometimes separated man and wife." However, he relates further that "so novel a disposition of visitors only became a subject for mirthfulness—never of censure.

Not being satisfied with these primitive arrangements, Hutchings determined to improve them, but the nearest sawmill was 50 miles distant over almost inaccessible mountain trails and the task of attempting to bring in the necessary lumber on pack animals seemed highly impractical. Accordingly bolts of muslin were procured and were used in partitioning off rooms. "Guests in this way were provided with apartments: it is true; but unless their lights were carefully disposed, there were also added unintentional shadow-pictures which, a contributory of mirthfulness in a

maximum degree, gave only a minimum degree of privacy in return. subsequently the sawmill which Muir ran was established and lumber was provided for necessary improvements in the building.

Finding the winter climate too severe on the south side of the valley, the Hutchings family erected a cabin in a "dark, rich setting of oaks" near Yosemite Falls, where they enjoyed sunshine on winter days from 9 a. m. until 3.30 p. m. "To connect the high ground near the hotel on the south side of the valley with that at the cabin on the north side, and at the same time make the Yosemite Falls and other attractions accessible to visitors, a causeway was thrown up across the intervening meadow, and an avenue of elms planted on either side, that were grown from seed sent us by the Reverend Joseph Worcester of Waltham, Mass. But few of these now survive as during my absence in the mountains on one occasion, some thoughtless young men cut them down for walking canes and carried them off. I hope when they see this they will feel their cheeks warm with shame."

The spring succeeding the completion of the cabin an orchard was planted and later a strawberry patch. Many of the trees were grown "from seeds of choice apples that had been sent us, the plants from which were afterward budded or grafted. In this way a thrifty orchard of about 150 trees came into being and now bears many tons annually of assorted fruits." The berry patch, however, offered greater difficulties. After perusing numerous plant catalogs the desired varieties of plants were selected and ordered, but, due to the fact that all mail those days

came West by way of Panama, necessitating a much longer period of time than is now the case, the first shipment of berry plants was completely dried up when it arrived in the valley. A second shipment was ordered and the company, apparently determined, not to have the same misfortune occur again, added so much moisture to the packing that the plants disintegrated en route. A third shipment was burnt up from too close proximity to the ship's funnel during the voyage, but nothing daunted, Hutchings sent in his order for the fourth time and received in return 13 small rootlets at a total cost of \$40. With careful culture these increased to thousands of plants, many of which produced nearly 200 berries each.

(Continued Next Month)

SPECIAL NOTICE

The Yosemite Museum is planning to observe the birthday of JOHN MUIR on April 21. A special program for that day is being arranged. We are now endeavoring to set up a special John Muir exhibit in the History Room.

Anyone possessing, or knowing of, any relics or documents pertaining to Muir that may be secured for this special exhibit is requested to communicate with C. A. Harwell, Park Naturalist, Yosemite National Park, California.

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Dan Anderson