

YOSEMITE NATURE NOTES



HALF DOME and CLOUD'S REST
As seen from Glacier Point
Courtesy of Standard Oil Co. of Calif.

February 1936

Volume xv

Number 2

Yosemite Nature Notes

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

Volume xv

February 1936

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A September Morning on the Bank of the Merced

(Ranger-Naturalist Enid Michael)

Summer has gone from the Valley. The sun moves south and each day the shadow of the great south wall reaches farther out across the Valley floor. Stray maples and dogwoods are beginning to show the first spangles of autumn color. From the shallow waters of the river the Belted Kingfisher may pluck a fish at will and for the present he is not so keen to protect his fishing rights along his particular stretch of water. Lusty young kingfishers ride the river lane together, rattling their harsh roll of notes. Soon the water buttercups will float pearly islands of bloom on the still pools.

Coffee-berries are now ripe and it is feasting time for Grosbeak, Tanager and Band-tailed Pigeons. The grosbeaks and tanagers are taking their last fill before winging south to their winter homes. The pigeons will stay on to collect a

share of the acorn crop. Soon will be busy days for the California Woodpeckers as they store away fat acorns against the lean days of winter.

A Cooper Hawk moves into the neighborhood. A warning shout from the Blue-fronted Jay sends all birds to cover. The hawk takes a perch on a dead stub where he may command a view of the meadow and prepares to wait, for he knows that the memory of little birds is short. I sit in the shadow of a willow clump, willing to match patience with the hawk. All is silent until a flock of Brewer Blackbirds fly overhead. They do not see the hawk and the hawk makes no move. A flock of blackbirds can make even a killer hawk unhappy.

Ten minutes pass. The Yellow Warbler sings, other birds speak up and begin to move about. The Flycatchers have forgotten the hawk.

Olive-sided, Traill and Wood Pewee are active again and I can hear the snap of mandibles as insects are plucked from the air. The big Olive-sided Flycatcher snatches a passing butterfly and returns to his perch, gay wings come fluttering down and the flycatcher gulps down the soft body of his victim. From far away comes the shout of a Red-shafted Flicker.

I look at my watch, it is now 10:55, an hour and ten minutes have passed and still no jay or woodpecker has left the wood to cross the meadow. But in the willows on my side of the river birds have been active and I have been entertained by many species while waiting for the hawk to strike. Sierra Creepers tread up the rough willow lark in search of food, their white breasts acting as reflectors throw light into the dark crannies and tiny insects fall victim to the tweezer-like bills of the Creepers. A lone Slender-billed Nuthatch works over the same trees, but he comes head downward in order to pick up any insects overlooked by the Creepers. He too has a reflector, for his throat is very white. There really is something in this reflector business. The Canyon Wren who also hunts about in dark crannies also wears a reflector on his breast. A young female Red-breasted Sapsucker lands on a willow trunk five feet from my face. She probably catches the glint of my eyes, anyway she is greatly startled and

makes off in a hurry. The sound of stiff wings suggest her relationship to the woodpeckers. A little House Wren comes to the top of his brush pile and looks me over; he appears quite unafraid. Mountain Chickadees swing about in the branches of the willows. Sierra Juncos and Western Robins come down to the river pool to bathe. Several Green-backer Goldfinches

Brown grass at the top of the bank, green grass at the water's edge, the pretty reflection occasionally rippled by a jumping fish. The Black Phoebe arrives, another bird for the list. The sky is very blue. Heat waves begin to dance over the brown meadow. The hawk is still frozen to his perch and silent. A jay begins to move about in a yellow pine 100 feet from the hawk. The jay sails across the river and still no move from the Cooper Hawk.

To conform to fashion this nature story should end with the spectacular, but nothing like this happened. After a wait of two hours and five minutes some children crossing the meadow on the way to the swimming hole frightened the hawk from his perch. Rapidly beating wings carried him down the valley and he was soon out of sight. Almost immediately on the hawk's departure the California Woodpeckers moved back into the bare branches of the dead cottonwood, from which point of vantage they could practice the art of fly catching.



A Glimpse of the Mountain Coyote

(Ranger-Naturalist E. D. Godwin)

To the lover of nature comes, once in a long time, an opportunity of observing at close hand some unaware individual who makes the forest his home. It is the possibility of such an occurrence that inspires the naturalist to rove farther through the wood, to seek sequestered spots where he can be alone with nature, to ply the keenest of his senses and pit them with those of other animals, and thus to become acquainted with the dwellers of the world. It is not always that he sees what he looks for, nor accomplishes what he aspires in this vein, for the animal usually sees him first and leaves or remains quiet, but occasionally the wild one is bested by his curiosity or hunger and makes an appearance.

Such was the case once last summer. I had hiked a mile or more from Old Inspiration Point up the Pohono Trail to Meadow Brook and stopped by the side of a small stream for lunch. As I sat in the tiny sunlit meadow I heard nothing

but the brook gurgling, a pair of chickadees singing above, and an Olive-sided Flycatcher calling from up the slope. From the forest of red firs ahead of me emanated no sound, but I was impelled to glance up from my lunch.

It was the first time I had seen a Mountain Coyote, and the manner in which he approached me was typical of what I had heard. His gait was a joggy trot until he came within 15 feet of the spot where I had changed into a motionless object. Here he stopped, holding his gaunt, tan form in a pose of potential retreat as he pricked his ears forward, surveyed me most scrutinously, and scented the breeze, scantily tainted with the efflux of my tuna fish sandwich. He resembled a medium-sized collie dog, but with a higher and narrower body. His legs, long and wiry, terminated in feet that would be small for a dog of the same size. His bushy tail was held at a drooping angle. The face, fox-like with long

snout and large ears, invited an appraisal of craftiness. As he stood, his nostrils quivered, his eyes searched, never failing to halt on me as he scanned the little meadow. His ears sought one direction and then another. His whole body appeared to portray uneasiness; his weight was transferred back and forth and a rapid exit seemed imminent. Slowly his feet began to shift, and he started to back away; as he did so, an afterthought impelled him to drop his head a moment to drink. With a sudden jerk he resumed his former pose and continued to back away, turning and breaking into his mechanical trot which took him off down the

trail where he disappeared behind the bole of a large fir.

Evidently not satisfied with his survey, he peered around the trunk at me and then emerged, coming toward me. This time he did not come so close, but was more active, trotting back and forth on the opposite bank and stopping to listen and smell. His every move and action denoted the utmost uneasiness and apprehension; every gesture, caution. His emaciated body bespoke of hardship; his eyes of subjugation. His life must be like ours—one of difficulty, one of toil—and as he jogged away down the trail, my thoughts followed him into the forest.



Coyote Stalking a Gopher

Carnivorous Habits of the Belding Ground

(Ranger-Naturalist Carl Sharsmith)

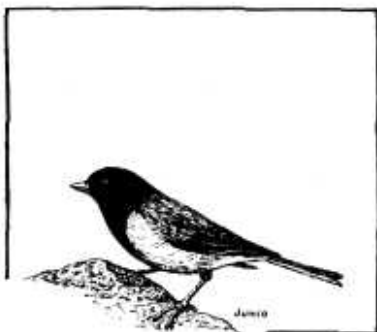
The Belding Ground Squirrel (*Citellus beldingi* Merriam), is a common inhabitant of the grassy meadows of the Hudsonian Zone of the Yosemite National Park, and is particularly well known to Park visitors in the Tuolumne Meadows

region. Often called "picket-pin" because of its erect habit of posture, this squirrel is a strictly ground-dwelling species and its vegetarian diet is in accord with its habitat. It lives, according to Grinnell and Storer,* "chiefly upon grass and

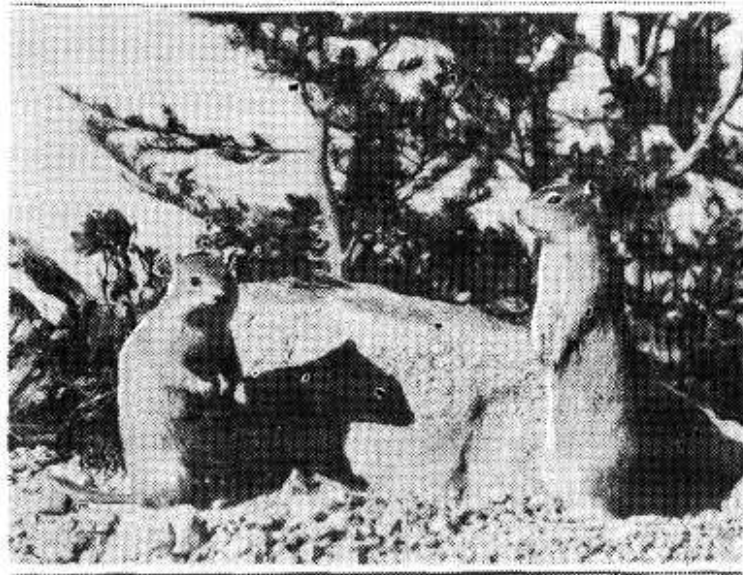
grass seeds, and depends less upon the larger seeds, nuts and roots such as are eaten by the California Ground Squirrel and the chipmunks."

That the Belding Ground Squirrel is not strictly vegetarian, however, is attested by the fact that Grinnell and Storer record the trapping, upon a few occasions, of Belding Ground Squirrels in meat-baited traps designed for the capture of carnivorous animals. They approach their lowland relative, the California Ground Squirrel (*Citellus beecheyi beecheyi* Richardson), then, in occasionally turning carnivorous. Three recent field records of this tendency to carnivorous food habits of the Belding Ground Squirrel follow:

served a Belding Ground Squirrel eating the head off a young fledgling Junco, the bird still struggling and the ground nest raided. This was near the District Ranger Station in Tuolumne Meadows.



2. July 19, 1935. Mr. Miller, a guest of the Tuolumne Meadows Lodge, observed the devouring of a



1. July 6, 1935. Mrs. John Bingham and Mrs. Max Gilstray observed a Belding Ground Squirrel eating the head off a young fledgling Junco, the bird still struggling and the ground nest raided. This was near the District Ranger Station in Tuolumne Meadows. The bird I later identified by the

wings and a few remaining feathers, as an Audubon Warbler. This occurred a few yards from the Tolumne Meadows Lodge.

3. July 23, 1935. Ranger Bartlett stationed at Tioga Pass, saw a Belding Ground Squirrel consume a freshly caught chipmunk from a brood reared in a tree by the Tioga Pass ranger station.

It is to be expected that further observation will probably show this carnivorous tendency of the Belding Ground Squirrel more extensively developed than is at present realized.

* Grinnell, Joseph, and Tracy I. Storer, *Animal Life in Yosemite*, p. 163, 1924.

MICE ANTICS

(M. E. Beatty, Asst. Park Naturalist)

That White-footed Mice (*Peromyscus maniculatus gambeli*) are industrious workers and food storers has been well borne out by the writer's observations in his own home. The winter's supply of walnuts stored upstairs seemed to be dwindling rapidly. Searching produced several caches in adjoining rooms with droppings suggestive of *Peromyscus* nearby. This brought to mind the several times members of the household had surprised a mouse in the downstairs living room and delighted in watching the sly little individual scamper back upstairs. Every time the mouse

seemed to make its appearance from behind the radio. Investigation produced nine walnuts stored on a small shelf in the rear of the radio. None of us could figure out how the mouse ever succeeded in getting down the stairs with such a large burden.

Another demonstration took place on the glassed-in back porch, with acorns, in place of walnuts. The writer's son had been collecting acorns for the Museum and the sack seemed to decrease rather than increase in size. Investigation showed that a packsack hanging on the wall had been completely filled, as were all the empty jars, cans, vases, etc., stored around the porch. Examination of individual acorns disclosed tiny teeth marks on the base end of the acorn and three gallons of reclaimed nuts proved beyond doubt that the mice had been more than busy to accomplish such a large transfer in three weeks time.

Bert Harwell in Washington

Park Naturalist C. A. Harwell has been assigned to the Washington office for a two months period starting January 15, 1936. Mr. Harwell will work on special E. C. W. problems dealing with visual and vocational education. A number of speaking engagements have been arranged for him enroute and on the Atlantic Coast.



YOSEMITE TREES

Another Park Occurrence of Single-leaf Pine

(Emil F. Ernst, Assistant Forester)

While the Single-leaf Pine (*Pinus monophylla*, Torrey and Fremont) is common on the east slope of the Sierra, it is quite rare in the west slope, which includes Yosemite National Park. Several specimens of this species are to be found in Pate Valley, far from the crest of the Sierra. A lone specimen was found recently by Junior Forester Elliott Sawyer on the Rancheria Trail near Rancheria Mountain. Specimens of the foliage were brought in and verified by the writer.

A possible explanation for the occurrence of these individual trees is the fact that the Paiute Indians of Mono Lake region exchanged the nuts from this pine for the acorns from the California Black Oak with the Yosemite Indians and as the few specimens of Single-leaf Pine found in the Park occur along known routes of travel used by the Indians, it is quite possible that the trees sprouted from nuts dropped by them as they journeyed back and forth.

The Single-leaf Pine is easily differentiated from the other pines because of the characteristic single leaf or needle from which it derives its best common name. It is the only American pine having a single leaf or needle. It is sometimes called the Pinon Pine and is therefore often confused with the Pinon Pines of the desert regions of Arizona and New Mexico from which the Pinon nuts of commerce are obtained. It is an exceedingly slow growing tree sometimes attaining an age of 225 years. It prefers the desert regions of the east slopes of the Sierra Nevada mountains and is also found in similar conditions in Utah, Nevada, Arizona, southeastern California, and in Lower California.

The confirmation of this species of trees within the present boundaries of Yosemite National Park brings the number of new coniferous species reported this season up to three. These three include the Knobcone Pine, Dwarf Juniper, and

now the Single-leaf Pine. There is the possibility that eventually the Western Yew, *Taxus brevifolia* Nuttall, may be found in an isolated place in the vicinity of Mather and that the Limber Pine, *Pinus flexilis*, may also be found in the Park in the vicinity of Mono Pass.

RARE BIRD VISITS YOSEMITE BANDING STATION

M. E. Batty, Asst. Park Naturalist

Bird banding always brings surprises and often assists the bander in obtaining a better knowledge of rare species to the region through the opportunity of studying the specimens in hand. On September 22, a bird new to the writer was taken in a government sparrow trap at the Yosemite Museum banding station. The bird was about the size and build of a tanager only the tail was quite long. The bright yellow throat and breast with upper parts greenish-brown together with the white eye ring classified the individual as a Long-tailed Chat (*Icteria virens longicauda*).

The only way in which this bird differed from the majority of bird text descriptions was in the lack of any white line or mark over the eye, although the white eye circle was very prominent.

The Long-tailed Chat is classed as a casual visitor to Yosemite. Charles Michael, who has kept bird records in Yosemite for about 15 years, has recorded this species during three years of this time, gener-

ally during the month of September.

CHOCOLATE LILY FOUND AGAIN

By H. Frank Evans
Field School 1935

Since the Chocolate Lily was first collected, named and described, it has eluded the searching eyes of the wild flower lover and the botanist alike. Strange as it may seem, the reason that it was not found was because it was being looked for; it was not hiding at all. Several clumps of Chocolate Lily (*Fritillaria atropurpurea*) were found in full bloom on July 26, 1935, at an elevation of 10,500 feet on the Mt. Lyell Trail. Their color made them very safe as they nodded in the shade of large granite boulders.

Unlike the Small-flowered *Fritillaria* (*Fritillaria parviflora*) which reaches to a height of three feet and has from three to twenty flowers on its stalk, the Chocolate Lily is seldom more than 12 inches high and has only two or five flowers on its simple raceme. The former is found in pine woods near the 6,000 foot level, while the latter is present in the upper Hudsonian and the lower Arctic-Alpine Life Zones.

Fritillaria atropurpurea rises from a deep, solid, scaly bulb. Its flower is about three-quarters of an inch in length, and the six-parted, greenish-yellow perianth is dappled with chocolate. The narrow, sessile leaves are alternate and tend to whorl at the base of the plant.



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Dan Anderson