

YOSEMITE NATURE NOTES

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A NUTCRACKER OF THE SIERRAS

A nutcracker, not made for human hands, is well known to lovers of the high Sierras. It is a bird. It is called Clarke's Crow or Clarke's Nutcracker. It is one criminal the mountaineer cannot help but love. This nutcracker emits what is usually the first sound one hears after a cold night in a sleeping bag far above the timber line. The first bit of dawn brings forth his call note. This seems to cry out his business in life, for the nutcracker's note is almost the word "crack". Reduced to letters it is a repetition of "k'rack-k'rack".

Clarke's Nutcracker is a black, white, and grey crow, handsome as well as decidedly sociable. He is the Beau Brummell of the Crow family. He enjoys coming to your camp and investigating how much you have left for him in your castaway food cans. Both the Clarke's Nutcracker and his relative, the handsomely crested Stellar Jay, are frequently seen on nature study hikes in Yosemite National Park. These hikes are offered free to Yosemite visitors through the cooperation of the Federal Government with the State Fish and Game Commission.

PRIMITIVE RODENT LIVES IN SIERRAS.

When camping in the high Sierra with pack train baggage limitations, mountaineers frequently exhaust their supply of onions. They know then how to flavor their venison or bear steak with the wild swamp onion of the boggy Sierran meadows. When hunting for this relish which nature has so generously provided, they often find the burrow of the mountain beaver. This strange animal is not a true beaver, but is one of the most primitive types of mammals now existing, having no close affinity with any other living animal. To see a mountain beaver is one of the thrills of high Sierran life. This mammal works in its burrow at night, and its piles of cut vegetation are more often seen than the animal itself. Skilled trappers sometimes catch them.

A NEW FLOWER FOR THE YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK

There have been many botanists in the Yosemite National Park, from time to time, but they seldom climbed the cliffs, and it is upon the cliffs that we occasionally find a new flower. The chimney that leads from the Four Mile Trail up on to the Sentinel Rock is just now a wonderful flower garden. At the top of this chimney, its roots imbedded in a clump of ferns, was a single plant of White-heart, *Dicentra Fausciflora*. The large heart-shaped flowers are white tinted with lavender and the petals that stand out on either side of the heart are lined with purple. This beautiful flower has been found before only in the Salmon Alps and Trinity Mountains, and also in the Saw Tooth Range, Tulare County. The specimen is mounted in the Museum, and we hope to find more plants in the Park.

RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET TAKES A BATH.

Some of those on the Natura Guide excursion to Glacier Point and Sentinel Dome had the unusual experience of seeing a Ruby-crowned Kinglet take a bath. One of these tiny birds with its ruby-red crown flew down to a little stream, took a bath, and then flew to a low branch of a fir tree. From a distance less than ten feet it was watched while preening its feathers. This was done twice and the bird seemed entirely oblivious of those around him. These little birds spend most of their time near the tops of the tall firs; so those who had this opportunity were very fortunate indeed.

THE DIGGER PINE

Not infrequently visitors at the Yosemite Museum ask about the singular broom shaped, gray-green pine trees to be seen just above El Portal. Early Californians dubbed this tree the "Digger Pine". The origin of the name is easily understood by those who know the white man's impartial name for all the native Indian tribes. This pine furnished a favorite article of food for the Indian, and it is small wonder that he was disturbed when the white man destroyed his orchards. The species produces a large heavy cone in which are found the "nuts" or seeds. The "nuts" are hard-shelled and must be pounded to be cracked. The soft core of green cones was also eaten, uncooked, and young buds may also have been used for food. On the whole, no more useful tree, save the oaks, grew for the Indian.

PIGEON'S FAMILY LIFE OBSERVED.

On the Ledge Trail to Glacier Point a party of nature guide hikers had the unique experience of watching a Band Tailed Pigeon feeding its young. This pigeon is the only wild pigeon found in the United States. It raises but one young a year.

YOSEMITE'S "WATER SNAKES."

During the past week the snake collection at the Yosemite Museum has been augmented by numerous garter snakes. One specimen, not much more than two feet long, was captured by a tourist just after the reptile had been observed to swallow a five inch Rainbow Trout. When the snake was dropped into a sack it disgorged its prey. The tourist bundled up the fish and snake and brought them in the same bag to the Museum. What was his surprise on dumping the contents of the bag into a ready cage to find that no trout appeared! The disappearance was explained shortly afterward when the snake again disgorged the trout. He made no further attempt to swallow it.

These snakes are not true water snakes, but some of them are so aquatic in their habits that they have received the name. Herpetologists know them by the name *Thamnophis* or Garter Snakes, and the one seen most often in Yosemite is the giant Garter Snake.

CALIFORNIA NUTMEG

Have you noticed the dark green conifers growing along the Merced River near Arch Rock? The leaves are sharp needles and so twisted as to lie flat. The fruit that swings gaily from the branches of some of the trees looks like green plums. California Nutmeg we call this tree, and people often ask if it is Fir, Pine, or Spruce? The California Nutmeg is a Yew tree; the botanist's name for it is *Torreya Californica*. All yew trees bear stamens on one tree and pistils on another.

Torreya Californica is one of our own trees, for it is native to California and to no other place. This tree is nowhere abundant and the scattered trees along the Merced are as fine specimens as may be seen anywhere.

A BEAUTY FROM EUROPE HAS COME TO YOSEMITE

For many years the Fleabane Daisy has had her own way in the meadows of Yosemite. From the vantage point of her tall stems she looks over the grass and most of the flowers. When cut down by the mowing machine, the Fleabane blooms again on a short stem. Today in the meadow the Ox-eye Daisy looks proudly around for the first time. Now this Ox-eye is a native of Europe. Long ago, finding Europe too small, she journeyed to America. The Ox-eye Daisy must live in the open field or meadow and during her sojourn in America she has successfully fought the farmer who would drive her out. Field, meadow, and roadside she covers with a snowy bloom so entrancing that North Carolina, in spite of the angry farmer, has made her the state flower.

Now the Fleabane Daisy had best look out for herself for the Ox-eye Daisy knows all the tricks of the trade, and, while today there is but one plant of Ox-eye Daisy, tomorrow ten thousand may whiten the meadow.

MANY YOUNG BIRDS SEEN.

Those who accompanied the Nature Guides on the field trip Monday morning saw the following birds feeding their young:—Western Robin, Russet-backed Thrush, Sierra Creeper, and Calliope Humming Bird. This is only one of the many interesting things which are seen on these excursions.



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