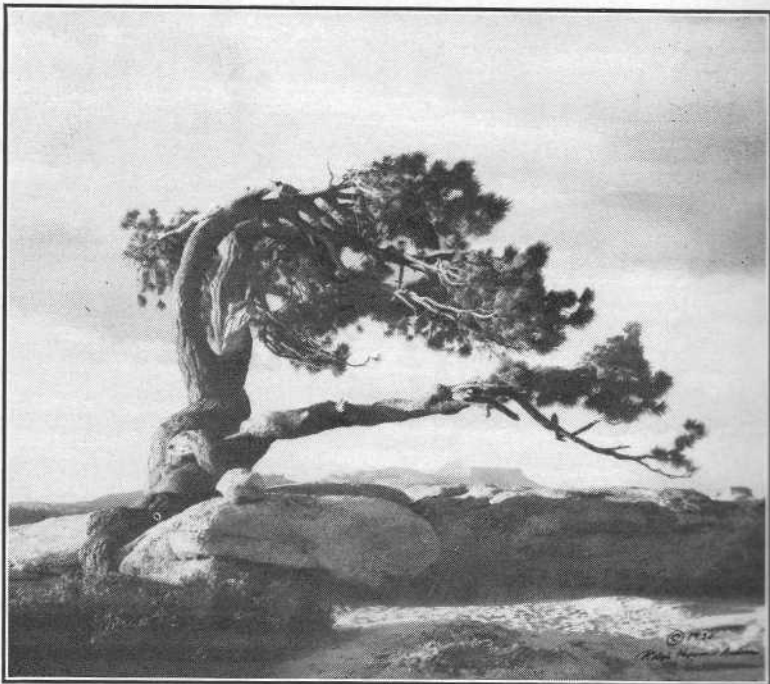


YOSEMITE NATURE NOTES

Vol. XXIV

September, 1945

No. 9



Yosemite Nature Notes

THE MONTHLY PUBLICATION OF
THE YOSEMITE NATURALIST DEPARTMENT
AND THE YOSEMITE NATURAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION

F. A. Kittredge, Superintendent

C. F. Brockman, Park Naturalist

M. V. Walker, Associate Park Naturalist

VOL. XXIV

SEPTEMBER, 1945

NO. 9

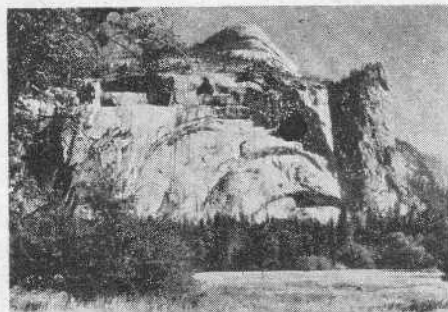
EVENING IN SEPTEMBER

By Elizabeth H. Godfrey, NPS Staff

As candles burn within a sacred shrine
The alpenglow of sunset gently falls—
To veil in rose the lofty domes and spires
And more enchant the haze on massive walls.

The boom of leaping waterfalls is still.
The rivulets are silent, parched and dry;
But, Oh, the charm of evening in September
When moon of gold ascends into the sky!

From treetops comes the faintest whispering;
On granite walls are floods of mystic light;
Lost Arrow breeze with woody fragrance laden
Is like a spirit roving in the night.





FRIENDLY PLACES IN THE HIGH MOUNTAINS

By Enid Michael

It was early August as we drove along the Tioga Road headed for the high places. Four precious days of leisure lay before us, and our eyes were alert for anything of interest along the way. Of a sudden we drew the car to the side of the road, for we saw a mother marmot on the rocky bank below the road with her babes like playful kittens about her feet. As I slipped from the car, movie camera in hand, the babes disappeared, but the mother held her ground, gazing curiously in our direction with dull brown eyes. After a few random shots we slipped below the bank in view of the hole between the rocks into which the mother marmot had vanished. The camera was arranged upon the tripod, and when all was in readiness, pigmy-owl like whistles attracted the mother marmot to the surface again. Carefully she edged little by little into the light. With her fore paws braced upon the rock in front of the den she stretched up and gazed about, first one way and then another. Her nose wriggled as she sniffed the air to get the scent of the creature which seemed to be so

close, but which, motionless in the dark shadow of a red fir, she could not locate. Occasionally she withdrew into the seclusion of the den and grunting sounds were heard. She may have been remonstrating with her impetuous young. On one of these occasions a baby marmot crept up to the entrance of the den and looked out. Altogether, we spent an hour and a half photographing these animals, but we considered the stop worth while. For years their amusing and interesting antics, recorded in color movies, will recall this incident and give us pleasure.

Continuing along the road we saw radiant splashes of skyrocket gilia (*G. aggregata*), woolly eriophyllum (*E. lanatum*), and sulphur eriogonum (*E. umbellatum*) which relieved the monotony of dry stretches along the road. However, the most frequent flowers in dry areas were those of barestem eriogonum (*E. nudum*) which occurred in graceful colonies and relieved the barren harshness of many an exposed area.

As the road climbed to an elevation of between 8,000 and 9,000 feet,

the moist swales were radiant with brilliant meadow bloom. Low growing lupine, aster fleabane, Queen Ann's lace, and two varieties of tall senecio made up the floral pageant that followed the roadside for several miles. *Artemisia norvegica* was also common.

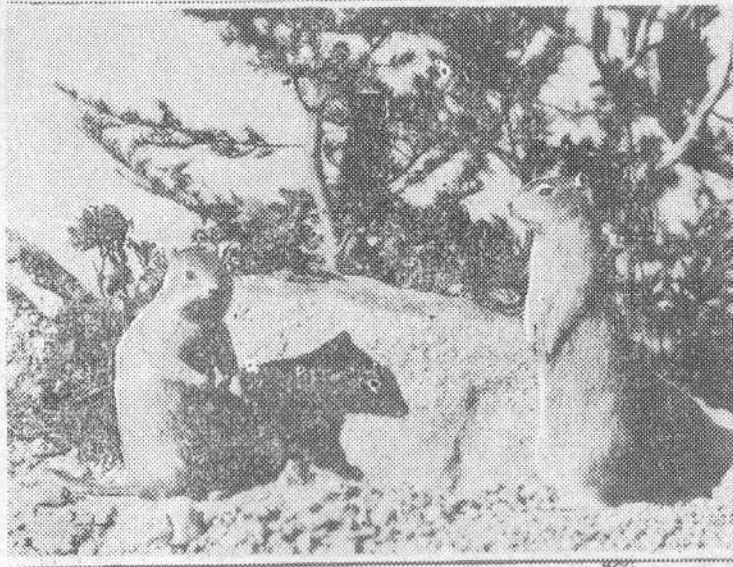
At length the highway swept into the broad Tuolumne Meadows. There the grass, so green on June 30, the date of our first visit of the year to this area, now displayed the tans and browns of autumn. Only here and there were small beds of golden-rod, Culbertson's paint brush, (*Castilleja culbertsonii*), and pearly everlasting to add variety to the sere expanse.

Near one of these bright patches

we enjoyed a little lunch. A short distance away a mountain bluebird fed her young. The babies were perched about, three on stones that rose above the flowers and a fourth on a stick. The bluebird hovering above the flowers would suddenly drop down, seize an insect and carry it to one of her eager brood.

Also of interest in Tuolumne Meadows were the belding ground squirrels or picket pins, and alpine chipmunks whose activities were duly recorded on film.

By afternoon our photographic activities had to be temporarily suspended, for dark clouds came rolling in over Mt. Dana. Soon lightning flashed, thunder crashed and torrents of rain descended.



Belding ground squirrels or picket pins

The next morning was clear, however, and we packed our knapsacks and took the trail to Glen Aulin. All the floral gayety that forty-two days ago helped us along the way was absent, and in consequence the trail seemed quite lonesome. Strange to



Shooting star

say, the fragrance of shooting stars lingered in the air, for their leaves give off a perfume as they are crushed where one's steps deviate from the established trail. Almost any time of year in Tuolumne Meadows this spicy scent perfumes the air as one walks about the meadow. The glad songs of the wild birds, too, were still. In place of the songs of those happy lovers, the hungry bird children, with shrill and piping voices, begged to be fed.

That evening at Glen Aulin we enjoyed a beautiful sunset. From the vantage of a near by slope we ob-

served Mt. Conness in noble beauty posed before a black cloud curtain. The last rays of the sun illuminated the mountain so that before the dark curtain it glowed like fire, then gradually faded to a pale rose.

Continuing our journey on the following day we hiked along the trail from Glen Aulin to May Lake, a woody route that at first meanders past pleasant meadows, along a little stream and close by the bright



Lewis monkey flower

waters of McGee Lake. Apparently it is hard for this trail to make up its mind to climb, but at length it really turned up hill. At one turn Mt. Conness and the neighboring peaks presented a thrilling spectacle. Eventually, amid groves of mountain hemlock and western white pine we reached an elevation where wild flowers were still really in bloom. Blossoms of the red-stemmed variety of the broad-leaf lupine, each plant

a gorgeous bouquet, varied from blue to wine red. The Lewis monkey flower with blossoms as large as peonias, yellow senecio and tall corn lily were all part of the floral parade. The whole atmosphere seemed alight with a profusion of color and gay bloom.

In this manner the climb to May Lake passed, and soon we found ourselves walking along its lovely shore admiring the rugged contours of Mt. Hoffmann which rises from the water's edge on the far side.

The following morning we awoke to the realization that our four day holiday was rapidly drawing to a close. We turned our backs on beautiful May Lake and soon reached the

Tioga Road. Within a short time the waters of Tenaya Lake were observed in the distance. Eventually we reached its shores and spent a few moments resting upon a warm sandy beach. Walking along the road was not as pleasant as hiking along a trail so, fortunately, soon after leaving Tenaya Lake we were hailed by a cheery voice asking if we wished to ride. It was a friend from the Valley, and to refuse the kind invitation was out of the question. Besides, the day was rapidly drawing to a close, so we climbed in and soon were whisked over the highway to Tuolumne Meadows, our destination as well as our starting point of three days before.





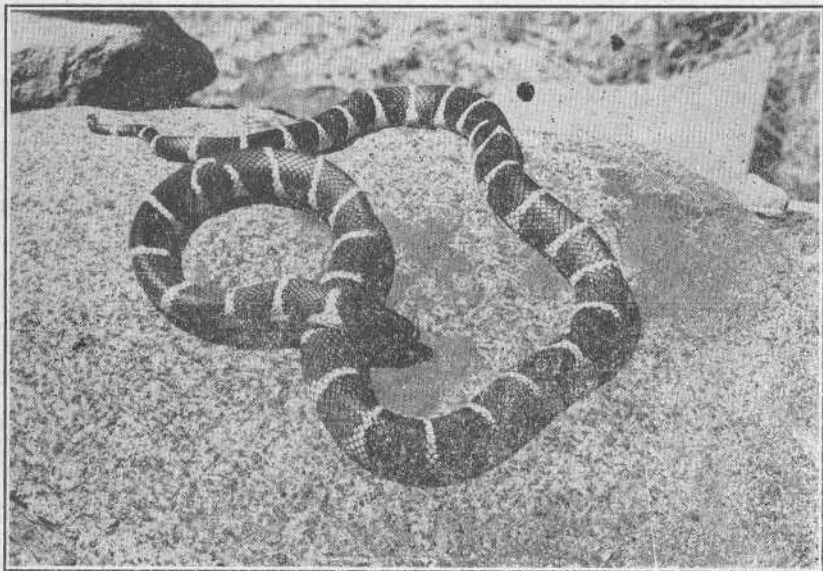
KINGSSNAKE VISITS MUSEUM

By M. V. Walker, Associate Park Naturalist

Even the snakes are aware of the greatly reduced naturalist personnel during these last few seasons. In normal years the naturalists ordinarily spend some time each spring and early summer in making collections of reptiles and amphibians for the exhibit cages. But this year things were different, and the snakes seemed to

sense this neglect, so apparently they also decided to help the war effort by finding their own way to the Museum exhibit cages.

On a Sunday afternoon in late June a visitor standing in the back door of the Museum that leads to the wild-flower garden suddenly shrieked, "Here's a snake!" A few steps be-



yond the door a large black and white California king snake (formerly called Boyle's kingsnake) crawled slowly across the footpath. In a matter of seconds this was specimen number one for the 1945 season and the snake cage had an occupant.

For several weeks this specimen lived the "life of Riley." Hundreds of Museum visitors admired and commented on the beautifully contrasting black and white rings so characteristic of this king snake. Friends soon brought mice which helped to appease a ravenous appetite. It was taken from the cage on numerous occasions and caressed and fondled by the naturalists while it was photographed in kodachrome, in colored

movies, and in black and white. The popularity of this king snake was soon a matter of some concern among the naturalists who were, for the time being at least, forced into a position of minor importance among the "Museum specimens."

This king snake (*Lampropeltis getulus californicae*) is without doubt one of the finest specimens of this particular species ever collected in Yosemite National Park. It measured exactly 41½ inches in length and was quite robust for its length. The specimen was beautifully marked, possessing 39 perfect and two imperfect white rings, all very evenly spaced over the clear, glossy background of pure black.

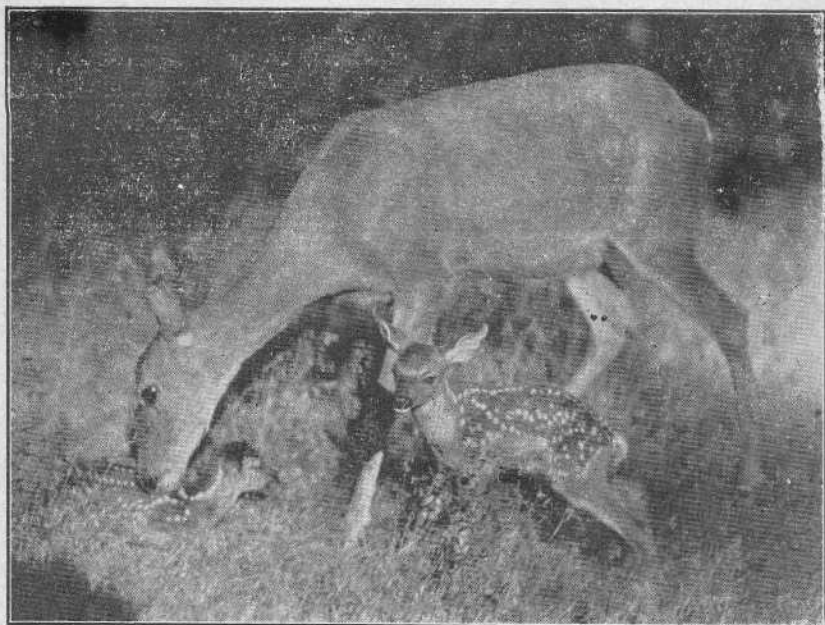


DEER DOES HIGH DIVE

By C. Frank Brockman, Park Naturalist

Early in the evening of August 6th a rather unusual event was observed in the vicinity of Stoneman Bridge. A doe and twin fawns, approaching this structure from the north side of the Merced River, sought safe passage across the stream by trotting along the bridge path used by pedestrians. Yosemite visitors will recall that this path is bordered on one side by the highway and on the other by a rock wall. Several motorists, interested in this little tableau and cognizant of the safety of the ani-

mals, stopped their cars near the bridge approaches to watch. As the doe and one fawn reached the south side of the bridge they leaped easily over the end of the low rock wall to the bank immediately on the other side. The second fawn, which had lagged in making the crossing of the bridge, apparently became frightened by the cars on the bridge approaches as well as by the fact that its twin and the doe had disappeared over the wall. It suddenly hesitated, reversed its course and fled back to-



ward the center of the structure before it emulated the others by leaping over the bridge wall. In this instance, however, there was no solid ground immediately on the other side. The fawn had flung itself into space fully twenty five feet above the waters of the Merced River.

Numerous spectators, expecting to see the animal killed, rushed to view the finale of this tragic dive. The fawn landed in the stream with a splash and as the current carried it swiftly downstream beneath the bridge it swam frantically. These efforts were rewarded for it soon

gained the safety of the south bank. Touching solid ground once more it rushed headlong toward the nearby timber, emitting squeals of fright.

In the meantime the doe, sensing possible injury to her offspring, had wheeled and crossed the road. She quickly located her fawn, dripping from its unexpected bath and still trembling from its experience. For a moment it permitted the fawn to nurse and regain its composure. A few minutes later the entire family—the swimmer none the worse for wear—trotted leisurely toward the lush grass of the Stoneman Meadow.





Digitized by
Yosemite Online Library

<http://www.yosemite.ca.us/library>

Dan Anderson