

# YOSEMITE NATURE NOTES

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UPPER YOSEMITE VALLEY

—*Fisk*, c. 1885



## Birds

*I know that I have never heard  
A song so lovely as a bird's,  
The soft low note from throat of Dove,  
Singing a symphony of love;  
A Meadowlark from nearest clod,  
Lifting a song in praise of God.*

*I think the sweetest rhapsodies  
Are sung by birds just for the trees.  
The Thrush sings softly with a stream,  
The joy of evening in his theme;  
That's why I know I've never heard  
A song so lovely as a bird's.*

CHARLES ALBERT HARWELL

# Yosemite Nature Notes

THE MONTHLY PUBLICATION OF  
THE YOSEMITE NATURALIST DIVISION AND  
THE YOSEMITE NATURAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION, INC.

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## 1956 CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT IN YOSEMITE

By W. J. and Erma Fitzpatrick

The Annual Christmas Bird Count taken in and adjacent to Yosemite National Park between El Portal (elevation 2,000 ft.) and Badger Pass (elevation 7,600 ft.), and including Yosemite Valley was conducted on December 31, 1956 under ideal conditions. Clear skies, no wind, and mild temperatures characterized the day. Temperatures ranged from 25° to 68° with snow being encountered only at higher elevations in shaded areas.

Seventeen participants working in 5 parties recorded 55 species and 2,066 individuals. This compared favorably with the 1950-1956 average of 54.45 species and 2,210 individuals. As usual, the larger numbers of both species and individuals were seen at lower elevations in the vicinity of El Portal. However, the most unusual observations were those of the unprecedented numbers of American Robins seen throughout the area and the observations of Evening and Pine Grosbeaks which had not, at least in recent years, been listed in the Christmas count.

The detailed count follows: Red-tailed Hawk, 5; Golden Eagle, 4;

Sparrow Hawk, 3; California Quail, 1; Band-tailed Pigeon, 169; Mourning Dove, 8; Pygmy Owl, 1; Belted Kingfisher, 4; Red-shafted Flicker, 14; Acorn Woodpecker, 24; Red-breasted Sapsucker, 3; Hairy Woodpecker, 5; Downy Woodpecker, 4; Nuttall Woodpecker, 1; White-headed Woodpecker, 5; Black Phoebe, 7; Steller Jay, 63; Scrub Jay, 26; Mt. Chickadee, 106; Plain Titmouse, 18; Common Bushtit, 76; Red-breasted Nuthatch, 11; Brown Creeper, 11; Wren-tit, 7; Water Ouzel, 12; Bewick Wren, 2; Canyon Wren, 4; Rock Wren, 3; California Thrasher, 1; American Robin, 301; Hermit Thrush, 6; Western Bluebird, 2; Townsend Solitaire, 5; Golden-crowned Kinglet, 239; Ruby-crowned Kinglet, 40; Hutton Vireo, 3; Audubon Warbler, 12; Brewer Blackbird, 5; Purple Finch, 52; Cassin Finch, 55; Linnet, 30; Pine Siskin, 23; Lesser Goldfinch, 75; Spotted Towhee, 33; Brown Towhee, 42; Lark Sparrow, 150; Rufous-crowned Sparrow, 2; Slate-colored Junco, 1; Oregon Junco, 333; Gambel Sparrow, 2; Golden-crowned Sparrow, 42; Fox Sparrow, 1; Song Sparrow, 2; Pine Grosbeak, 6; Evening Grosbeak, 6.

## A RANGER-NATURALIST RETURNS

By Howard H. Cofer, Ranger-Naturalist

It was with a great deal of mixed emotions that we decided to come back. My wife had been with me when I was in field school in Yosemite in 1941 and again in the summer of 1942 when I served as ranger-naturalist. We both had thought it was the most wonderful place on earth. But that was 14 and 15 years ago and we were not fully aware that a lot of changes had occurred. To be specific, we were just that much older, and we had 2 boys age 6 and 9. We were not so fully aware of the changes that had taken place in Yosemite in the intervening years. We had only heard rumors about the terribly crowded conditions and, of course, had read "The Shocking Truth About Our National Parks" by Charles Stevenson in the *Reader's Digest*.

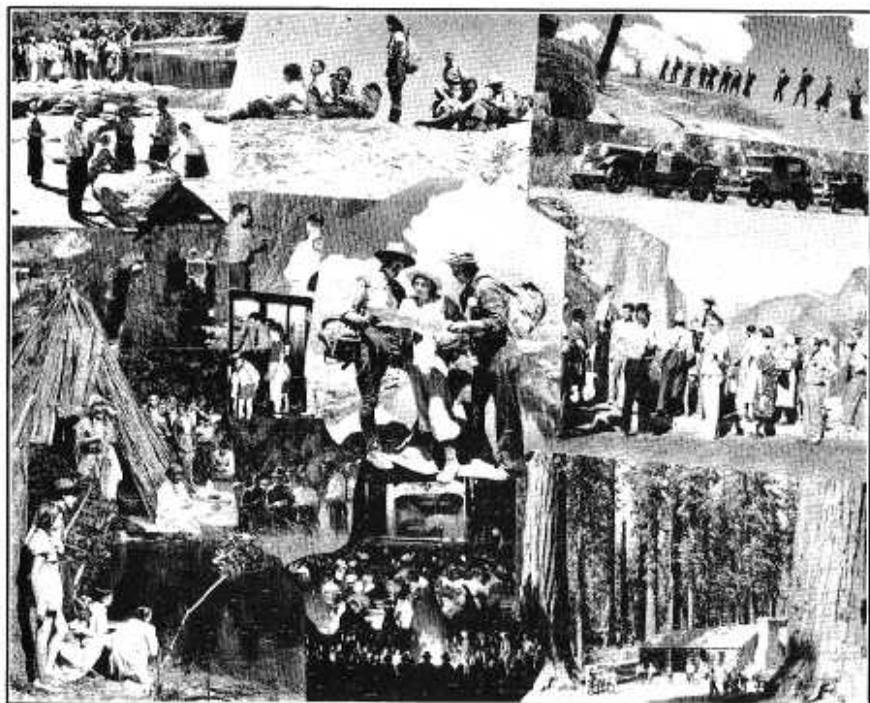
The war had terminated my seasonal job with the Park Service and it was one of those things — we just hadn't gotten back. A trip to central California at Christmastime 1955 started us to thinking, "Why didn't

we try to get a job as a seasonal ranger-naturalist in Yosemite again." After all, it would be a wonderful experience for the boys. So we did.

In a very short time Superintendent Preston informed me that "We are pleased to advise you that you have been selected . . ." Park Naturalist Hubbard sent a "bushel" of special issues of *Nature Notes*, as well as a lot of other pertinent material about the parks. I was dumbfounded to realize how much I had forgotten about the flora and fauna and the natural features of Yosemite. But after studying at every opportunity, the day soon arrived when I was trying on a new uniform at Merced. It was interesting to compare prices paid in 1942 with 1956 and also waistband measurements. Both had increased considerably.

Finally, on June 2nd we were driving up the Merced Canyon toward Arch Rock Entrance Station. The temporarily repaired sections of the road were the first evidences of flood damage which had been





These are the memories we had of 1941 in Yosemite.

done during the previous December. The sign at the entrance station said \$3 and we recalled that in 1942 it had been \$2. The ranger on duty expressed the same courteous attitude that had been taught to us back in 1941 and 1942.

Prior to our leaving home we had for weeks told our boys what they could expect to see in Yosemite. So as we drove on up the road we were all looking for points that we could recognize. Sure enough, there was Cascade Fall bounding down with lots of volume, followed in a few minutes by a wonderful view of Bridalveil Fall. Then the boys recognized El Capitan. To my wife and I the meadows did not seem to be in as much evidence as they should, and when we went from the museum to Camp 19 we were completely lost. We found out later that the old road we used to take had been relocated from across the meadow to another

There were several changes in Camp 19. First, the tents were white instead of brown, and there were permanent tent frames on concrete foundations. The old field school tent platforms were gone. The most unfamiliar structure to us was an old Army surplus portable machine shop which had been converted into a "bear baffle." Were we to believe the days of the "bear box" suspended between two trees were over? Sure enough, this monstrosity was to protect our bacon and other perishables from Bruin. Because of last winter's flood, the old wood burning stoves had been condemned and we found brand spanking new stoves.

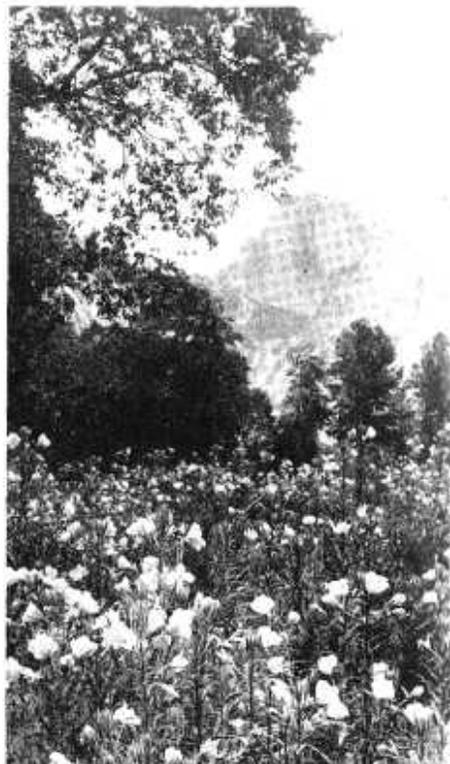
The Old Village, with its grocery store, looked much the same but as we purchased our groceries there was nostalgia for the prices of 1942. In general, they had just about doubled but, of course, the salary of

doubled also. Some figures on a few other items are revealing, and may be of interest — for example, publications for sale at the museum. "The Auto Tour of Yosemite Valley" was 10c, now 25c; "101 Wildflowers" was 25c, ("Common Wildflowers") now 35c; Matthes' "Geologic History of Yosemite Valley," Professional Paper 160, was \$1.75, now \$5.25. Of course, we were aware of the level of today's prices; we simply found it interesting to recall what things were like in 1942.

Californians know that it seldom, if ever, rains in Yosemite Valley during the summer months. I cannot recall a single drop during 1942. But we had the unusual this summer. It rained several days the last two weeks in July and quite often about meal time in the evening we would hear the roar of Yosemite Falls increase and everybody would go out to see it pouring a tremendous volume of muddy water. Also, the Merced River fluctuated up and down about two feet each day during this time.

I remember, with others, Mirror Lake when it really was a lake in which beautiful reflections could be seen. As is true with all lakes having sediment-carrying streams which deposit their materials into them, Mirror Lake is disappearing. The floods of 1950 and 1955 greatly increased the deposits in the lake. Many of us are sad at its passing but on the other hand it is just as interesting to understand the natural sequence of events that cause lakes to disappear as it is to experience the beautiful reflections. The type of change that saddens me is that brought about by the presence of thoughtless people who use the national parks as resort areas instead of the inspirational areas which they are.

The number of visitors which came into Yosemite in the summer of 1942



Still other things seemed not to change.

was around 195,000. There were 57 rangers and 10 on the naturalist staff. This summer there were around 708,000 visitors to Yosemite with 78 rangers and 23 on the naturalist staff. These figures show an increase of approximately 50% in combined ranger and naturalist personnel while the number of visitors has increased over 263%. This year there were 3 ranger-naturalists each at Tuolumne, Mariposa Grove, and Glacier Point, where in 1942 there was only 1 at each of these outposts.

Where we used to give talks at Camp 14 nightly, and occasionally at the old Lodge, Camp Curry, and the Ahwahnee, this year talks were given nightly at Camps 7 and 14, the new Lodge, and twice weekly at the Ahwahnee. The rangers acted as master of ceremonies then and the ranger-naturalists gave the

hike. Now two ranger naturalists participate each night at Camps 7 and 14, one acting as master of ceremonies and the other giving the illustrated talk.

Leading community singing at a campfire program was a new experience for me. I didn't think I could ever do it and I am sure hundreds of people who have heard me agree that I should never have tried it. Nevertheless, I went through the motions about once a week all summer and can truthfully say that I enjoyed it.

One of the most popular features during the 1942 summer, and for many seasons, was the Indian demonstration in which Tabuce and Lucy and Chief Leemee participated. It was interesting to work with them, but the Indians are no longer with us and I felt lost in attempting to tell the visitors about Indian customs and ceremonies without the Indians.

In 1942 I was lucky enough to take a group of people on what was then called a 7-day hike of the High

Sierra camps. It was the first time that first-year seasonal naturalists got to do this and it was the last year that the National Park Service gave this service at all. Now the circuit of High Sierra camps is done in reverse under sponsorship of the Yosemite Park & Curry Co. The hikers are taken by bus on the Tioga Road to the trail junction with May Lake where their trip begins.

We miss the field schoolers. They were so eager, ambitious, and industrious. The last field school was held in 1953 as a result of curtailed finances. Pleasant memories were recalled while looking through the 1941 yearbook which had fallen my lot to compile. For several years the field school made an animal study of the Swamp Lake region and this was referred to as the Research Reserve. I found it interesting to look over our report of the study made in 1941. In searching through old papers of that period I also ran across a diary which was kept of our two-week pack trip into the



Campfire programs now require two ranger naturalists to be on hand.



Old "friends" were renewed.

High Sierra. This was very pleasant reading indeed, and one night this summer while Associate Park Naturalist Glenn Gallison was giving an illustrated talk on fishing in Yosemite, what should I see on the screen but a fine string of beautiful trout which were caught by 3 members of our 1941 field school class and which I had helped eat. Yum, yum! By the way, the limit at that time was 20 fish or ten pounds and one fish, while today it is 10 fish or ten pounds and one fish.

When not busy giving talks at the museum, or conducting nature walks or all day hikes, this year the ranger-naturalists were given special duty which involved "contact" assignments at various areas of visitor

concentration, such as Tunnel View, Mirror Lake, Happy Isles, or Camp Curry. This was a new endeavor to avail the ranger-naturalists with as many of the park visitors as possible. It was on a trial basis in Yosemite but experience thus far indicates its desirability.

Well, how did we fare this summer after all this lapse of time? For me the time literally flew. It was a fine staff with which to work and the program was very efficiently organized so that each had an opportunity to work in the field of special interest.

This year the Junior Ranger Program was something new of interest to us because our boys attended and each ranger-naturalist took his turn working with this group for a week. The minds of our children are fertile fields in which to plant the love of things natural and to instill the idea of their conservation.

As for the conditions referred to in the *Reader's Digest* article, we found them to be pretty much the truth. The National Park Service is doing the best it can under present conditions and is making long range plans for improvements under its MISSION 66 program. You will be hearing more about this later.

## THE SIERRA

The Sierra, the Sierra, the range of  
light  
Green flowering meadows, deer  
taking flight  
Forests dark, somber, and still  
The cry of the marmot so loud and  
so shrill  
Roaring stream through rocky Vul-  
cans forge  
The granite and snow ever so white  
The Sierra, the Sierra, the range of  
light.

By George E. Heinsohn  
Museum Assistant

## A NEW MUSEUM EXHIBIT

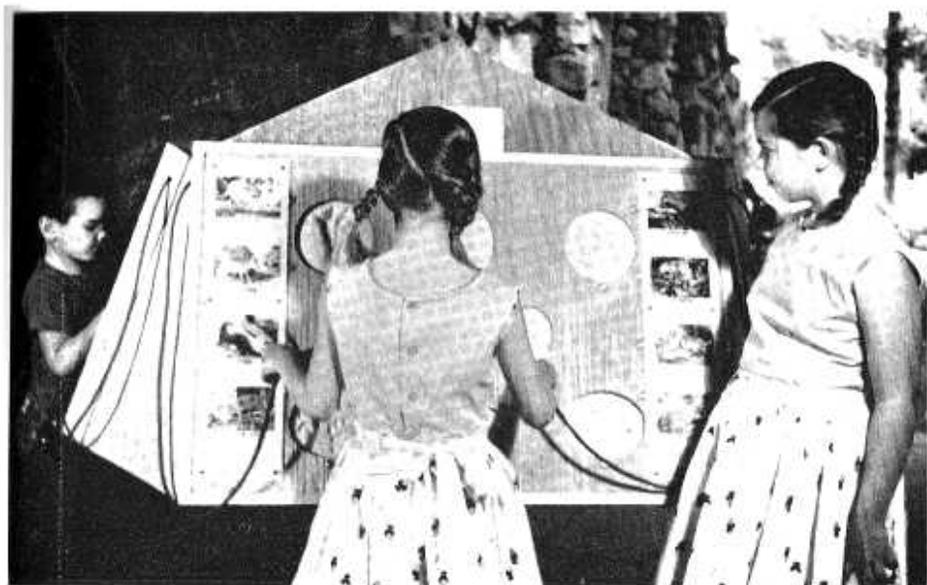
By Elbert M. Brock, Museum Assistant

In August of 1956 a new animal exhibit was added to the Yosemite Museum. The exhibit contains 24 plaster casts of animal tracks. These casts were made in the field where the plaster was poured into the track. For each track there is a corresponding picture of the animal that made the print. The tracks are not necessarily located by the pictures of the animals to which they belong. The display board is so wired as to form an electrical game which is probably familiar to many of the present-day school children. Each board has two cords with which to play the game. If the pointer at the end of one cord is placed by a metal button beside the picture of an animal, and the other pointer placed on the metal button next to the corresponding track, a light bulb at the

top of the board will light. If the incorrect track is chosen the bulb will not light.

The animals represented are evenly divided among three display boards so that the greatest number of children can play at any one time. The exhibit has proved very popular as a game for two children; while one child holds the pointer by the picture, the second child tries to find the track. When this has been done, the children move to the next board where they trade positions. Adults, too, find this exhibit interesting and often elbow the children out of the game.

The animal tracks, which were cast by Mrs. Mary V. Hood, are mostly of mammals found within Yosemite National Park.



The game became an immediate success.

## HIGH ALTITUDE BLACK OAKS

By Richard L. Lehman, Ranger-Naturalist

On a recent trip from Pate Valley to Rodgers Lake my hiking companion, Bill Hood, and I were amazed to find that at above 7000 feet in elevation we were still in a black oak-incense cedar forest. At 7400 ft. (we carried a Lietz altimeter), just before entering a delightful flower-packed meadow near the Pleasant Valley trail junction, we finally broke through the last black oaks into occasional groves of aspen.

Subsequent checking reveals that the black oaks on this dry steep slope above Piute Creek are growing at unusually high elevation for this species (*Quercus Kelloggii*). Black oaks are located near Chinguapin at 6000 ft. and Wayne Bryant (1951) found them at 6300 ft. on the south wall of Yosemite Valley. There are stands of black oak at about 6500 ft. on the Glacier Point-Nevada Falls trail and Sudworth (1908) reports that this tree grows to 6500 ft. in Stanislaus County and to 7200 ft. on the

East Fork of the Kaweah River 100 miles to the south of Yosemite. Mainly, oaks are a foot-hill group of trees but according to Sudworth (1908) the scrub oak (*Q. dumosa*) grows to 5500 ft. in Sierra National Forest and the canyon live oak (*Q. chrysolepis*) and its variant huckleberry oak live in shrubby clumps to 8000 or 9000 ft.

The piece of trail along which the high altitude black oaks are located has an unusual exposure which may in part explain why they are there. All morning these black oaks are in the cool shade while across Piute Canyon the eastern slopes of Rancheria Mountain are in the direct sun. However, in the afternoon these oaks receive the full heat of the sun and Piute Canyon becomes an oven. In addition, these trees are sheltered from direct westerly winds by the mass of Rancheria Mountain and from winds from the other compass points by the protective ridges of Cadoza Mountain.



The black oaks are one of Yosemite's best known trees.



### TAKE-HOME PAY

Nor dollars nor cents will ever stay  
 So long as this—my take-home pay.  
 A mountain meadow in floral flam-  
 boyance,  
 Medicine mete for worldly annoy-  
 ance,  
 The sweet pungency of sugar pine  
 dust,  
 Born of swishing cross-cut's thrust.  
 Friendly campfires, large and small,  
 Most with music, some good, some  
 —not at all.  
 Alpen glow on Dana's brow,  
 Then down Conness' scree we plow.  
 The rich twilight hue of sequoias  
 strong,  
 Lost to the madding mid-day throng.  
 The burning eyes of a midnight coon  
 Caught in the beam of a man made  
 moon.  
 Cassiop's bells ringing loud and  
 strong,  
 If not with sound, then a sweeter  
 song  
 Of joy that only those may know  
 Who on a mountain's shoulders  
 grow.  
 Such pleasant thoughts will ever  
 play  
 On mem-ry's stage — my take-home  
 pay.

By Dick Wason,  
 Ranger-Naturalist





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Dan Anderson