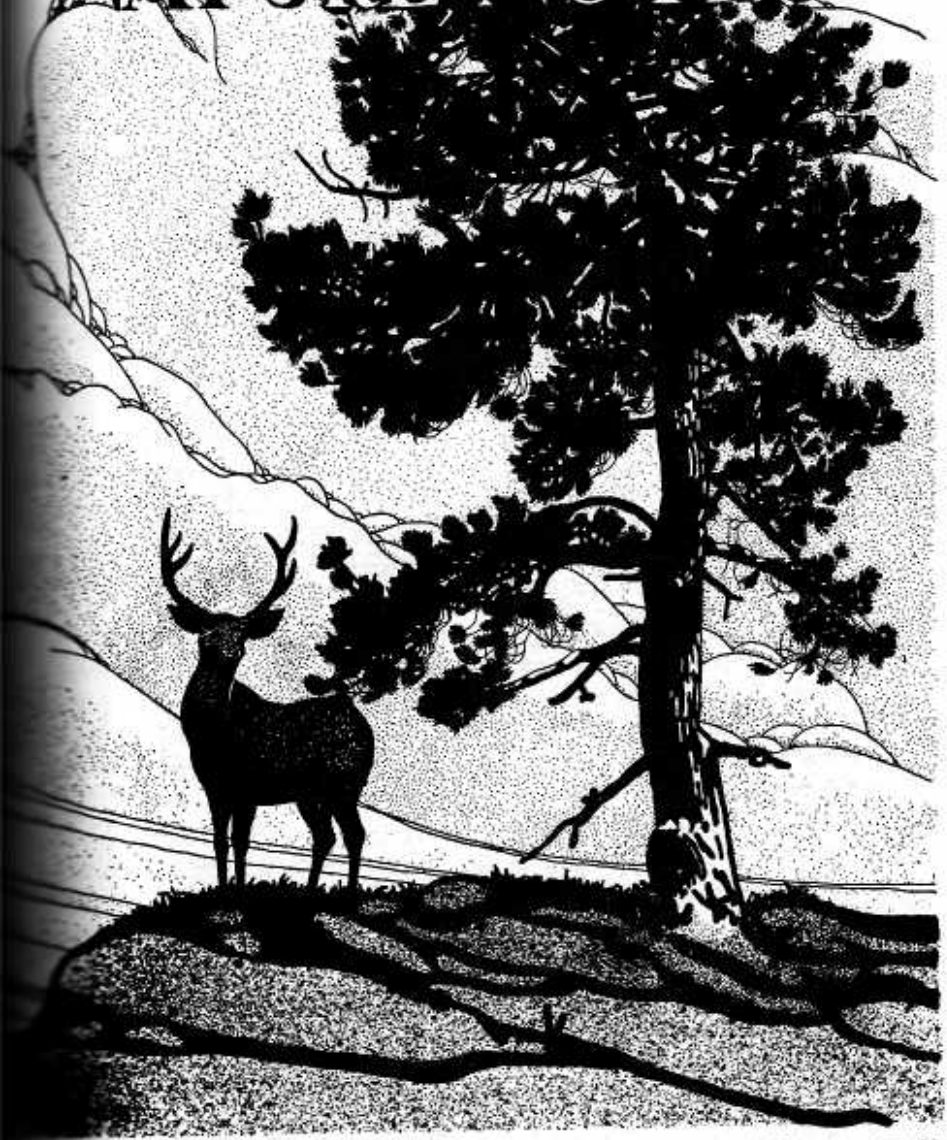
YOSEMITE NATURE NOTES



Volume IV September 8, 1925 Number 16

VACATION-LAND IN OUR HOMES THROUGHOUT THE YEAR

Few of us are fortunate enough to spend more than a short vacation each year in our mountain playgrounds. How many of us, as we stood upon the heights and felt the thrill of fellowship that comes with first-hand acquaintance with the birds, the flowers, the trees and the mountains themselves, have wished that the inspiring influence of these associations could be with us throughout the year in our everyday life.

Our government is doing its part to help us to more thoroughly enjoy and understand our great playgrounds, the National Parks. In Yosemite we find a splendid museum and a corps of naturalists who conduct daily field trips along the trailsides and who deliver evening campfire lectures on a wide variety of natural history subjects. But why should we be satisfied with but an introduction to the trailsides of our beloved Sierra? Is there no way in which we may continue our friendship with the Big Country during each month and each week of the year?

There is a way! Lovers of the California mountains have organized to interpret and present in popular form all of the manifestations of Nature of the Sierras and more particularly of Yosemite National Park. Primarily the YOSEMITE NATURAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION concerns itself with the living things of the Yosemite region; yet it must necessarily be a factor in inspiring a regard for American Wild Life in general.

YOSEMITE NATURE NOTES, which has been published in mimeographed form by the Park Naturalist for a number of years, has been adopted as the official organ of the Association. Cooperating with the government, the Association prints "Yosemite Nature Notes" weekly during June, July, and August and monthly throughout the remainder of the year, each of the twenty-four issues being sent to all members.

If you are one of the hundreds of thousands who love Yosemite, you will wish to keep in touch with her through the Association. There are hundreds of thousands of others who have no conception of the big message of the Out-of-doors. You will want those uninitiated to learn of what the Park has to offer.

Act now! Fill out the enclosed application for membership and mail it with a check or money order for $2.00 to The Park Naturalist, Yosemite National Park, California. Every cent of the $2.00 will be devoted to keeping you in touch with your Yosemite.

YOSEMITE NATURE NOTES

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A MYSTERIOUS FREAK

By C. P. Russell

Park Naturalist, Yosemite National Park

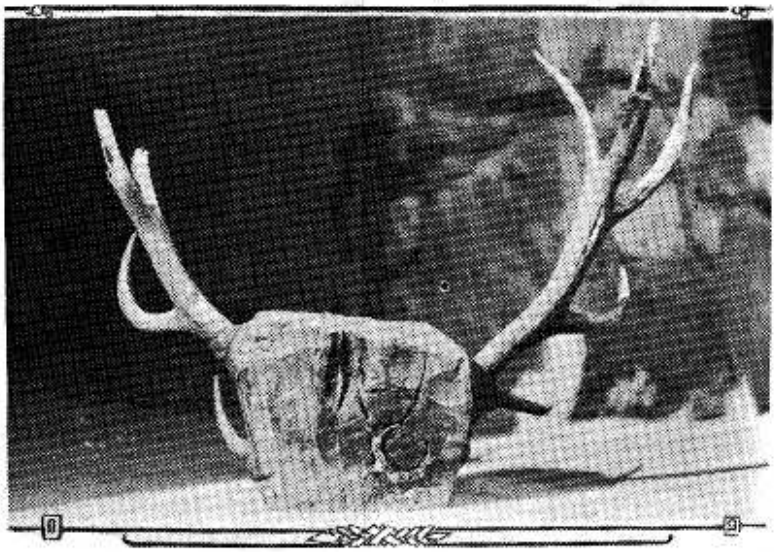
THE ENGULFING tendency of trees has been dealt with in previous articles in "Yosemite Nature Notes," but we believe the prize instance of such tree behavior is here recorded. What would you think should you come upon the massive antlers of a Roosevelt Elk protruding evenly from a growing forest tree? Probably you would at first be doubtful, and like many Yosemite Museum visitors who view the freak, you would declare, "It's a fake." However, one look at the split side of the sectional tree trunk is convincing. The elk skull itself is there revealed, completely imbedded in sound wood. No, it is no relic of man's nature faking.

An Indian woodchopper engaged in the work of felling redwoods near Scotia, Calif., made the strange find. The tree in which the antlers were imbedded was a growing Madrona and the horns were upside down with the tips resting on the ground. It is not surprising then that a portion of the points are decayed—rather the surprise lies in the fact that so much of the perishable structures have remained intact through the hundred or more years since the tree claimed them. Even bad weather failed in their destruction. One would believe that gnawing rodents would have reduced them to ragged stubs, at least.

The tree was chopped down and the section of the trunk containing the antlers was sawed out. One side of the section was split off and the intact skull revealed in the tree's heartwood. Growth rings prove that more than a hundred years has elapsed since the engulfing began.

Did the elk bull entangle his antlers in the fork of the tree? The position of the skull and the condition of the wood would indicate that this is hardly the explanation. Because the antlers were found with the tips resting upon the ground it seems more reasonable to believe that the Madrona, as a seedling, grew from a spot directly under the skull. As it reached upward it's leader found a hole through the bony obstruction and so at first the skull surrounded the tree. As years passed and the Madrona added to its girth and height, the skull was slowly overgrown.

Through the Pacific Lumber Company the department of forestry of the University of California came in possession of the unique relic. This institution generously loaned it to the Yosemite Museum



Slow Growing Oak Encompasses Head of Swift Moving Elk

This buck tackled an oak. Woodsmen have presented to Yosemite National Park Museum this curiosity, the skull and horns of a Roosevelt elk, completely embedded in an oak tree. The elk's skull can be seen in the heart of the tree, the horns extending as if they grew out of the tree. Park naturalists say the tree is almost 100 years old. The elk must have tangled with it when it was a small sapling. Being unable to extricate himself, he died with his horns locked in the tree, and as the decades passed the oak completely surrounded the skull.

—J. V. Lloyd photo.

A HALF MILLION TROUT PLANTED IN YOSEMITE

By H. C. Bryant

ON FRIDAY, July 17, a fish car of the California Fish and Game Commission containing a half million trout fingerlings arrived at El Portal, this being the first shipment for this season to the park. The baby fish were in excellent condition and were quickly moved to their new homes in Yosemite streams. Those claiming the proud lineage of the Rainbow species were sent high into the mountains. Eastern Brook also spent the night traveling by truck to high mountain meadows. More than half of the shipment was placed in the Merced river to care for the intensive fishing to which it is subject. Loch Leven and Brown Trout have helped to improve fishing on the floor of the valley so that even the amateur is able to make worthwhile catches. A visit to shallow water along the river since the plantings were made shows numerous little fish, active and happy in their new home. The dollar angling license contributed by the fisherman makes these restocking projects possible. Another carload is expected later in the season.

DOES A RUBBER BOA CONSTRICT?

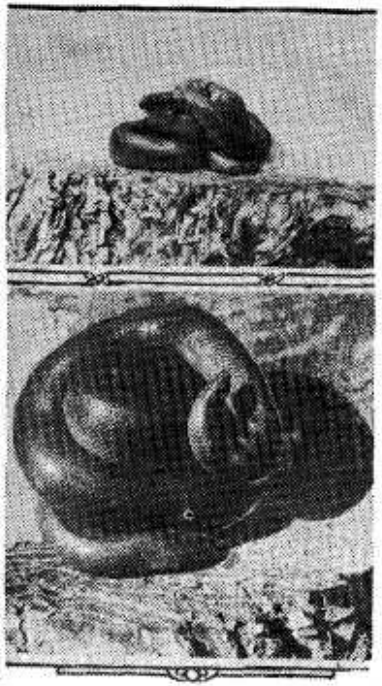
By C. P. RUSSELL

EVERY summer the Yosemite Museum exhibits a number of the little snakes called rubber boas or "double ended snakes" (Charina bottae bottae). They are of more than passing interest for a number of reasons. For instance, they belong to that great family of constricting snakes called Boidae. They are, in fact, the most northern representatives of this remarkable snake family of the tropics; specimens have been found as far north as King county, Washington.

But while their anatomical characters clearly place them among Boas, naturalists at the Yosemite Museum have never noted in them a habit of feeding that would indicate a Boa relationship. Neither have we found a reference to observations on their method of taking food. It was then with considerable thrill that on August 4 the park naturalist witnessed a small rubber Boa swallow a lizard, Gerrhonotus palmeri.

A number of the alligator lizards had been placed in the same cage with the Boas for the lizards were of such size that it seemed impossible that the little snakes could harm them. How the capture was effected remains unknown, but when my attention was called to the proceedings a fourteen-inch Boa held a ten-inch lizard. Life in the lizard was not quite extinct, but the two loops of the snake's body thrown around the lizard's middle left no chance of escape, and no chance of retaining life. Constricted indeed! The muscular contractions of the snake's body caused the front and hind ends of the lizard's body to puff out on either side of the constriction like two attached links of weiner wurst.

As I watched the snake introduced the lizard's snout into its mouth. With much maneuvering the Boa's jaws were dislocated at their junction and the bones of the lower jaw also dislocated at their front ends. Then the impossible happened. The lizard's head which appeared to be twice the width of the snake's head was engulfed. Certainly it seemed utterly impossible that the swallowing could proceed further, for the lizard's body just behind the front legs was puffed out to three times the diameter of the snake's throat. But the surprises had only begun. The Boa's constricting folds loosened their crushing grip and the puffiness of the lizard's body disappeared. With great effort Charina further expanded his jaws and drew in his prey until the front legs disappeared. With astonishing rapidity the body continued to move into the little snake and in ten minutes the hind legs disappeared. There then remained about six inches of slender lizard tail to consume. By gripping this elongated organ with his jaws the Boa actually crawled up the tail and so



A CONSTRICTOR

The Rubber Boa's head and tail look so much alike that the reptile has been termed "Double Ended Snake."

sucked the other reptile further and further into his stomach. He now presented a stuffed appearance, indeed. The entire swallowing process was accomplished in fifteen minutes. With one-eighth of an inch of tail protruding from between his jaws the rubber Boa burrowed into the sand of his cage and there I suppose he will remain until his heavy meal is digested.

Are you convinced that our Boa of the Sierras is as much a constrictor as are his enormous relatives of the tropics?

AFIELD WITH THE NATURE GUIDES

PINE GROSBEAK IS STUDIED BY SCHOOL GROUP

Should a visitor to Yosemite National Park ask where a water ouzel or a rosy finch could be found a nature guide could give directions which would probably help in the finding of the bird. Such directions would not be so easy should one ask for the pine grosbeak. Only occasionally is this bird found. As it is a nesting bird of the timber line belt it is most likely to be seen in or near hemlock forests. Occasionally one is seen in the canyon between Tuolumne Meadows and Glen Aulin near Tuolumne Falls. One was a young bird which called incessantly as it followed its parent. The call was a double note, the second higher pitched than the first, which had the quality of the note of a baby black-headed grosbeak. The fluttering wings as the parent fed assured the crowd that it was a young bird. The pine grosbeak is a heavy-set bird with short, heavy bill and may be easily distinguished from the Townsend solitaire, a bird often seen in similar situations. The red head of the male is replaced by yellow in the female and young.

Nowhere in the Sierra is the pine grosbeak a common bird. For years egg collectors view with each other in a search for the nest and eggs. Finally a San Francisco man located a nest in the Tahoe district near Pyramid Peak. Without really searching for this bird the school group was fortunate enough to find it. The known rarity of the species made the experience the more appreciated. No matter how long a person may be a student of nature there are always more rarities to be searched out and studied. Even to the professional bird student the sight of a pine grosbeak brings a thrill.—H. C. BRYANT.

* * *

BEARS PREPARING FOR WINTER SLEEP

The season of bear gluttony has again arrived. Tourists have not difficulty in viewing bears now for they come in numbers to the bear feeding platform and to the old garbage dump. Not only at night do they make their forays. Early every afternoon they come out from their retreats in the talus slopes and boldly make their ways to garbage cans, the meat market, resorts, camps and dwellings. Visitors who make the trip to the feeding platform are invariably rewarded in seeing numbers of the animals and not infrequently they witness tussels between the beasts, which fights clearly demonstrate that it is no ordinary summer appetite that causes them to forget their manners.

Yosemite bears are gorging themselves in preparation for their long winter feast. Early in December most of them will retire to snug caves in our many rock piles and there they will sleep through that snowy period when food is scarce. Except in the case of mothers with small cubs, they will sleep alone. Their present piggishness results in their accumulating a heavy layer of fat and this surplus of nourishment serves to tide them over until they again may feed.—C. P. Russell.

* * *

A REFINED CHIPMUNK

Many human beings have the idea that the waters of a soda fountain appeal solely to them. That such is not always the case would be gathered from an observation made in Tuolumne Meadows. A Tahoe chipmunk was seen to run eagerly to the edge of a soda spring. There he stopped and reached down to the water level to drink of the strong liquid. After taking a few swallows he licked his mouth with apparent relish and ran away.—H. D. Harlwood

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A CRANE FLY LARVA IN A SODA SPRING

Three living crane fly larvae were found in a soda spring in Tuolumne Meadows. They seemed to be healthy and were of a large species being about an inch and a fourth long. They were of a light brown color with the segmentation clearly defined. In a nearby spring two dead ones were found. Whether the water proved toxic or whether death was due to some other cause could not be determined. It will be interesting to see these larvae become adults, providing that can be brought about.—R. D. Harwood

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THE GRAND CANYON OF THE TUOLUMNE RIVER

Nearly all the visitors to Yosemite Valley are first impressed with the towering cliffs which seem to hang directly overhead and which seem to stand so close together one feel that they might topple down and crush the whole valley. What would be the impression if one were driven directly from the plains to a gorge less than a quarter mile wide and higher by a thousand feet and more than Yosemite Valley's cliffs? The Muir Gorge in the Tuolumne river is such a place and even after spending much time in spectacular scenery in the Sierra one is little prepared for the treat of standing in the bottom there and looking up. The Grand Canyon of the Tuolumne has its waterfalls and cliffs but no meadows. It is a thousand feet higher than Yosemite and so is the natural home of the sugar pine which there grows to tremendous size and beauty. Also the incense cedar is found there abundantly in large specimens which seem to attempt to fit themselves proportionately into the magnitude of their surroundings. It is not far beyond Waterwheel falls where these additional wonders may be found.—David D. Keck.

THE YOSEMITE NATURAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION
ITS PURPOSES

1. To gather and disseminate information on the wild-life of the Sierras.
2. To develop and enlarge the Yosemite Museum (in co-operation with the National Park Service) and to establish subsidiary units, such as the Glacier Point lookout and branches of similar nature.
3. To promote the educational work of the Yosemite Nature Guide Service.
4. To publish (in co-operation with the U. S. National Park Service) "Yosemite Nature Notes".
5. To study living conditions, past and present, of the Indians of the Yosemite region.
6. To maintain in Yosemite Valley a library of historical, scientific, and popular interest.
7. To further scientific investigation along lines of greatest popular interest and to publish, from time to time, bulletins of non-technical nature.
8. To strictly limit the activities of the association to purposes which shall be scientific and educational, in order that the organization shall not be operated for profit.

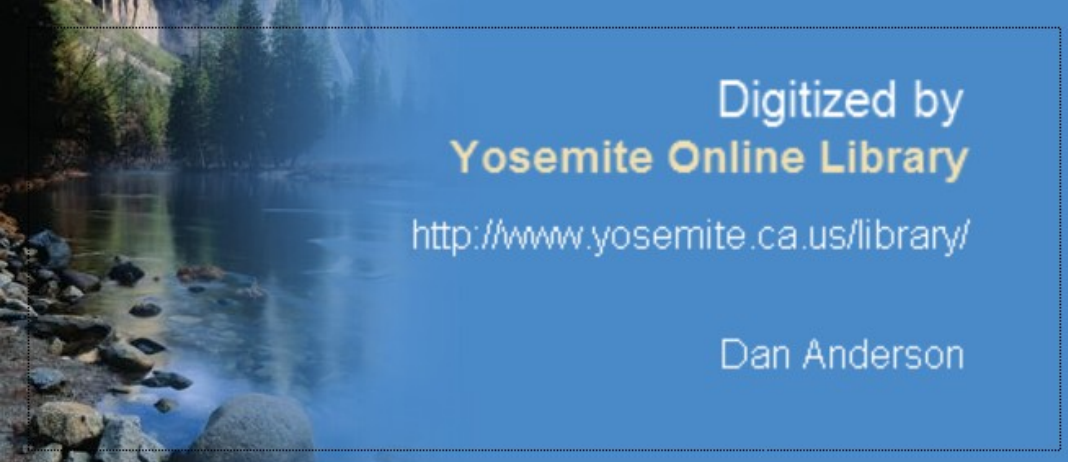
MAY WE SEND YOU EACH ISSUE OF YOSEMITE NATURE NOTES?

Your check for $2.00 sent to the Park Naturalist, Yosemite National Park, will help to pay the cost of its publication for one year and make you a member of the Yosemite Natural History Association for the same period.

FROM THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON OUT-DOOR RECREATION

Called by PRESIDENT COOLIDGE

"THAT THE CONFERENCE ENDORSE NATURE STUDY IN SCHOOLS AND THE EXTENSION OF THE NATURE STUDY IDEA TO EVERY AMERICAN SCHOOL AND FAMILY; . . . . . THAT THE ESTABLISHMENT OF MUSEUMS OF NATURAL HISTORY IN NATIONAL PARKS WILL INCREASE THE EDUCATIONAL RECREATIONAL VALUE OF THE PARKS".—*Resolution of the Conference.*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