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# YOSEMITE NATURE NOTES

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“LEARN TO READ THE TRAIL-SIDE”

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E. P. LEAVITT

Acting Superintendent

# YOSEMITE NATURE NOTES

THE PUBLICATION OF  
THE YOSEMITE EDUCATIONAL DEPARTMENT  
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## YOSEMITE BIRDS IN OCTOBER

*By Selma Werner*

To those who know Yosemite only in the summer time, when its rushing rivers and plunging waterfalls hold the eye, there is sometimes a hesitancy about seeing it at any other season. But they need fear no anti-climax, as I found out in early October when I entered the valley during a light snowfall, the first of the season. The tang in the air, the frost on the ground outlining each tiny leaf and twig, the autumn coloring painting the slopes and the cliffs powdered with snow made me forget the lack of water—in fact everything but the sheer beauty of the place.

Wondering how many of my feathered friends were about, I went on a walk with Mr. and Mrs. Charles Michael, who showed me not only old friends, but new. More subdued were the notes, but we heard towhees and woodpeckers, juncos and white-crowned sparrows, while a Cassin purple finch either completely forgetting the season or too contented in the sunshine to care, gave us an exquisite whisper song.

A list of twenty-seven birds seemed remarkable to me, for in

late July so many had left the valley that our lists were small.

Wandering through the meadow, we saw a flock of birds settle down before us. I stood spellbound. It seemed as if a piece of that gorgeous October sky had fallen into quivering bits of bird life. Can anything be as soul-stirring, as breath-taking as a first glimpse of the mountain bluebird. We saw fifty of them hovering and plunging, posing on the fence posts, fearless, seemingly conscious of their beauty and proud of it. A few Western bluebirds made a charming contrast, but their pose was not so defiant, their color not so daring. For the first time, I realized why the bluebird was chosen as a symbol of happiness.

In the study of birds there is always something unexpected; a new friend appears, or an old one comes out in a new role. It is this which gives it its charm and it never grows monotonous.

My visit to the valley gave me many lovely memories but, just because of them, I envy those who have before them their first glimpse of the mountain bluebird.

## DOE PURSUES COYOTE

By Joseph Dixon

YOSEMITE, Oct. 20.—As we entered Yosemite Valley at 7 o'clock one morning recently we were astounded to see a doe in hot pursuit of a coyote. If the procedure has been reversed, we would have thought the incident perfectly normal, but the rare spectacle of a doe chasing a coyote was a marvel in our eyes. The two animals were encountered as we rounded a sharp bend in the road near the base of El Capitan. The coyote was first sighted running directly across the main highway just in front of

our car, with the doe not over ten feet behind him in close pursuit, with ears laid back and front feet outstretched. We were so close to the coyote that the deer did not have time to cross the road ahead of our car. However, the moment we were past, she again started after the coyote with renewed vigor.

The logical explanation of this episode is that the doe probably had a newly-born fawn hidden nearby, and because of this fact she, in desperation, had attacked and driven off the predatory coyote.

## A STRUGGLE WITHOUT REST

By George M. Wright

Shall the Jeffrey pine atop Sentinel Dome know no surcease from earthly blasts and mortal crucifixion? Must there be ever one more cross to bear?

A monument to endurance and persistence, symbolic of patience and defiance, is this solitary figure; a tree of fame and individual personality, whose pictured likeness graces the walls of many a home. It is beloved of many who may never stand by its bowed head or wonder at the fateful stir of wind among its branches, only to wonder more sigh deeply, too, and, so wondering, scramble back to lower earth again.

The Sentinel pine is the type example of those hardy, mountaineering trees which cautiously rear their determined forms right up against the very timber line in spite of winter's worst—there to give shelter to bird and beast and, ever and again, to the more enterprising

of men.

Root-anchored to a cleft in the granite, with a crouching, sinuous trunk whose every line is beauty born of greatest strength, the lone guardian stretches yearning arms to the Sierra divide and beckons to come on. A weathervane of mute eloquence, it records the prevailing wind of centuries.

A hiker's head looms on the horizon of curving granite. To the tree it is but one more wheezing, puffing conqueror of the dome. To the hiker this tree, yes, this very tree which has defended a throne upon the mountain through the long winters when man has not so much as dared brave the summit, is but another curiosity.

Perhaps the hiker will scramble with cruel spiked boots to the top-most branches, already bent tortuously low with many burdens, and from this vantage wave his puny arms aloft with magnificent ges-

ture. Then he is most like the fabled sparrow. This foolish bird, thinking to win renown in a soaring contest, concealed himself beneath the eagle's pinion and then

Alpiner (who probably climbed all but the last 200 feet in an auto) will proudly inscribe his name in the protective sheath of bark. These are futile acts, thoughtless



overtopped that lordly avian's greatest effort with a few fluttering strokes of his own feeble wings.

Or, perhaps stirred by longings toward immortal fame, the vain

and inspired by vanity. Yet they bid fair to rob this tree of life itself. "National Park" means wild life protection. To the faithful Sentinel, it has thus far meant just one more cross to bear.

## SUMMIT MINING

By F. S. Matthes

3203 Nineteenth street, N. W., Washington, D. C. Carl P. Russell, park naturalist, Yosemite National Park, Calif.

My Dear Mr. Russell: I have enjoyed your recent article in the Sierra Club Bulletin on "Early Mining Excitements East of Yosemite." It is a valuable contribution to the history of the mountain region of which the Yosemite forms

part, and is most entertainingly written.

I was particularly interested because some twelve years ago I came across the old cabins above the Gaylor lakes and also those at the head of Bloody canyon, and I have wanted to know ever since how far back they really date. They are older, I see now, than I surmised.

Near the "Golden Crown," I chanced to pick up an old, weather-beaten signboard that was lying on the ground and that looked, it seemed to me, fully as ancient as the cabins. It was intended to direct people to the Devil's Post Pile, but the miner or early tourist guide who did the painting was neither an artist nor a good hand at spelling, and the effect, in consequence, is ludicrous. And, withal, it seemed to have an air reminiscent of those brave early mining days, so I took it along and expressed it to Washington, wrapped in burlap. It has hung ever since on the wall of my study, where it is to my Boy Scout friends the outstanding treasure of all my collection of curios from the Far West.

The reason why I hold the signboard to be as ancient as the cabins in Mono Pass is that the wood is in a similarly weathered state. It

actually has been worn back, where not covered by the paint of the letters, to a depth of one-eighth of an inch or more, and, as a result, the letters themselves now stand out in high relief. It is painted on both sides, the letters being white on one side and black on the other. Some of the paint is gone, but the letters can still be made out because they are raised.

The Devil's Post Pile must have been known ever since any mining was done in the vicinity of Mammoth; hence there is good reason to believe that by 1880 some sort of trail existed from the "Golden Crown" to the Devil's Post Pile. In any event, there is no doubt in my mind that the signboard far antedates the creation of the Yosemite National Park. I shall now treasure it more than ever.

Sincerely yours,

F. E. MATTHES

## MY FEATHERED DINNER GUEST

By Florence Anne Sumner

My close friendship with Mr. Tanager began one July afternoon shortly after my arrival in the valley. It was wash day, and I was scrubbing diligently at one end of the table. A basket of figs had been left on the other end. There was a slight noise above me, and looking up, I saw a beautiful bird perched on a branch overhead. In another moment he had alighted on the edge of the basket and was greedily pecking at the figs. He had no fear of me; so I decided to make friends.

School work, however, kept me from camp a great deal of the time so that it was not until two or three nights later that we had a

chance to renew our acquaintance. It was on a beautiful evening just at sunset.

With a whirl of wings, Mr. Tanager lighted on the clothes line and, turning his head back and forth, kept his sparkling eyes on my plate as if longing to be invited to dinner.

"Come on," I whispered in an encouraging tone, accompanying my words with a push of my plate farther out on my knees. For I was sitting on the couch in back of my tent enjoying the sunset while I consumed my evening meal.

"Come on," I repeated, and this time leaned back, resting on my elbows so that I could remain quiet

and not frighten my visitor. No other invitation was needed. Mr. Tanager hopped lightly to the ground at the foot of the couch. A second hop brought him to the foot of the bed, and with a third he was on my knee. There he sat unafraid and surveyed the frugal repast laid before him, for I had nearly finished my meal.

His delay gave men an excellent opportunity to take in every detail of his costume. One might have been carried back in thought to the court of Queen Elizabeth, so brilliant was his habit. He harmonized perfectly with the beauty of the sunset and the field of yellow Helianthus in the background. His suit was a glossy black, the vest lemon yellow, and on his head he wore a jaunty cap of orange. I had been told that Mr. Tanager was a gay dresser, being much more brilliantly attired than his wife, who seems to prefer the duller colors. Therefore, I was very glad to have an opportunity for close inspection.

A moment more he paused, for he evidently did not want much to eat, and there was a question in his mind as to which would be the greatest delicacy, jelly, graham crackers, or cream cheese. After a second's consideration, he decided upon the last. With a quick movement, he took a dainty beakful of cheese and, hesitating but a moment, he was off to the tree tops and gone from sight, perhaps taking home the groceries to the family. It was not many minutes before my friend returned, and this time no coaxing was necessary. He alighted on the clothes line and flew directly to my plate. Here he did not hesitate either but took another beakful of cheese and off he flew.

I hoped he would return, but it was several days before I saw him, and never again did he become so friendly, though several times he ate what was thrown to him, and other campers reported visits to their dinner table and pantry.

## MISPLACED BIRDS

By Dorothy Hack

In order that the members of the Yosemite School of Field Natural History would feel perfectly at home, in spite of being at unaccustomed altitudes during their recent High Sierra trip, certain birds, commonly found in the Upper Sonoran zone, decided to take the long flight to the higher altitudes so that these students might recognize a few familiar forms among all the strange ones.

En route to Lost Valley, above the Little Yosemite High Sierra

Camp, on August 3, while passing through a stand of young Lodgepole pines, we heard a call note which was very familiar to those of us from Southern California and the great valley. However, hearing it at this altitude (6200 feet), we all thought we were making a wild guess when we cried, "Western Gnatcatcher," but discovered shortly that we were correct in our guess. Another surprise was in store for us a few minutes later when, in passing a large shrubby



growth of manzanita, what should we hear but the familiar call notes of a small flock of California bush-tits. They were apparently enjoying their surroundings as much as we, for they were making a large amount of noise for a small group of such tiny birds. Grinnell and Storer, in "Animal Life in the Yosemite," record having seen both the gnatcatcher and bush-tit at this elevation, but they are not found there commonly.

While resting at the foot of the cascade which empties into Lake Merced at its upper end on the following day (August 4), we noticed a flycatcher perched on a dead limb overhanging the stream. At casual observation it seemed too dark and large for a western wood pewee, and a closer examination proved it to be a black phoebe. Drs. Grinnell and Storer state that occasionally black phoebes are seen in the Yosemite Valley—and here was one at an elevation of 7100 feet!

And still these were not all the misplaced birds we found on our hike. Imagine the surprise of the members of the group when such a common bird as the Brewer blackbird was found invading the haunts of the leucosticte and white-crowned sparrow. At the base of Mt McClure, on August 6, at an elevation of almost 11,000 feet, a flock of these birds were found feeding in the snow.

In Tuolumne Meadows, near the Sierra Club Lodge, on August 9, a bird was seen in flight which was recognized by some members of the group as a mourning dove. The leader of the party, Dr. H. C. Bryant, did not see the bird and was inclined to be somewhat skeptical, never having seen the mourning dove at such an altitude (8600

feet). However, the possibility of there being a mourning dove as high as that was confirmed when Carl Russell, park naturalist of Yosemite National Park, and George Wright, assistant park naturalist, reported having seen a mourning dove on the preceding day at Boothe Lake (elevation 10,000 feet). A single bird of this species is reported in Grinnell and Storer's "Animal Life in Yosemite" as having been seen at Vogelsang Lake (10,500 feet) on September 4, 1915. These birds are rarely seen in the Yosemite Valley, being characteristically restricted to the Upper Sonoran zone.

A lone great blue heron wandered up to Tuolumne river as far as Glen Aulin and was there observed by a few members of the school. Apparently, the bird had heard of the good fishing in that region. The great blue heron has been seen very occasionally as high as this (7800 feet).

Reminding us that we were about to return to lower altitudes, a western meadowlark was flushed from the grass on the shores of Lake Tenaya (8141 feet) shortly after sunset on August 10. Only one pair had been observed in the valley during the summer, even 4000 feet elevation being too high for this common bird of the great valley.

Here was one braving the cold nights at this altitude. An occasional meadowlark has been seen at Tuolumne Meadows, according to former observations.

Finally, the pallid wren-tit, a bird of the chaparral, was heard on the Snow Creek zig-zags while the group was descending to the valley floor on the last lap of their hike. This bird is found quite often at this point, because of the warmth and chaparral-like growth found on this sun-baked north slope.



## VERMIN CAMPAIGNS

By H. C. Bryant

A leading California sporting goods store has recently advertised under the caption, "The more you hunt now, the more shooting next fall." A picture of a hawk hovering over a quail visualizes to the reader the next lines in the ad, "It's always open season on vermin. It's the vermin, not the shooters, which are making our game birds scarcer each year. Every sportsman and everybody should declare war on these destroyers of birds and eggs, and bowl them over with shotgun or .22 rifle every chance he gets."

To many, such injunctions sound like good advice. Please note, however, that these advertisements appear in spring rather than in the fall, when a man has a right to be in the field with a gun. Picture a man out hunting hawks in spring (when he cannot hunt game because of closed season). Will not the quails' nests he and his dog disturb be a greater loss than the birds taken by the hawks? How about safety for breeding birds and animals? The discharge of guns in game covers in nesting time is

a violation of a fundamental principle in conservation. The game warden's work is greatly increased as a result of such advice, for telephonic reports soon come in that shooting is going on during closed season.

Such advertisements are "wolves in sheep's clothing." They purport to be advice from game conservationists. The real issue sought is a means of selling ammunition during the slack season.

Predatory species have a real use in nature. They should not be black-listed and slaughtered wholesale even if they do destroy game species. Furthermore, few hunters distinguish between good and bad hawks, and violate the law when they kill red-tailed and other valuable kinds.

But whether one defends or maligns predatory species, there is no defense for this move to put hunters in the field during the breeding season. Undisturbed breeding grounds form the best insurance of desired increase.

## YOSEMITE FALLS WILL ONLY BE RESTING

By Lois M. Perry

There comes a time in the experience of every living thing when it must rest, when it must relax and be quiet. The beautiful Yosemite Falls with their happy cascades and their deep plungings are no exception; they, too, often seem to become very still, even lulling themselves into a silent slumber. At midday, during the weeks at the close of a warm, dry summer, when evaporation is at its greatest and when diverting winds seem deter-

mined to disperse the very drops as they descend, the Yosemite creek, as it traverses the floor of the valley, seeks a gentler course. Its song becomes a slow, soft movement, and its source of supply seems to be checked entirely. But with the coming of night and its cooling darkness the stream takes heart, its falls are renewed, and the dawn is greeted once more by the vision of a descending strand of crystal. The falls continue for another day

However, as the autumn days go by, the strain may become too great, the hours of rejuvenation may not be long enough. The falls may fail to reappear with the coming of a new day; then it is that the visitor in the valley must keep his trust in the completeness of the pattern of things. He must believe that in time water-life will return to the granite walls, he must know that death cannot come to a thing so perfect and so lovely as the Yosemite falls. As he awaits their re-appearance, he would do well to search for the shadow of the activity which earlier found such bold expression in the waterfall.

The dark, moisture-stained rock, the smooth, worn surfaces, the deep water-cut basins would tell of the

grandeur of the spring freshet. The fronds of delicately pointing, five-fingered maiden-hair fern, reaching out from high sheltered crevices along the water course would remind the most skeptical visitor that spray had blown there before and that it surely would again. Even in the hollows of the distant valley walls one, by listening closely, might hear a caressing echo of the very boom of the falls in their fullest.

Man, in his brief comings and goings, must keep the faith; he must know that, as the Yosemite falls grow less and less and finally disappear entirely, they are only resting and they will surely return in all good time.—Lois Mayo Perry.

## THE INSPIRATION OF GLACIER POINT

Note—The following lines were composed by a group of several members of the class of 1928, Yosemite School of Field Natural History, and read on July 20 at Glacier Point Hotel as a part of the evening's program. The other guests at the hotel that evening were 165 delegates from Pennsylvania to the Sunday School convention held at Los Angeles

First its rocks,  
And then its flowers,  
Then its birds that sing

An open trail,  
A nature guide,  
Who names each little thing.

A hike each morn,  
A lecture hour,  
The fire-fall from the rim,

Awake our thoughts,  
Inspire our souls,  
All bring us close to Him.

# YOSEMITE NATURAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION

YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK  
CALIFORNIA

YOSEMITE MUSEUM

Dear Friend:

Here are three good reasons why you should become a member of the Yosemite Natural History Association:

1. It will keep you in touch with Yosemite through "Yosemite Nature Notes".
2. It offers you opportunity to secure NATURE MAGAZINE, AMERICAN FORESTS AND FOREST LIFE, or both, at an unprecedented low price.
3. You materially aid a non-profiting Government educational activity (The Yosemite Museum and its attendant nature guide service) when you remit your membership fee.

Please read a sample of "Yosemite Nature Notes", consider our purposes, and don't overlook the benefits of the combination offers with the American Nature Association and the American Forestry Association. Remit by check or money order.

Cordially yours,

C. P. Russell  
Park Naturalist



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Dan Anderson