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# YOSEMITE NATURE NOTES

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"LEARN TO READ THE TRAIL-SIDE"

This is the official publication of the Educational Department of Yosemite National Park. It is published each month by the National Park Service with the co-operation of the Yosemite Natural History Association, and its purpose is to supply dependable information on the natural history and scientific features of Yosemite National Park. The articles published herein are not copyrighted as it is intended that they shall be freely used by the press. Communications should be addressed to C. P. Russell, Park Naturalist, Yosemite National Park, California.

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# YOSEMITE NATURE NOTES

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THE YOSEMITE EDUCATIONAL DEPARTMENT  
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## THE SLAUGHTER OF THE TRUSTING

By C. H. Oneal

Mutual friendliness marks the interrelationships of animals in Yosemite valley. Many years of kindly associations with man has overcome all their instinctive fear. These creatures have come to look upon man as their friend. Aloofness and terror have been replaced by companionship and trust. Under this kindly treatment these animals have increased greatly in numbers. Man should not break this faith.

Men, seemingly intelligent men, sportsmen with a perverted idea of what constitutes real sportsmanship, openly boast of killing these kindly animals. Deer that would eat out of your hand while looking trustingly into your eyes have been slain at the very edge of the park boundaries. Bear that have lost all fear of man, that do man no injury, have been wantonly shot in large numbers as they strayed across the line.

How do these hunters profit? Are they hungry? Do they need fur for clothing? Neither. They are consumed with the lust for blood, coupled with the selfish incentive for the opportunity granted their egotistical recitals of the prowess of their marksmanship. It is vanity. Is it sportsmanlike? It is not. Real sportsmen like to pit their knowledge against that of their quarry; their courage and endurance against those of animals. They like the odds about evenly divided. The odds given by these pseudo-sportsmen is no more than is taken in shooting a milch cow in a pasture. The desire to kill has overcome their intelligence. Their illy begotten, misguided, so called pleasure is in danger of exterminat-

ing some of our choicest friends. Such individuals influenced legislators to remove all protection offered bear. This was done while all true sportsmen and nature lovers were off guard. Bear can now be shot any time of the year just outside the national park. Taking advantage of this laxity, these men have met the bear at the very edge of the park. What is the result? But a fractional number of the bear that formerly delighted the park visitors are now seen. A few years ago as many as sixteen to eighteen bears were seen in a single night at the garbage dumps known as the "bear pits." The most seen this year at one time was five. Can we ignore the "handwriting on the wall?" Is the black bear to be

exterminated, lost to all future generations, as is the case of the grizzly bear, the prong horned antelope, and the mountain sheep? That depends upon all true lovers of nature.

There should be a game reserve around the entire park. While the concentration of animals would always be the greatest in the park, any animals that might wander

outside should be saved. In addition, species such as the black bear that are in danger of being exterminated should be protected at all times by the most rigid laws adequately enforced. In this way our posterity would have the pleasure and enjoyment of seeing and understanding these wonderful animals. Let us give the future generation their rightful heritage.

## THE YOSEMITE CONY

By William C Godfrey

The Yosemite Cony (*Ochotona schisticeps muiri*, Grinnell and Storer) throughout its range is a dweller in the high mountains. The mention of its name invariably brings to mind associations of the bare rock, dwarf tree regions near timber line. Here, among the rocks in the great open patches of broken granite nearly devoid of vegetation and, in most cases, far from water, the peculiar, almost pathetic, cry of this little rock-loving animal may frequently be heard.

The cony, though often called pika and little chief hare, is still more commonly dubbed rock rabbit, for it is structurally allied to the rabbits; yet its appearance is more like that of a rat. Strangely enough, miners of certain districts have come to call conies "starved rats," either because they have thought them emaciated or because of the rather starved appearance, so far as vegetation is concerned, of their habitat. Although possessed of this and that character which likens it to one or another species of animal, the absence of visible tail, the large rounded ears, hunched appearance, odd little bleat, and fascinating antics make the cony an entirely

unique animal, with a picturesque individuality.

Conies are found only in the northern part of Asia, in Alaska, and southward along the higher mountain ranges, where they consistently keep to the rock slides, finding effective protection there among the boulders and debris. In Yosemite National Park there are conies inhabiting the slopes as low as 7700 feet. Thence they range upward to about 12,000 feet altitude.

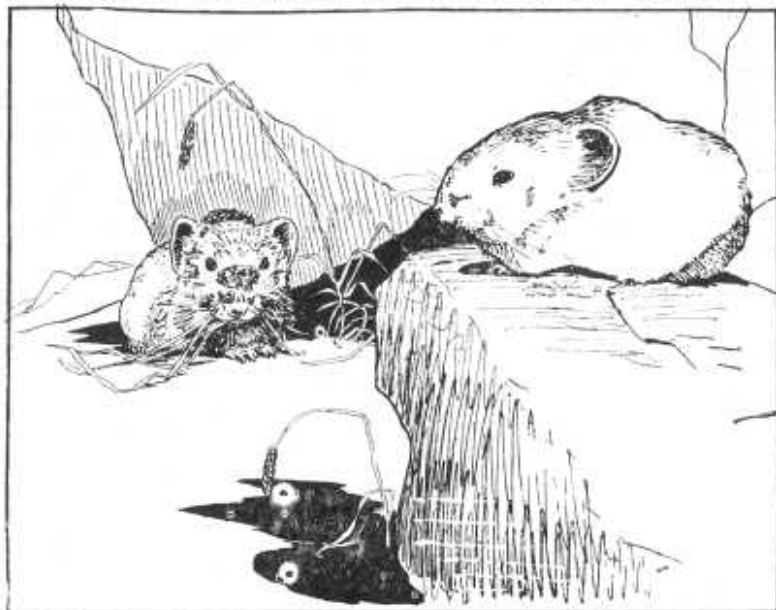
### The Weasels Their Foes

Though bushy-tailed woodrats (*Neotoma cinerea cinerea*) and marmots (*Marmota flaviventer sierrae*) may, on occasion, occupy the same rock slide, there is not any evidence that they molest the smaller rodent in any way. The Sierra pine marten (*Martes caurina sierrae*) and the least and mountain weasels (*Mustela muricus* and *Mustela arizonensis*) are all potential foes of the cony, and, undoubtedly, the weasels, at least, do occasionally make a killing among them.

Where bleached granite boulders, made brighter by contrast with the deep shadows of stunted trees, unfold in beauty before the eye, one may search long and in vain for

the author of a certain strained, bleating call. Though moderately loud, the peculiar, thin quality of the call leads one to look for a small animal. It may be uttered but once again, it may be repeated for ten or fifteen seconds, at first rapidly, then upon first sight of an intruder; more slowly, as if the cony's breath were being gradually exhausted, the last note ending with an almost

tage, the cony can enjoy a wide-angle view of the panorama below and yet in an instant seemingly tumble backward into the shelter of its slide, if it appears advisable. It is in this position that the cony expresses its most rabbit-like characteristics. When its curiosity is aroused, its head is often raised abruptly, its feet shuffled, and its nose wiggled. The movement of



THE YOSEMITE CONY

agonizing squeal. The animal is usually very hard to locate. This is partially due to a ventriloquistic quality of the sound but even more to color resemblance to the rocks upon which it sits. Finally the little creature may be located within a hundred feet of the observer, huddled on the crest of a backward slanting rock, with body usually partly protected by the rock from the direction of the threatening danger. From this position of van-

the head, though, is much faster than that of a rabbit. The cony moves rapidly and with ease about his slide, with apparently no concern for the steepness or smoothness of the rock surface.

At home in the land of shortest growing seasons, with winter conditions prevailing for more than half the year, the cony faces a serious food supply shortage annually. Rather than lie down on the job (colloquially speaking), as many

other alpine species do, by hibernating, it practices similar methods to those employed by the acorn-storing California woodpeckers, the honey bee, and the human farmer. Summer months of industrious preparation are spent cutting, curing and storing away in a dry, well-drained rock barn those plants which grow in the immediate vicinity. Certain grasses and sedges are especially favored in this hay-making. A bushel or so of material may be stored away in one den. Pine needles and twigs are sometimes included in the winter larder, lending to the whole something of the appearance of a nest.

Early morning and evening hours are the busiest outdoors for the cony, these being the around-and-about time for practically all birds and mammals. They are not great travelers and rarely, if ever, are seen to venture farther than a few yards from the sanctuary of the home slide. Choice of storing place is so excellent and the manner of hay-making is such that the plants

have the fragrance of the most carefully cured hay and, more than that, remain with natural colors hardly faded. This speaks well for the factors of ventilation, shade, drainage from below and protection from above.

As in the case of rabbits, the breeding season is a long one, and young may be brought forth almost any time throughout the summer. They are not seen about on the rocks until quite sizable and well able to take care of themselves. Three or four embryos is a common number in this region.

Pleasing appearance, unusual characteristics, and wonderfully specialized mode of life combine to make the Yosemite cony one of the park's outstanding animals. And who could fall at some time, when in the very vortex of the big city, to wish that he might for just a time be a cony, high, high up in the rarefied, pure atmosphere of the mountain, perched on some warm, rocky vantage, with all the world at its feet?

## HETCH HETCHY

by Olive Pye

Since the building of the great dam, from a tourist's standpoint, what is Hetch Hetchy like today? Has a great cathedral been defiled, or did the construction work turn back time to the era when it contained a glacial lake three miles long? Though comparatively few of Yosemite's thousands go there, the trip can be made easily in three and one-half hours one way, taking time to enjoy the forests interspersed with meadows and the Tuolumne Grove of Big Trees.

Leaving the sugar and yellow pines, one comes into the open, five miles below, catching the first glimpse of the valley and lake. In late July the predominating colors are gray and blue—the gray of granite and digger pine and dainty lessingia, the water reflecting the sky. Immediately one is reminded that the lake is man made, the great dam, 226 feet high and extending 118 feet below the surface, blocks the narrow gateway of the Hetch Hetchy, only 900 feet

across. To appreciate the beauty one must turn his back on the dam and look at the cliffs enclosing the lake or down the great canyon.

Hetch Hetchy has had the same geological history as Yosemite—uplift of mountains, stream erosion, followed by glacial action. Like it the varying width of valley and the perpendicular cliffs are due to different degrees of hardness and the jointing of the rocks which have facilitated erosion more in some places than in others. Many famous Yosemite features are duplicated here: El Capitan, the Royal Arches, the North Dome, and there is Wapama Fall, 1700 feet, partly hidden by rocks, and earlier in the year the dainty Tueeulala. The cliffs come down so precipitously to the water's edge that it leaves no room for a trail, and no camping is permitted nearby.

Along the road and in the lower part of the valley the most common tree is the digger pine, for though the floor is only 300 feet lower than Yosemite, the upper Sonoran vegetation has reached its

fingers up the Tuolumne canyon and planted a chaparral composed of manzanita, ceanothus or deer bush, yerba santa, currant, the basket penstemon, and scrub golden oak. Although John Muir speaks of many moisture loving plants such as the azaleas, spirea allspice, and syringa—orchids, lilies and brodiaeas, they have either been destroyed or are found in little canyons now difficult of access. Above the digger pine and golden cup oak belt, the Douglas fir, incense cedar and yellow pine begin, with only a few firs and sugar pines until the rim is reached.

Hetch Hetchy is beautiful today, yet it brings a sense of sadness that people have lost "one of nature's rarest and most precious mountain temples." As the movement to increase the number of state parks is on, let us remember that "everyone needs beauty as well as bread, places to play in and pray in, where nature may heal and cheer and give strength to body and soul alike" (John Muir)

## THE CHERRY HEDGE AND FEEDING BIRDS

by Enid Michael

One of the show places in Yosemite Valley during the late August days is the cherry hedge that stretches across the Kenneyville field in front of the Ahwahnee Hotel. Every cherry bush is heavily hung with great clusters of red ripe fruit. Mixed through the hedge at intervals are wild coffee berry bushes, and these are also loaded with fruit. This morning I sat in the shade with my back against the

trunk of a Kellogg oak and watched the birds that came to the hedge to feast.

The evening grosbeaks, young and old, were here in great numbers. Family groups were scattered from one end of the hedge to the other. These birds seemed to show a preference for the coffee berries, but, as the coffee berry bushes were few in the hedge, many grosbeaks had

to be content with a fill of cherries.

Next in number of individuals on the feeding ground were robins. Attracted by the abundant food supply, most of the robins of the valley were here. Theirs was a mixed diet, for besides the cherries and coffee berries there were fat worms to be had in the field where men were ploughing.

Band-tailed pigeons came for their share of the fruit. These heavy-bodied birds swung like clumsy parrots on the slender cherry branches but, awkward as they were, they appeared to be efficient feeders, for even when hanging head down they had no trouble in swallowing berries.

Out in the field a snarrow hawk was hunting grasshoppers. California woodpeckers were gathering

and storing acorns; between times they found time to play or gossip.

A Cooper hawk came onto the scene, and all of the feeding birds dived to cover. The killer hawk flew into an oak to wait his chance to strike. Save the evening grosbeaks, all of the birds became silent. A wave of squally notes rippled along the hedge, and then in a moment grosbeaks in small groups began to pour into the air. All groups headed in the same direction, and in a few minutes all of the birds were gathered together in the top of a very tall pine. For perhaps ten minutes animated conversation was carried on in the treetop, then suddenly all birds took to the air, and, forming into a compact flock, they winged their way down the valley.

## FRIENDS THAT COME IN THE NIGHT

by Jeannette Parkinson

A few of the guests at the Field School Camp came only at night, when we had to turn the flashlight on them in order to know by whom we were being visited.

One night, on hearing most peculiar footsteps, we turned on our lights and saw a beautiful jumping mouse (*Zapus pacificus alleni*) coming into our outdoor kitchen. He seemed to jump three or four feet at a time, but when suddenly blinded by the gleaming eye of the flashlight, hopped about confusedly, this way and that, in short jerky hops, before getting his bearings enough to make his escape.

Later we heard the leaves rustling in the Azalea thicket and, flashing on our light saw two little spotted skunks, who immediately began a

game of hide and seek, in and out of a squirrel hole not two feet from the foot of the bed. They apparently wanted to hide, but couldn't resist the fascination of the light and kept coming back to see though obviously they could see nothing in our direction.

Imagine our surprise, and might we say, consternation when, calmly waving his plummy tail, out from beneath the bed walked a third member of the family. He joined the others and eventually they all disappeared down the hole.

Again in the night we heard them scratching and digging among the leaves and even wrestling with a salmon can that had been left under the kitchen table earlier in the evening.



## GROUSE FRIENDS

by C. H. Oneal

The pleasure of Glacier Point is greatly heightened by the friendly attitude of the Sierra grouse. Unobtrusive and quiet in their habits, their color blending perfectly with the mottled dark gray shadows of their habitat, their presence would seldom be noticed if it were not for the occasional clucking of the hens or the booming of the cocks. A few incidents served greatly to increase our admiration for these birds.

One evening early in July while sauntering up the Illilouette Trail, we found our progress questioned by a male grouse. He made repeated sallies, dragging his wings in the dust. At the end of each charge, he would stop suddenly, inflate the air sacs on his neck, lift his head and lower his tail, and salute us with a defiant booming. Suspicious that this warlike demonstration had hidden motives, we reconnoitered and discovered about a hundred feet farther up the trail

a hen with chicks just merging out of the downy stage.

Some of these grouse attain a remarkable degree of tameness. Continued kindness and feeding has so overcome their instinctive fear that they will often times eat out of one's hand. As the shadows began to lengthen and the number of people diminished at the "Look-out," an old hen would sometimes alight on the stone wall in front. She was as talkative as any domesticated fowl and kept up a continual clucking. She was given food a number of times but did not seem to be hungry. Presuming upon our acquaintance, I slowly extended my hand and was able to stroke her neck and back. During this process the clucking was accelerated, and no fear indicated.

The gentle, trusting nature of these birds, accompanied by their ready adaptability, no doubt would make them easily domesticated.

## A RATTLESNAKE BANQUETS

by Margaret Byrkit

During the first week of the field school, members of the class brought in a live rattlesnake, captured on the bridge path in back of the new village. The capture was made by means of Dr. Ralph Chaney's geology hammer, a forked stick and a string. After being photographed, the rattler was taken to a cage at the museum.

Mr. Rattler was given an Independence Day banquet. A lively

field mouse was put into the cage, and immediately made himself at home, chewing a bit of grass and when propelled toward the snake, walked over the latter and began to bite the rattles. This aroused the sleepy reptile and, closely observing the mouse, awaited a time for revenge. Suddenly, without even coiling, the snake bit the mouse, causing instant paralysis of the left front leg. The snake struck again

and in a few seconds the mouse was stretched out dead on the opposite side of the cage.

The snake came over to his victim, moved about to secure the most advantageous position and finally dislocated his jaws to permit of the swallowing whole of the mouse, which was taken in head foremost. It required great effort and much motion and further expansion of the jaws to allow the passage of the little animal, but eventually every trace disappeared. During the pro-

cess of swallowing, the mouse remained in the same relative position to the ground, while the snake moved himself around the obstruction, continually upward, until the whole was within his body. Then, with a few additional stretchings, the rattler again sought his corner to await digestion. The entire process of killing and devouring the victim required about ten minutes. Five days afterward the indigestible refuse was disgorged.

## MICROSCOPIC FRESH WATER FORMS

by Dorothy Hack

A muddy, stagnant, evil-smelling pool, left by the Merced river as the water lowers, is apt to be stepped over by the average individual with no more than a very casual glance. An examination of the contents of such a pool would reveal only a few larval forms of insects and Crustacea, and perhaps a stray trout fry or two, left stranded when the water receded. Filamentous green algae would perhaps be present—slimy *Spirogyra* and *Mostoc*. However, by examining under the microscope a drop or two of water from a particular stagnant corner of the pool, a very interesting fauna and flora are revealed.

One-celled animals, Protozoa, and one-celled plants, Algae, are abundantly present. Among the former, very small green flagellates, barely visible under the highest magnification, predominate. They may be readily recognized by their extremely rapid wavelike motion, the flagellum, by means of which they move, being waved back and forth in the

manner of a whip. Among the Ciliates are found *Paramecia*, somewhat smaller than the common form which is found in hay infusions. A *Vorticella*, probably the same species found in stagnant water at lower altitudes, is found sparingly. It is usually attached to minute particles of brown scum. One or two interesting forms closely related to *Euplotes* have been seen, their giant cilia extending from the posterior region of the body being a chief characteristic. With sufficient patience and a good microscope, various species of the *Amoeba* may be found.

Diatoms, those peculiar green algae which have a limy skeleton and which are capable of independent motion, are commonly present. Desmids and other one-celled algae are readily found.

Of the microscopic many-celled animals rotifers are the most easily seen. Microscopic larvae of mollusks and Arthropods are abundant.



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Dan Anderson