

# YOSEMITE NATURE NOTES



The Yosemite Museum.

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## BEAR FACTS

By C. H. Oneal, Ranger - Naturalist

"Bears! Bears!" The shouting of this word never fails to quicken the pulse of the drowsiest camper in Yosemite. Timid ladies shudder and cease their conversation. Men and children appear from all sides to view the mysterious intruder. Admired by many, feared by a few, hated by the camper that has been robbed, the bear never fails to draw attention. The first acquaintance of the average person with the bears is usually somewhat dramatic.

The camp is quiet except for the snores of the men wearied with a day of sight seeing. Bang!! A garbage can has toppled over. Everyone springs to the edge of his bed. Excited whispers are heard everywhere. "Bears! Bears!" Again sounds the magic word. Nearly everyone turns out more or less clad in flimsy draperies. Armed with stove-wood, old shoes, or frying-pans, they advance upon the intruder. Suddenly, someone cries, "There she is." As if by signal the bombardment commences. What chance has the bear. With a

"Whoof" she wheels on her rear quarters and gallops off. Peace has been restored. The garbage has been saved.

As the lights go on at the "bear pits" three hungry garbage eaters are feasting. Quietly and stealthily there appears at the rim of light an enormous bear. Poising a moment to let his august presence be noted he advances. Over-awed the other bears scatter leaving him in possession. He is the champion. But wait—with the greatest unconcern in walks a new visitor. Straight to the choicest morsels he goes without a tremor. He is small, weighing but a few pounds, and possessed of neither bulging muscles nor rapidity. Will he be crushed for his bravery? No! His opponent retreats. A new champion reigns. With his black and white stripes glistening in the light and his plumed tail aloft he eats his fill unmolested.

The actions of bears at times are almost human. A female bear was begging food as I came from the overhanging rock at Glacier Point.

Falling twigs attracted my attention to a nearby tree. There on a limb about thirty feet from the ground was a young cub. Calling to the people adjacent we watched. The older bear advanced to the tree. Evidently suffering from ticks, she gave herself a thorough scratching against the tree, then she looked up at the cub. As if it was a cue, it backed down. Someone remarked, "Wouldn't it be nice if she nursed it." No sooner the thought than the act. The cub started nursing immediately while the mother bear was in a normal standing position. Then the old bear sat on its haunches, holding its front legs aloft. Glancing backward she saw a chance to lie down. In this position the nursing was continued. Partly sliding and partly

pushed by the mother the cub finally nursed from the side with its head on her foreleg. A remark from a young lady describes the process, "Why, she nurses it just like a mother does her baby." The cub's stomach full, they scampered down the hill and out of the way of curious humans.

Bears are living contradictions. They are heavy and seemingly slow, but when properly stimulated they are capable of terrific rapidity. Decile looking and appearing to invite friendship, they in an instant lose this quiet demeanor and may maim a person for life. Powerful, cruel, cunning, temperamental, but withal fascinating and dynamic they hold our attention as no other of our wild animals here at Yosemite National Park.

## YOSEMITE BIRD REPORT FOR FEBRUARY

By Enid Michael, Ranger-Naturalist

The month of February in the Yosemite Valley started off with a golden stretch of spring-like days. Under the warming influence of the sun a thaw came in the land beyond the rim. Waters gathering from melting snowbanks rilled down the sunny slopes to join forces in the granite trough that cradles Yosemite creek. Yosemite Falls came to life and in almost spring-time glory it leaped from its high notch. But still lacking the mighty volume of full spring strength, the waters failed to leap clear and were fountained into a boiling mist mass where they struck the ledge below the notch. Plumed and aerated, this cloud of "water dust" comes leisurely, listlessly, ever floating downward, and yet with all its apparent leisure the valley

is filled with the soothing rumble of falling water.

From 8 until 9 on these sunny mornings Yosemite Falls puts on its supreme show, for then it is that long slanting rays of the sun mingle their magic in the mist. Rainbow colors first bloom in the fountain plume below the notch, then as the sun climbs in the blue sky the colors drift down the veil. In the play of the morning breeze the mist curtain aways back and forth and as the curtain shifts the bridged veil wavers on the wind drift. Occasionally at the whim of some wandering gust a fleece from the curtain is ripped free to float away as filtered gold-dust—gold dust more golden than the pollen clouds that sweep from blooming cedars.

A vision, a dream, a floating column of spun silver veiled in a mist of rainbow hues. Gold-dust sifting at the top, then tints more green than burning copper blend into the deep shades of purple. Slowly the rainbow curtain drops until it fades for the day into the seething vapors at the base of the fall.

February being one of the winter months, we naturally expect at least some stormy weather, but after 16 days of perfect weather we of the valley began to have a feeling that the storm gods were off on a lark. By the middle of the month there was hardly a patch of snow to be found on the north side of the valley, and even on the south side of the river there was much open ground.

On the morning of February 11 in the ceanothus thicket near the feeding station, jays, juncos and towhees were practicing their spring songs. The hard-voiced jays whispered only the softest of love notes and juncos joined in to make a merry spring chorus. Now and then a towhee would tilt his head upward and spill his trill of notes. Two days later the first robins of the year were squealing and chuckling in the oaks. Strangely enough, however, with all this perfect weather, birds were unusually scarce. California woodpeckers and blue-fronted jays were common enough in the oaks about the new village, but a two-hour walk in other sections of the valley would probably not disclose more than a dozen birds, including perhaps six or eight species.

By the middle of the month the gaunt gray cottonwoods were beginning to take on a pink flush throughout their crowns, and the Kellogg oaks, in the distance, with buds swelling on the bare branches,

formed a filmy haze against the background of evergreens. Under the oaks new lawns were spreading faintly green and deer were browsing in the meadows, taking a tonic of spring greens. Other spring indicators were moths, bees and butterflies. The sun-filled days awakened a ground squirrel from his winter sleep. He came out of his burrow on the 16th and he was no doubt surprised to find spring apparently here. A thin covering of frozen snow still lay in patches on the meadows south of the river. In many places a network of ice tunnels could be seen through the glazed snow sheet. Much tunnel work, however, had melted away, leaving bare ground to cross from one snow patch to another; a condition that would just suit that little killer, the pigmy owl, but a most dangerous condition for the tunnel-digging meadow mice.

The cow elk in the paddock were showing their first touch of spring fever on the morning of the 16th. They gambled across the pasture like spring lambs and one old cow that felt particularly frolicsome tried to promote a May dance. She pranced and skipped about among the caves and cows but was unable to arouse the others to the proper pitch of gaiety and so the dance was off. One would hardly expect cows to skip about with any degree of grace, but elk cows are really graceful animals.

The canyon wren that lives in the rock slide back of the barns was in full voice on sunny mornings during the middle of the month.

On the morning of the 18th a ruby-crowned kinglet was sounding his bugle song. And on the same morning the first band-tailed pigeon of the season, was seen

Flickers were numerous for the first time this year and their high-pitched roll of notes were often heard. After weeks of absence the tracks of the little spotted skunk were again to be found in the dusty trails.

February 19, the chain of sun-drenched days was broken. At dawn clouds began to drift in from the west. The sun managed to shine for an hour and then the cloud curtain spread across the sky. All day the gray mantle hung over the valley, but no rain fell until just before dusk. Birds were scarce. A two-mile walk about the upper end of the valley disclosed only seven species, but among these was the willow woodpecker, a bird not previously seen this month.

February 21 was a dull overcast day with very little sunshine. Walked across the valley. From the Sentinel bridge a lone female ring-necked duck was seen. She was a very shy bird. Near Roe island, and then again beyond the island, a willow woodpecker was encountered. On the morning's walk, covering a distance of about three miles, fifteen different species of birds were noted.

February 22, 23, 24, 25, 26 and 27 were cold stormy days with rain falling most of the time. During these days there were times when the ground was white with snow, but the snow that fell was soggy and soon melted away. On the 23d three pipits were seen in the meadow near the elk paddock. Pipits are rare birds in Yosemite valley and they usually appear here during stormy weather.

In spite of the long stretch of fair weather only 33 species of birds were noted— which number is three below the February average of the last 10 years.

#### Summary of Birds Seen

Ring-necked Duck—A flock of from one to nine birds occasionally noted on the river. Only one male in full plumage.

Great Blue Heron—A lone bird noted frequently. Probably present throughout the month.

Band-tailed Pigeon—A single bird seen February 18.

Goshawk—A lone individual on the first day of the month.

Sparrow Hawk—A lone bird noted on several occasions.

Horned Owl—Heard just twice during the month.

Pigmy Owl—A lone bird on the second day of the month.

Belted Kingfisher—Two present throughout the month.

Hairy Woodpecker—We never failed to find one or two birds in the cottonwood groves along the river.

Willow Woodpecker—Rare this month. A lone bird on three occasions.

White-headed Woodpecker—A lone individual present daily about the mouth of Indian canyon. Occasionally lone birds were noted in other sections.

Pileated Woodpecker—A lone male frequently noted.

California Woodpecker—Common in all the Kellogg oak groves on the north side of the valley.

Red-shafted Flicker—No doubt a few individuals present throughout the month, although there were days when we failed to see a single bird.

Blue-fronted Jay—The most common bird of the month.

California Purple Finch—A lone bird noted February 4.

Pine Siskin—In the alders along the river a flock of 25 birds was noted on several occasions.

Slate-colored Junco—A lone individual frequently seen with the flock of Sierra juncos.

Sierra Junco—A flock of about 40 birds present daily about the mouth of Indian canyon. Another small flock near the barns. Seldom noted elsewhere.

Sacramento Towhee—Five birds present daily at the mouth of Indian canyon and three or four near the zoo.

Audubon Warbler—Three birds noted on the first day of month.

American Pipit—Three birds found feeding in the Sentinel meadow on the morning of February 23.

Water Ouzel—Possibly a lone bird present from the eighth until the end of the month, but there were days when we failed to locate him. Heard singing beautifully on February 23.

Canyon Wren—Rare this month. Possibly a few individuals present throughout the month. One bird heard in full song.

Sierra Creeper—Present daily. Individuals likely to be found in any section of the valley.

Red-breasted Nuthatch—Probably a couple of pairs present throughout the month.

Mountain Chickadee—Present throughout the month, but in varying numbers. February 3, fifty were seen and again about this number on the last day of the month. The average number noted on a day was perhaps six.

Ruby-crowned Kinglet—Lone individuals noted almost daily, but at no time were more than a few individuals noted.

Golden-crowned Kinglet—Present daily. Flocks of from 10 to 12 birds likely to be seen in any section of the valley.

Townsend Solitaire—A lone bird noted February 6.

Western Robin—A few individuals found their way into the valley during the stretch of perfect weather.

Varied Thrush—A beautiful male bird was seen on the last day of the month.

Western Bluebird—At least one flock of 10 birds present throughout the month. Possibly two or three flocks.

It was a cold morning in Yosemite Valley and all the pools and streams were frozen over. When we stepped out of the house we found a little flock of Western bluebirds flying about the building next door. The birds were acting in a strange manner. Each bird in turn would drop down from the roof and then on fluttering wings would hover under the eaves. At first we were at a loss to understand this unusual maneuver, but after watching for a few minutes we discovered the object of their strange behavior. The bluebirds were thirsty and they were hovering under the eaves to sip a drink from icicles that hung clustered from the drip of the roof.

Often we have seen deer munching snow and once we saw a bear licking the ice on the frozen river margin, but this was the first time that we ever saw birds drinking from the end of an icicle.



## YOSEMITE'S SKY ROOF

By Clifford C. Presnall, Ranger - Naturalist

Yosemite Valley, with its carpet of wild flowers, its granite walls from which are hung draperies of spray-whitened falling water, and its polished domes and cloud-piercing spires is so commanding a spectacle as to make the observer forget the beauty of the sky that roofs this outdoor temple. The very perfection of a California sky tends to dull our appreciation of it; its typical clearness is a modest virtue which is not realized until clouds blacken it, or, more often, emblazon it with the flaming tints of sunrise and sunset. Here in Yosemite, however, we see only a small part of the sky. Most of the morning and evening colors are hidden behind great canyon walls rising on all sides, and it is only occasionally that the beauty of the sky transcends that of the valley.

Such an occasion was noted by several persons on the evening of January 27, when the air was unusually clear after the storm of the

preceding days. Just as the blue-gray light of evening was disappearing in the notch to the west, between El Capitan and Cathedral Rocks, the eastern sky was painted with the deepest turquoise blue—such a blue as is sometimes seen in Crater Lake, or in Parrish painting. Against this dark yet vivid background there stood out in vigorous contrast the gray bulk of Half Dome, its noble lines sharply defined by the glistening white of freshly fallen snow. Above the dome the first stars of the evening shone with a frosty brilliance, like exuberant snow crystals that hesitated to join their brothers resting on the mountains beneath them.

Gazing in awe at this heavenly beauty, the greetings of a passing friend seemed to come from another world—a prosaic, gasoline-scented world which for a few minutes called in vain to me, worshipping at the beautiful shrine of nature.

## STATE GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

By R. H. Rose, Ranger - Naturalist

The announcement of a recent act of the California State Legislature which provides for the establishment of a new geological survey should meet with the hearty approval all who are interested in the national parks of California. The new organization is known as the geologic branch of the State Division of Mines and is under the direction of Olaf P. Jenkins, geologist.

Those of us who have been as-

sociated with geologic exhibits, field and lecture work in the national parks of California realize how difficult it is to find literature or early geological studies in the national parks and vicinity. Such information is needed in order that an adequate historical background may be supplied. The geologic branch is publishing as its first bulletin an extensive bibliography of the geology of California which will serve as a guide book to avail-

able geologic information. The publication is now being prepared by Dr. Solon Shedd, curator of the Branner Memorial Geological Library at Stanford University.

Progress in educational work requires that ranger-naturalists present not only the geology of the isolated regions comprising the parks in which they are doing work, but also that they show clearly the relationship between the geological history of the parks and that of the Cordilleran region as a whole. Audiences will have greater appreciation for lectures that are prepared with this broader perspective in mind.

The geology and topography of Yosemite and the other national parks of California will be beautifully shown in their relationship to the geologic and topographic features of the state as a whole, as soon as accurate maps now in course of preparation are completed.

California had an active geological survey which was created by an act of the State Legislature in 1850. The pioneer survey was under the direction of J. D. Whitney, for whom our Mt. Whitney was named. It is hard to appreciate the difficulties under which the old survey labored. The Golden State was not traversed by the network of rapid-transit lines as it is today. Traveling was done for the most part by stage coach, horseback or on foot. Accurate and detailed work was not possible under such handicaps. However, we owe a great deal to the men of the pioneer survey for laying the foundation for the vast amount of splendid work that has been done since its time, more particularly during the past quarter of a century. In the days of the pioneer survey, gold mining was pro-

ductively the only industry of importance in California. The commendable scientific accomplishment of Whitney and his capable staff was not looked upon with favor by the gold mining interests, which strongly influenced the Legislature of that day, and the pioneer survey was abruptly discontinued in 1874.

In 1880 the State Bureau of Mines was created by an act of the Legislature. A museum containing a comprehensive collection of minerals of the state, models and drawings of mining machinery, and a library of works on mineralogy, geology and mining were the important features of the new organization. The headquarters of the bureau and its various departments are located in the Ferry building in San Francisco. The creation of the Geological Survey of California is a move on the part of the State Legislature that is in harmony with the progressive spirit of the great state of California. The Legislature is to be commended upon making this far-sighted move.

The new survey, now organized as the geologic branch of the State Division of Mines, is in its infancy. The initial appropriation of \$20,000 for the biennium is very small. This amount must be materially increased before the survey can accomplish the important work before it. To every dollar the state of California expends in geologic field work and mapping, the United States Geological Survey adds an equal amount. Our national survey is one of the most efficient and thorough going scientific organizations in the world. Their "fifty-fifty" technical and financial assistance to the California Geological Survey will mean much.

The active co-operation of the National Park Service toward the



success of the new organization will be of great benefit. The new survey will be of immense economic and scientific value to the people of the state. By the establishment

of this survey California has proved to the world her willingness to contribute toward the advancement of science.

## BLACK ANTS AS FIRE FIGHTERS

By F. S. Carl, Ranger

According to my observations of big black ants, they are the most proficient fire fighters to be found, and it would pay the majority of us to study them more closely as to their habits.

Last summer Jack Moody and I were on a patrol trip in the southeastern part of the park. On our way home we came over the Merced pass trail and came to a little meadow where there was good horse feed and water, so we unpacked our horses and proceeded to have lunch. While eating we noticed a big black ant hill. Upon lighting a cigarette after lunch I threw the lighted match close to the hill. We were surprised to see about 50 ants start for the fire and jump right into it, the ants kicking and biting. While this was going on, the others kept right on with their work as though nothing un-

common was happening.

I then threw my lighted cigarette, which was a "taller made" one, in about the same place where the match was. The ants attacked this in larger force than they did the match, and biting, and kicking with their feet they completely destroyed the cigarette. Some of them were burned to death, while others were burned so badly that they would kill each other. But for every one that was killed or disabled there was another to take his place.

After the fire was out they sent "men" out to pick up the dead, just as if it were a battlefield. All this took place in about half an hour, so you can see they have a well-trained organization, which includes fire-fighting and everything. What struck me was the orderly manner in which this was handled.

## YOSEMITE

If I could paint these scenes I see  
On God's broad canvas, spread for  
me;

These cliffs, which tower in awe-  
some might,

Those distant peaks with snow-  
crown white,

Rock domes which grace His temple  
vast,

Clear streams, in beauty unsur-  
passed,

Which tumble from the Valley rim  
Or chatter down through canyons  
dim,

These scenes of lake and rock and  
tree,

Their wonder and their majesty:

If I could paint you what I see  
Eternal fame would come to me.

If I could speak these sounds I hear  
And bring their music to your ear;

The whisper in the pine tree tall,  
The cadence of the waterfall,

Some hidden songster's cheerful note,  
The mating call from robin's throat,

The scolding of a saucy jay,  
The chatter of a chipmunk gay,

The murmur of the clear Merced,  
The aspens quivering overhead;

These sounds which Nature brings  
to me,

You'd hear as Heaven's own sym-  
phony.

Floyd E. Dewhirst.



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Dan Anderson