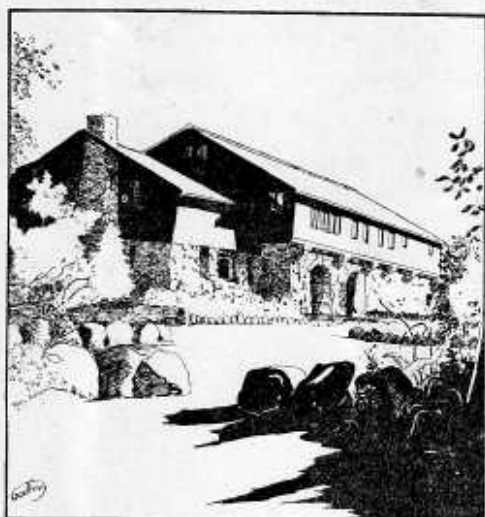


YOSEMITE NATURE NOTES



The Yosemite Museum

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Department of the Interior
Ray Lyman Wilbur, Secretary
National Park Service
Horace M. Albright, Director

YOSEMITE NATURE NOTES

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Albright's Efforts Save Yosemite Timber

By JAMES V. LLOYD

Assistant Superintendent Yosemite National Park

YOSEMITE, June 21.—With the payment of \$293,685.15 to private interests recently by John D. Rockefeller Jr. and the United States, 12,000 acres of the finest yellow and sugar pine forests in the West passed to government control and became an important part of Yosemite National Park, located on California's eastern boundary. This transaction marked the largest single purchase ever made in connection with a national park. It saved the Tuolumne and Merced groves of Big Trees from an ignominious isolation, certain to follow with the threatened cutting of the nearby forest lands. The purchase of the 12,000 acres brought to an end a protracted fight to preserve the Yosemite timber.

Director Horace M. Albright of the National Park Service first directed public attention toward the menace of the woodman's ax destroying the virgin forests of the park. He interested Congressman Louis C. Cramton of Michigan in

securing the passage of a federal regulation permitting the National Park Service to buy private lands within the boundaries of a national park, provided some citizen would be willing to share half the purchase price with the United States. A second bill passed by Congress gave the government the right to condemn all private holdings in the parks.

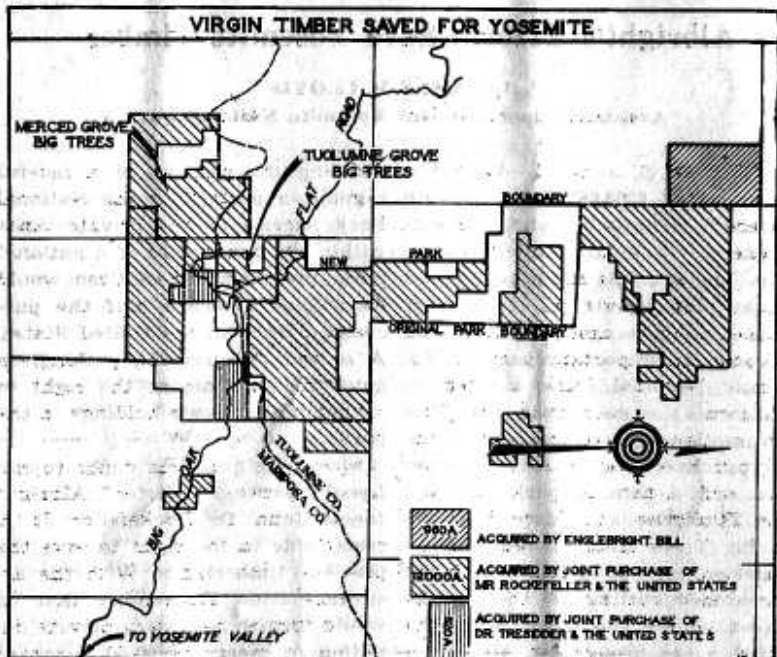
Already a generous donor to national parks, Director Albright found John D. Rockefeller Jr. a ready aide in the fight to save the precious timberlands. With the assurance from Rockefeller that he would furnish necessary private donation to meet the 50-50 purchase provision of the law, Director Albright and Congressman Cramton redoubled their efforts to secure the needed funds from the government. An appropriation of \$1,649,342.57 by Congress followed. With a like sum contributed by Rockefeller, the delicate negotiations for the acquisition of the valuable forests were brought

to a speedy conclusion.

Commenting on the purchase of these lands, Secretary of the Interior Wilbur recently said:

"The nation as a whole and particularly future visitors to the Yosemite owe a debt of gratitude to John D. Rockefeller Jr. and to the members of Congress, particularly Representative Louis C. Cramton of Michigan, who were so far-sighted and patriotic to make possible this

officials to be of vital importance to the future public enjoyment of Yosemite. Tresidder is largely responsible for the modern hotel and camp resort development in the park that serves 460,000 visitors annually—at all seasons of the year. The cost of these private land purchases involving only 12,000 acres is an index of the enormous value of the 728,000 acres now constituting Yosemite National Park.



saving of national beauty."

This outstanding forest contribution by Rockefeller has been somewhat paralleled by Dr. Don Tresidder, president of the Yosemite Park and Curry Company, public utility operators in Yosemite. He recently joined with the National Park Service in the purchase of 520 acres at Gin and Crane flats, inside of Yosemite National Park and along the Big Oak Flat road. These lands are considered by national park of-

The third land acquisition made for Yosemite recently came with the passage of Congressman Harry L. Engelbright's bill, adding 980 acres of government land to the park. The administration of this area by the National Park Service is considered of paramount importance in the building of the new Crane Flat-Hetch Hetchy road, now being surveyed for early construction.

Evidence of an Old Indian Trail Located

By ASSISTANT CHIEF RANGER J. H. WEGNER

Returning by way of the Big Oak Flat road from an inspection trip through the Crane Flat district this spring, the ground became sufficiently bare after leaving Tamarack Flat to allow travel without the aid of snow shoes. After strapping these to my back and while stepping blithely along in one of the bare spots near the west fork of Coyote creek, my attention was attracted by some flakes of obsidian lying scattered about along the roadside. This immediately aroused my curiosity, as Indian rancherias are rather an exception in a purely fir type forest. This naturally called for a little further investigation, which soon disclosed the acorn grinding mortar holes on a neighboring granite boulder. This, of course, definitely established it as one of their camp grounds.

After some reflection on the unusual location of this camp, I observed that it was directly on the path of the trail used by the first white men who crossed the mountains to the Mono Lake side. The general course of this old trail, I have been told by some of the real old-time stockmen who used to range throughout this area, was from Anderson valley to Hazel Green, Big Meadows to Tamarack creek, and then over Lightning Ridge (so named because lightning at one time was said to have killed a large number of sheep there), down what is now known as Blue Jay creek, into the Yosemite creek canyon, crossing the creek at the second sand bar, which is approximately two miles above the falls.

These reflections lead to the more or less logical deduction that if the

first white men crossing the mountains from west to east used the Indians' through trail, would it not be reasonable to suppose that Captain Walker, on his expedition across the Sierras from Mono lake to the San Joaquin valley in the year 1833, would have done exactly the same thing from the starting point on the east slope?

These deductions are strengthened further by notes in the diary of Captain Walker's secretary, recently brought to public attention in articles written by Francis Farquhar, a prominent member of the Sierra Club and an historian of note, in which mention is made that some of the party doing scout duty came upon a deep valley with vertical walls down which there was no possibility of descending and into which plunged tremendous waterfalls, the depth of the valley being so great that the water disappeared from view before landing on the floor below. "Certainly a likely impression of anyone viewing the valley for the first time from the top of Yosemite Falls."

Another note in the diary mentions that the party came upon a group of trees with cinnamon colored bark, immensely larger than any of the surrounding forests.

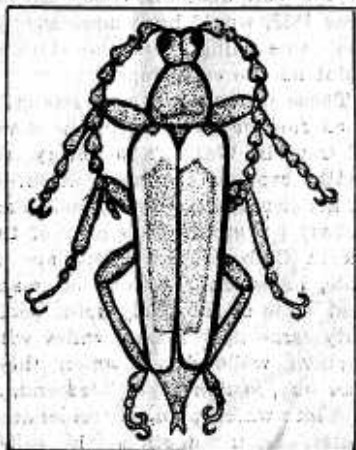
With the trail location known at the point crossing Yosemite creek a rancheria (reported by old sheepmen) on Lightning Ridge, and the known locations at Coyote creek, Big Meadows and Little Nell Falls, it could reasonably be imagined that the Walker party may have traveled that route and were the first white men to see the Meiced Grove of Big Trees

The Golden-Winged Elder Borer

By LOIS M. BALLOU

Student Field School

The most colorful and one of the largest insects of the Yosemite National Park, excluding the lepidopterus group, seen by the Field School of Natural History during



the past summer, was the golden-winged elder borer. This beetle, scientifically known as *Desmocerus auripennis* Chev., was first seen on the elderberry (*Sambucus glauca*) while nearing the top of the Yo-

osemite Falls. One week later it was observed while hiking down the Pohono Trail.

According to E. O. Essig, "The larvae live two years and mine the trunks and limbs of the living red and blue elderberry in the High Sierra of California and Nevada. The larvae enter wounds and scars and mine into the pith. Sometimes they kill the limbs and smaller branches." (1)

The wings of the beetle are predominantly a very brilliant orange color, thus the name "golden-winged elder borer." The body, with the exception of the wings, is shiny black and varies in length from 23-28 m. m. The females are distinguished from the male by large blue-green blotches on the wing covers outlined by orange. The borer has long curled and many-jointed antennae. The accompanying illustration gives one an idea of the form and pattern of the insect.

(1) Essig, E. O., *Insects of West, North Am.* p 454-1926.

The Knobcone Pine at El Portal

By ENID MICHAEL

Ranger-Naturalist

In the Yosemite National Park the pine tree family is represented by eight species. In former years the pines had nine representatives in the park, but when the western boundary of the park was moved eastward, one of the most interesting pines was thrown out of bounds

and left without protection. This pine is the knobcone pine (*Pinus attenuata*).

In George B. Sudworth's "Forest Trees of the Pacific Slope," 1912, the author quotes a questionable record of the knobcone pine in Yosemite National Park. For years

there has been more or less speculation among those who happened to be interested as to whether this pine had ever been found within the confines of the park.

This question was recently settled when a party from the Yosemite Museum discovered two fine specimens of the knobcone pine growing on a flat between the El Portal station and the Merced river. The altitude here is 2000 feet. These two trees approximately 45 feet tall were about 100 yards apart and were growing in association with

Pinus ponderosa and *Pinus sabiniana*. The knobcone pine is a fire type pine—a pine that does not ordinarily shed or open its cones unless swept by fire. The cones persist on the branches for many years, sometimes even becoming embedded in the wood of the tree. It was cones densely clustered along the branches that attracted our attention to the tree. A specimen of branch and cones was collected for exhibit in the tree room at our Yosemite Museum.

Bird Intelligence

By Enid Michael, Ranger-Naturalist

Blue-fronted jays are certainly wise birds. The blue-fronts are those handsome-crested jays, but with all their beauty they surely use their heads for other purposes than merely to support a jaunty head-dress. They have logical minds; they can reason and remember.

It happened to be my good fortune to get very well acquainted with a certain pair of these jays. In the spring of 1929 when they decided to nest they chose as the nesting site a cedar bough about six feet above the ground. Where the branchlets spread from the main stem of the bough they laid a foundation of course twigs. These twigs were not picked from the ground, but broken one by one from manzanita bushes growing in the neighborhood. Each twig was carefully selected so that when placed it would dovetail nicely into the structure. The foundation was bound together and lashed to the branch by bits of cotton string.

One morning when I came out

of the house to see how the jays were progressing with their nest I found Lady Jay tugging at a piece of string that had become entangled in the branches of the cedar. To help the jay out I went into the house and got some cotton waste which I shredded and tossed on the ground under the cedar. The jays were quick to take advantage of my offering, and during the construction of the nest the cotton waste was incorporated into the frame of the structure and also into the nest cup.

About the time the nest began to assume the aspect of completeness there came a heavy downpour of rain. For two days the jays of the pair took turns hovering the nest to protect it from the downpour. The nest, however, and especially the cotton waste became more or less moistened. Now this is the truth: When the storm was over and the sun came out, the lady jay actually pulled the nest partly to pieces and hung the cotton on a branch to dry. When the waste

was dry the jay constructed her nest, laid her eggs and reared her family.

While the jays successfully reared their family, their choice of nesting site was not altogether fortunate, as thoughtless and inquisitive humans came to pull down the branch and pry into their family affairs. The jays, however, being intelligent birds, lost nothing by the experience with the meddling humans, as being clearly demonstrated this season.

This year the jays are building high up in the cedar, beyond the reach of prying humans. The morning of April 6 I was once more thrilled with admiration of their intelligence. When I stepped out to interview the jays I found them pulling last season's nest apart that they might again utilize the cotton waste in binding their new structure together. To show my friendliness and appreciation I supplied fresh cotton waste to line the nest cup.

The Yellow-Headed Blackbird Visits Yosemite

By Clifford C. Presnall, Ranger - Naturalist

The yellow-headed blackbird (*Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*), while a common summer resident of the San Joaquin valley, is an accidental transient in the Yosemite region. Its presence in the valley this spring was therefore the cause of much interest among local ornithologists.

On May 8, Ranger Homer Hoyt noted a peculiar blackbird near the park headquarters, but did not identify it. The next day Charles Michael identified the bird as a female yellow-headed blackbird. Several other persons observed and photographed the bird at that time. It was evidently very tired and hungry, feeding very industriously on the ground and refusing to fly when approached. Apparently it had been blown from its usual migra-

tory route by the severe and protracted storms of the previous fortnight.

Michael recorded the bird on three days—May 9, 10 and 11. On the last date he saw another female and a young male of the species in front of the postoffice.

During the last 13 years there have been but two other records of yellow-headed blackbirds in Yosemite National Park. In the spring of 1917 a male in full plumage was taken near the Sentinel Hotel by Chief Ranger F. S. Townsley. Chief Townsley mounted this bird and exhibited it in his collection for several years. The other instance was an observation by Herbert Sonn in the spring of 1925 near the site of the Ahwahnee Hotel.

YOSEMITE BIRD REPORT FOR MAY

By Enid Michael, Ranger - Naturalist

In Yosemite valley the month of May was not what might be called a spring-like month. Eleven days

out of the first 16 brought either rain or snow, then followed a stretch of fair weather, but the

month came to a close with two more stormy days. At the end of the first week the thermometer dropped to 25 degrees and many of the flowering plants were badly frost-bitten. Snow plants, budding oaks, dogwoods and ferns suffered greatly.

The birds, however, suffered but little from the cold, inclement weather. Those birds that nest early mostly tuck their nests way in holes and crevices where they may snugly weather the storms. Of all the early nesting birds only the hardy blue-fronted jay nests in the open, and usually his large well-built nest is sheltered in heavy foliage. The ouzel builds a snug waterproof nest and anyway water ouzels do not mind a little moisture.

During the month the following

birds were noted feeding young: Hairy woodpecker, white-headed woodpecker, California woodpecker, blue-fronted jay, water ouzel and Sierra creeper.

As usual the lazuli bunting was the last of the summer visitants to arrive. The wood pewee arrived a full week behind his normal schedule, while the trail flycatchers, who are always next to the last to arrive in spring came in this year just two days behind the wood pewees.

Glancing over the May bird reports for the last 10 years the feature that stands out is not the unusual things, but the usual. In other words, it is most remarkable how nearly the average run of bird activities approximate an absolute normal.

SKUNK AND BEAR EAT TOGETHER

By Clifford C. Presnall, Ranger - Naturalist

Skunks are very independent creatures. Bears are equally self-reliant. When the two come face to face the unexpected is likely to happen. It did, one evening in mid-April, at the bear feeding platform below El Capitan, when a lone skunk outmaneuvered five bears.

There were five of the larger animals at first, but all quit the platform and retired at the advance of the enemy, leaving the skunk free to do as he wished. Being a gentleman, he wished to wash his face and hands before going to dinner.

While *Mephitis occidentalis* was refreshing himself at the river, by bathing and drinking, three of the bears returned to the feeding platform to resume their interrupted meal. Two were completely van-

ished this early in the engagement. One big, black fellow stationed himself in the middle of the platform and with menacing looks and low growls kept the two smaller ones at the edge.

The leisurely return of the skunk caused these two to retreat still farther, but did not seem to give the big bear any cause for worry. For a quarter of an hour the skunk prospected around among the debris which the bears had scattered to one side of the platform, but he did not go near the black bear, who continued to feed alone.

Presently one of the small bears, perhaps a two-year-old, came slowly out of the bushes and cautiously approached the skunk. He moved very slowly until within a few feet

of the skunk, then stopped for 10 or 15 seconds, and then suddenly jumped backwards and ran for cover. He did this three times. Owing to the poor light, it was impossible to see what the skunk did. In fact, it was impossible to see it at all except when its eyes caught the light from our automobile headlights.

Soon after 9 o'clock the skunk moved up the platform on the side opposite the black bear. The bear ceased eating and watched the skunk closely, but did not move away. Our lights now illuminated the platform very well, so we were able to watch proceedings closely. The skunk paid no attention to the bear, but started eating immediately, keeping its tail high in the air all the while.

This danger signal seemed to bother the bear. He moved restless-

ly about on the far side of the platform for five minutes, then settled down to eating again, stopping often to look at the skunk.

We watched this strange pair for 20 minutes without noticing any active hostilities—each one kept to his own corner of the platform. Once the nervous strain seemed too much for the bear and he started to leave the platform. He stopped and looked intently at the skunk, apparently questioning the upraised tail, which is known to all animals as the skunk's final warning.

The otherwise placid demeanor of the skunk seemed to reassure bruin, and he soon resumed eating. No other bears appeared on the scene, however. Apparently the combination of the biggest bear in the valley and the boldest skunk was more than they cared to face.



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 authoritative 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. Correspondence should be addressed to C. A. Harwell, Park Naturalist, Yosemite National Park, California.

C. G. THOMSON

Superintendent



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Dan Anderson