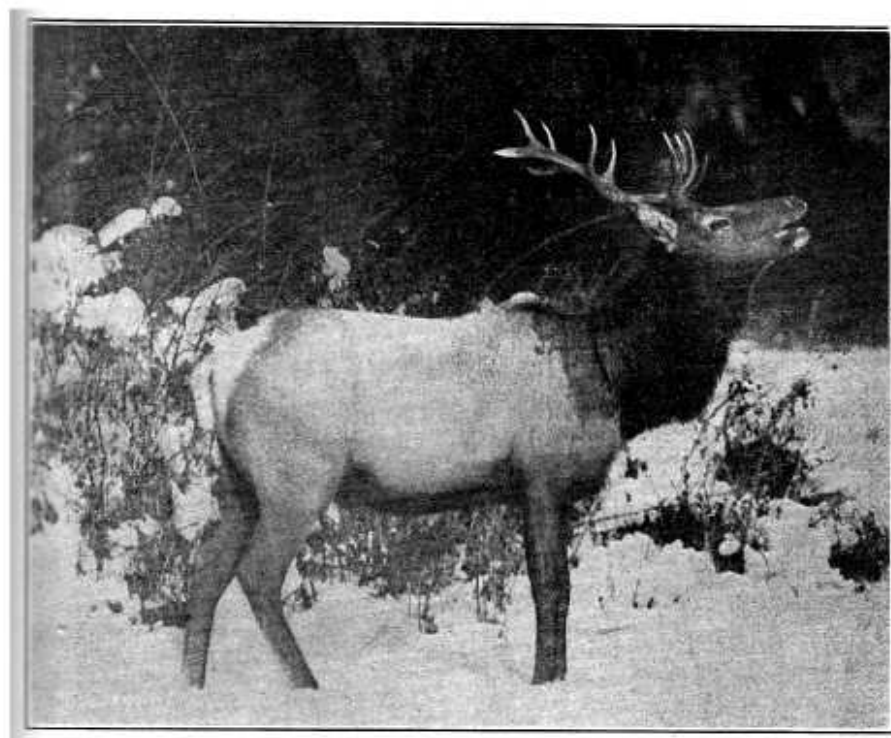


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Winter Wild Life Observations

C. A. HARWELL, Park Naturalist

During the extremely heavy storms of the past few weeks there has been a noticeable migration of deer from the floor of the valley to lower more open hillsides. During the heaviest storm early in February we spent some time observing the condition of those animals still left in the valley. They seemed not so bad off. Hundreds of our black oaks, too heavily laden with snow, were very badly broken. Many of the limbs and branches broken down were covered with mistletoe. This furnished deer a new and much relished food supply. Also boughs of all trees heavily laden with snow were pushed down within the easy reach of these browsing animals. The deer seemed to take refuge especially under the large incense cedars.

Deer have been fed at a number of stations. Our local residents are very partial to these lovely animals, so that most back porches offered hand-outs. I arranged with Mr. Murphy, who has charge of the feeding of our herd of elk, to put some alfalfa hay out for the deer. He reported that as many as 27 were seen at his deer feeding station near his home at one time.

WILDCAT ATTACKS DEER

I have often heard old-timers in the mountains talk about wildcats riding on the backs of deer, seemingly with the purpose of tiring out their victim or getting them in such an excited condition that this smaller animal could make a kill. Assistant Chief Ranger John Wegner, one evening about 1925, while sitting on a bench at the Government saddle room, observed a four-point buck come dashing down the road by the Government barns. As he came closer Mr. Wegner noticed a bob-cat was riding on the deer's back firmly gripping the back of the buck's neck, with his teeth. He also had a strong hold with his claws. The deer was making a frantic effort to shake off the cat. He disappeared on down the road still being firmly ridden.

ANOTHER BATTLE

February 2, electricians Sam Cookson and Joe Gann, while driving up the highway, one mile east of Arch Rock Ranger Station, at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, observed such a struggle at close range. Just as they approached they saw a full grown doe jump from a 20-foot

bank to the soft snow at the side of the highway with a wildcat at its throat. They brought their car to a stop within 20 feet of the animals and urged by very strong human instinct, grabbed shovels from their car and hurried to the rescue. The deer by this time had gained the open pavement. She seemed to know the terrible handicap the cat would have in deep snow and evidently headed down the steep hill side toward this known open space. The doe was striking the cat sharply with her fore feet. The men observed that the cat had his teeth deeply imbedded in the throat of the deer. Blood was streaming from the wound and it looked like the cat's four feet were not used. When Cookson and Gann got within a few feet the cat loosed his hold and made an attempt to escape by scaling the bank. The deer trotted on down the road and out of sight. The soft snow coupled with the steepness of the bank proved too much for the cat. When he saw he was cornered he seemed to turn on the men. A blow on the side of the head from a shovel quickly dispatched him.

The wildcat was a male weighing 12 pounds. He is now a scientific specimen at the museum.

Ranger Henry Skelton tells me that during the winter of 1920, while he was stationed at Arch Rock, he found two carcasses of eight-month old fawns where all indications pointed toward a kill by a bob-cat. In each case from the tracks in the snow and evidences of struggle he was sure of the fact. He followed the tracks of one of these deer back up the hillside and

found one place where the deer had run under a low hanging tree in an attempt to scrape off the cat. Ranger Skelton found hair of both deer and wildcat on the limbs of this tree. He followed the tracks far enough to locate the exact spot where the cat had evidently jumped from a large boulder to the back of the fawn. As a finish to these observations he set traps near both carcasses and very soon caught a wildcat in each. These cats weighed 18 pounds each.

GROUSE HITS SNOW

Norman Clyde, the well-known mountain climber of California, spent the first week of February at Glacier Point, where he was snowed in by the heavy storm. On one of his snowshoe trips he discovered a grouse flying from a snowbank. Upon examination he found the grouse had been occupying a hole some two feet deep in the fresh snow blanket. It is a regularly observed thing for grouse to bury themselves under loose snow in the East, but such an occurrence is rare for our Sierra species.

BEARS

Notwithstanding the fact that this has been a heavy snow winter, bears were observed out and around as in past winters. January 14 Ranger Eastman reported a large bear on the south side of the river near the bear feeding platforms during the daytime. The bear was in a very gaunt condition and seemed to be standing around on the snow rather stupidly. The last bear to leave the Glacier Point Hotel area for its winter quarters was observed by Mr. McKinney on December 15.



Feeding Habits of the Woodpeckers in the Yosemite Valley

Enid Michael

THE LEWIS WOODPECKER

In sizes, the Lewis woodpecker is slightly larger than the California woodpecker. His upper parts are black, appearing greenish in strong light. A gray collar circles the nape of his neck. His forehead and sides of the head are dark red; upper and under surfaces of the wings are black; upper breast, gray; abdomen an intimate mixture of rose and gray (mostly rose), with peculiar hairy effect. Both sexes are colored alike.

The Lewis woodpecker is related to the California woodpecker. When he settles in a district for a winter the Lewis resorts to an acorn storing habit, for which the California woodpecker is famous. His method of storing this fruit, however, is somewhat different, as he shells the acorn and splits the kernel into pieces that can be stored in some convenient crack. The California woodpecker as a rule drills holes and stores his acorns whole.

The California woodpecker is likely to be resident in any district where found. On the other hand, the Lewis is a great wanderer and much more gregarious in habit than any other western woodpecker. In migration these woodpeckers travel in flocks. Flocks of a hundred are not uncommon. And on one occasion, when on the high crest of the Sierra, we actually saw thousands of Lewis woodpeckers winging their way to winter feeding grounds.

In habits the Lewis woodpecker

is a strange mixture. He has the broad wing and steady wing beat of a crow. When on his way he flies in a direct line after the manner of a crow. This crow-like flight sets him apart from all other woodpeckers of the district.



At times Lewis employs the feeding method of a flycatcher. On other occasions flocks of these birds may be seen feeding on the ground like robins. And like others of the woodpecker tribe, he may feed on the trunks of trees. He drills his own nest hole. In the fall of the year he feeds on fruit and berries. He has a liking for apples. And during this season he lays away a store of acorns to tide him over the winter months.

One is likely to encounter the Lewis woodpecker anywhere in the Yosemite National Park at one season or another. In Yosemite Valley stragglers are most likely to be seen during September. In three different years during the last ten, a pair of these stragglers decided to spend the winter in the valley. The first thing they did when they made up their minds to stay here was to select a deserted flicker hole

for sleeping quarters. Then, before winter really set in, they laid away a store of acorns. With the necessities of life to carry them through the winter, the woodpeckers became inactive and almost dormant. They would spend their nights in the flicker hole and their days clinging to the trunk of the home tree. When the warm days of spring arrived they began to move about, and before the middle of May they departed.

So far as I know, the birds have not been known to nest in Yosemite Park. Therefore I was greatly pleased to find a band of these woodpeckers at Big Meadow on May 11, a season of the year when

they should be involved in nesting activities. However, the fact that 50 birds were seen would seemingly indicate that they were in migration rather than settled in their nesting grounds. The fact that one of these birds perched in a possessive way on the top of a dead stub that contained a fresh hole lent hopes to my desire that a pair of Lewis woodpeckers nest in this vicinity. In all my experience with Lewis woodpeckers I've never known them on their nesting grounds. According to my observations, they are among the most silent of woodpeckers. But it is likely that during the nesting season they may become loquacious.

Winter Bird Report

ENID MICHAEL,

Ranger-Naturalist

In spite of the heavy weather, the bird population during the winter held up well both in regard to individuals and species. In fact, 36 species of birds for the month was two above the January average for the last 12 years. As in other winters, bird life was concentrated in the warmest section of the valley, about the mouth of Indian Canyon.

The feeding station and the suet tree back of the postoffice were both well patronized. Fourteen different species of birds came almost daily to feed at the station. The most distinguished looking visitor to the free-lunch counter was a handsome male sparrow hawk, who discovered the place on the morning of January 10. A piece of mixed lean and fat meat was nailed to one of the posts and on this the hawk managed to make a breakfast. He stood on top of the

post with the meat under his feet and tipping forward, he ripped off pieces with his beak in just such a manner as he would tear a mouse to pieces. None of the birds who habitually come here to feed questioned his right to the meat, but neither did they show any fear or excitement.

The sparrow hawk became a steady boarder and each morning he came for his breakfast of raw meat. When the sparrow hawk flew down from his perch to the feeding post the other birds scattered, but so soon as the hawk settled the little birds came right back as though there was nothing to fear.

ANOTHER HAWK ARRIVES

A sharp-shinned hawk also discovered the feeding station, but he came to feed on the feeders. The sharp-shinned hawk was no larger

than the sparrow hawk, but the effect on the feeding birds was quite different when he arrived on the scene. A warning shout from the jay or the little Sierra chickaree, or perhaps the chickadee, and the panic was on. The feeding birds almost tumbled over one another in their mad rush to the cover of the cedar trees. The little squirrel sought shelter in the wood shed. If the sharp-shin failed to get a bird on his first swoop he would hide in a heavy foliaged cedar tree and wait for the birds of the neighborhood to forget his presence. And he was a patient devil. One morning he waited an hour and a half before getting a second chance to strike. If the chickaree spotted the sharp-shin's hiding place, he would take a perch a safe distance away and hurl curses at him. In such a case the hawk might just as well leave, for all the neighborhood would know of his presence.

OTHER FEATHERED VISITORS

Steady patrons of the suet tree included three California woodpeckers, a pair of willow woodpeckers, one nuttall woodpecker, one ruby-crowned kinglet, one plain titmouse, two slender-billed nuthatches, a dozen blue-fronted jays and many chickadees. Beside the steady boarders there came occasionally a spurred towhee, a flicker and a number of juncos. The juncos usually picked up suet crumbs from the base of the tree that were dropped by other birds. The lone robin never came to the suet; he could always be sure of a hand-out of raisins when he came calling at the back door of the postoffice.

The surprise of the winter was

the pair of green-backed goldfinches. Early on a cold morning we heard their sweet, plaintive voices and then the pair dropped to the road to bathe in a pool where a passing truck had broken the ice.

Two handsome California gray squirrels are making their headquarters about the New Village this winter.

OBSERVATIONS AT CASCADES

By Homer Crider, Powerhouse Operator

As I make my night and morning trips on my way to and from work at the powerhouse I often see rabbit tracks in the fresh snow, especially along the river bed. Mr. Halstead, who has lived at Cascades for seven years, tells me that he has seen white-tailed rabbits here during the winter season, so perhaps these are tracks of white-tails forced down by the heavy snow.

On a half dozen occasions during the last two weeks Mrs. Crider has been playing hide-and-go-seek with a couple of American Merganser ducks. Each time she observed them they were diving in the swift water of the river. By the time she had approached within 100 feet of them, they took to wing and flew down stream. They must have liked this feeding ground very much because within a few hours they would return to the same ripple. Ranger Reed of Arch Rock Station has also seen them during this period feeding in the Merced back of his house.



Chief Ranger Townsley (right) and Ranger Freeland (left) on snow patrol near Lake Tenaya, Yosemite National Park.

On Skis With Snow Gauging Party

C. C. PRESNALL, Junior Park Naturalist.

Editors Note:- This is the second article on snow gauging by Mr. Presnall. The first article appeared in last month's issue.

Skiling in Yosemite, a sport that is rapidly gaining popularity, also offers an interesting though sometimes hazardous occupation to a small group of hardy park rangers and State snow gaugers who brave the storms of the high Sierra several times each winter to measure the snowfall on isolated mountain meadows and passes.

The first snow measuring expedition dispatched from the headquarters of Yosemite National Park this year consisted of 10 men divided into three groups with orders to measure snowfall at 15 widely separated points throughout the park. Two of the parties spent eight days in the mountains, one party traveling over 100 miles on skis over snow from 5 to 10 feet deep. As a member of the latter party the writer had ample opportunity to observe that skiing for pleasure is tame compared to the enforced vigors of skiing for serious purposes.

ADVANCE PREPARATIONS

Not that we suffer privation or hunger, since both the Department of the Interior and the State Division of Natural Resources had provided for our material comforts by erecting shelter cabins at intervals of from 8 to 16 miles along the trails. Months before, while the trails were yet open, these cabins had been stocked with food and blankets, wood had been cut and stored, and everything made snug for the winter. However, no amount of forethought can provide for such exigencies as cramped muscles,

deadening fatigue or frozen toes.

And don't believe for a minute that skiling in large doses is not hard work. The uninitiated may see nothing but effortless ease and grace exhibited by an expert as he glides down a hill in a series of linked telemark turns, but the expert knows that it requires unusual co-ordination of mind and muscle. Multiply this one short turn by 50, add eight hours of slow progress on level snow or uphill, and throw in a steep, icy, timber-covered mountain and you have a fair picture of what a snow gauger does in one day. But his day does not end at nightfall. Finishing his journey by moonlight he must shovel snow to gain access to his cabin, build a fire, cook dinner, wash the dishes, make his bed, dry his shoes and socks, and wax his skis before retiring for the night. The next day starts at 4 a. m., and the next, and the next, until a man actually feels unnatural during the brief hours when he is not harnessed into his skis and 25-pound pack.

FIGURING SUMMER WEALTH

The actual measuring of snowfall occupied but a small portion of our time on this particular trip in late January. The gauging is done in a strictly scientific manner so as to secure accurate data upon which to base estimates of available irrigation water for the coming summer. Since the agricultural wealth of California is largely dependent upon the amount of potential irrigation water stored as snow in the Sierra Nevada it is of prime importance

to have accurate advance information on the snowfall. We measured it at four designated points within the drainage basin of the Merced river at elevations of from 7000 to 8700 feet. At each point we took from 20 to 30 samples of snow and weighed them carefully to determine the water content. Each sample extended from the surface of the snow to the ground, being taken with a long iron tube comparable to the diamond drill used in securing rock cores. The greatest depth of snow measured by us on the level was 110 inches and the greatest water content was 45 inches. How the ranchers in the San Joaquin valley will rejoice at such an abundance of water! It means everything to them, and the thought of their happiness made our toil seem lighter.

GOOD COMPANY

But our work was not drudgery—far from it. We were a jolly trio—John Wegner, Sam King and I—chasing fatigue with a lusty joke and masking danger with a hearty jibe. Sam would point his skis down an abrupt slope and go turning and stemming through the trees at high speed, only to skid on a spot of crusted snow and pile up in a tangle of legs, skis and pack straps. Then would follow much twisting and writhing, accompanied by gargantuan grunts as the luckless Sam attempted to persuade his feet to point the same way his face did. A contortionist could have learned a lot from him.

We frequently used the sting of good natured derision to warn a frost-bitten comrade. One day, while bucking a young blizzard,

Sam became tired of breaking trail and allowed me to take the lead, saying that I should have no trouble finding the way since he had led us through the worst part. But in two minutes I had lost the trail where a huge snowdrift completely obscured what few landmarks might have been discernable through the driving snow, so we spread out and advanced slowly against the storm, searching for trail markers—my two companions on either side loudly asking the world in general why they should be cursed with such a leader. I surely worked hard to save my reputation, wondering why in blazes all the trail blazes were cut so low down on the trunks of the trees. They were all buried. By some chance I scraped snow at the right place and was surprised to find myself back on the trail.

AN INSISTENT CALL

With such companions a man can enjoy the most arduous ski trip, forgetting what dangers there are and thinking only of the high spots. The day we traveled in three hours a distance that had required over five hours on snow shoes; the hill that gave us momentum to glide half way across Elam Meadow; the alpine glow on the huge cirque where lies Breeze lake; the Buck Camp cabin, snow enshrouded in the moonlight (we never saw it in full daylight), beckoning us home from weary miles, the last mile made lonely and eerie by the far-off bark of a red fox. Those are some of the reasons why we go back each year with secret joy to the job of snow-gauging in the Sierra Nevada.





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Dan Anderson