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Yosemite's Bear Banquet

By M. E. BEATTY Assistant Park Naturalist

April in Yosemite means the start of our nightly Bear Shows, which are continued until these animals go into their winter hibernation in late November or early December. For the first few weeks each year we are constantly asked by visitors why there are so few bears feeding and why they seem so indifferent about eating. This apparent lack of hunger is due to their long winter's fast rather than to the quality of the food we offer. So far as is known, bears partake of no food or water during the hibernating period, which in this region lasts about four months. Upon emerging from winter dens the bears' digestive organs are still inactive and must be brought back to normal functioning very slowly and carefully, just as in humans where the termination of a fast requires very close supervision. So during April we commonly observe bears eating grass and herbage in the meadows rather than the heavier diet offered at the feeding platforms. Evidently these grasses and herbs have certain medicinal properties that aid in bringing the digestive organs back to normal functioning.

From this one might assume that

the first few bear shows of the year would be lacking in interest, but quite the reverse is true. The small attendance of bears gives some of the smaller mammals an opportunity to share the banquet table. Striped skunks are regular boarders at this time and one can never tell just what will happen. As a general rule the skunk and the bear get along rather well together, each animal having a great deal of respect for the other. Coyotes, a gray fox and an eagle have also been observed feeding at the bears dining room during April of this year. As the season advances more and more bears appear at the nightly feeding. As many as 30 may be seen at one time in late summer. The cubs generally appear in the valley during June, but do not start eating alongside their mothers at the pits until a month or so later.

Late summer and fall is the time when the expression "as hungry as a bear" seems to be verified. They not only eat to fill their immediate demands but to build up excess layers of fat to tide them over the hibernating period. This is especially necessary for females who expect cubs, for these cubs are born

during the hibernating period and this fat reserve must be sufficient to support the life of the mother and at the same time furnish food for the nursing cubs.

The fact that the bear is the largest mammal in our park, besides being one of the most interesting from his peculiar habits, makes the Yosemite bear banquet one of the leading attractions for our summer visitors.

EARLY ARRIVALS IN HIGH SIERRA

By SNOW GAUGER SAM KING

While making the last snow gauging trip of the year to Tenaya Lake and Tuolumne Meadows I noted several early spring records of birds and animals that were moving into the high country while it was still completely covered with snow. At the Parson's Lodge, in Tuolumne Meadows, were four mountain bluebirds getting ready to stake out claims for summer residence. They seemed a bit previous, as there was not a single spot of bare ground anywhere on this 29th day of March. (Editor's note: It is quite probable that this observation establishes the first date at which mountain bluebirds arrive in their summer nesting area, a surmise further justified by the observations of Charles and Enid Michael, who saw mountain bluebirds, apparently migrating through Yosemite Valley, on March 19, 22, and 26.)

We also saw tracks of a pine marten in Tuolumne Meadows, which may indicate that these animals are spreading out from Tenaya

Lake, where we have seen many of their tracks for several years.

At the Tenaya Lake cabin we met our old friends, a blue-fronted jay and a Clark crow, that have been right on hand for food scraps every time a snow gauging party has occupied the cabin during the last two winters. In fact, they act as though such visits were the only occasions that they enjoyed a full feed. Both birds would come right up to the cabin door and gulp down biscuits in a manner that would put to shame certain of my fellow "hangers" who have been known to make derogatory remarks about my cooking. The Clark crow seemed at home at this high elevation (8100), as might be expected, but the Jay



was a little above his usual range and showed the effect of it. His voice was a hoarse croak, as though he suffered from a bad cold, or else it was due to the contaminating influence of long association with the Clark crow. Jays are great imitators, and most likely this one had learned to croak the crow language.

Taming a Wildcat

By C. C. PRESNALL Junior Park Naturalist

Making tame cats out of wildcats is one of the diversions of Yosemite residents, who think no more of it than most people would of going to the pet store to buy a canary. At least that is true of Peter Topp, foreman of the Yosemite fish hatchery, who has trained two wildcats to come to his back door whenever he calls. One of the cats will even stand on its hind legs in its eagerness to reach the food. In pioneer days a wildcat at the door would cause the women and children to barricade themselves inside while the man of the house went forth to slay the beast, but the modern Yosemite idea is to throw open the windows so the children can watch their mother feed the cats while father shoots them with a camera.

Mr. Topp says it only took a week or two to train the cats. His first intimation of their presence was when he found the tracks in the snow each morning where they had evidently been eating scraps left for some tame ring-tailed cats that live around the hatchery. Then one day he saw the old mother wildcat some distance from the house, and threw a pork chop toward her. She was evidently very hungry, for she grabbed the meat and carried it into the woods. After that she came every day, bringing a half-grown kitten with her, and gradually became tame enough to approach to within a few feet of the open kitchen window.

The antics of the old cat and her kitten were very amusing. At first the old one would not let the kitten eat until she had sampled the food, then she would give him selected pieces. One day the kitten arrived first on the scene and enjoyed the thrill of feeding h'mself, although he made a clumsy job of it, often lunging at the meat only to bury his head in the snow a few inches to one side or the other of it. The discovery that he could feed himself made him very cocky; he was now a grown up cat, and tried to act like one when his mother came up for her share. He growled and arched his back so high that his hind feet almost left the snow, and when these tactics failed to impress the old one he gave her a bloody nose, causing her to retire in disgust. Apparently the kitten felt that this evened the score for the many spankings he had previously received, at least the two cats resumed peaceable relations in a few days, rubbing against each other just as a house cat rubs against its master's legs.

NOT MANY IN VALLEY

Wildcats have never been especially numerous in Yosemite National Park, and throughout most of the year they have no trouble in finding enough to eat. Hence it is quite probable that Mr. Topp's two pets will forsake the "bread line" as soon as spring comes, but no doubt will be on hand again next winter for more tidbits.





Rare Fur-bearing Mammals in Yosemite

By RANGER NATURALIST ADREY E. BORELL

No mammals in California are being more extensively and continuously hunted than are the fur-bearers. All of them are trapped persistently for their pelts. Several species are hunted throughout the year because of the damage they do or are thought to do. Many sportsmen and ranchers take every opportunity to shoot a bobcat, fox, skunk, or mink even though the animal may be miles from the nearest poultry yard. They do it without thinking, or just because it has always been done, and because they want to shoot at something alive. Several species of fur-bearers are classed as predators and therefore receive no protection from our State game laws. The others are protected by a closed season; except when doing damage. This leaves a loop-hole making prosecution of violators difficult or impossible. In other words, our fur-bearers are extensively trapped, poisoned, shot and hunted with dogs during the open season, and some species are pursued throughout the year. As a result many species (river otter, marten, mink, red fox, wolverine, and fisher) are becoming scarce, and the grizzly bear, sea otter and

wolf are probably gone from California forever.

PARKS PROVIDE REFUGE

There are some people who will answer: "What of it? Who cares whether they are exterminated?" But there are others who feel that the carnivore and other fur-bearers are integral parts of the animal community, and who know that we are not justified in exterminating them. These fur-bearing mammals are finding a real haven in our National Parks. Although the National Parks in California were set aside too late to save the grizzly bear (our State emblem), they were established in time to save many other species which are disappearing from most of California.

The following data were taken from written records of observations made by Park Rangers and Naturalists between April 1 and September 15, 1932. These records are filed in the Yosemite Museum and contain some encouraging facts regarding fur-bearers.

SPECIES SELDOM SEEN

Wolverines are rare throughout the State, and rarely has one been recorded in Yosemite during the

past few years. One was seen last summer at Breeze Lake between July 24 and 30 and the tracks of another were found at Huckleberry Lake by Ranger L. C. Danner. Tracks of red foxes were found in many places above 5000 feet altitude, and the park population of red foxes is probably about 40. Ring-tailed cats and California gray foxes are common in Yosemite Valley and seem to be increasing in number. Sierra pine marten have been seen at Tenaya Lake, Tuolumne Meadows and Snow Creek Lodge; also their tracks were found in several other places. There are probably 80 or more marten in the park. Both the marten and the red fox are highly valued for their fur and outside the park are trapped intensively for that reason. The beautiful and rare fisher is undoubtedly to be found within the park boundaries, but there has been no positive record of it for several years.

HOPE FOR RIVER OTTER

Here is the most surprising and important discovery made during the past summer. At least 11 river otters were seen in various lakes in the northern section of the park by the patrolling rangers. River otters are highly prized for their pelts and are becoming rare over most of California. There are a number of large lakes and streams in Yosemite which should provide suitable habitat requirements for river otters. It is hoped that they will continue to thrive and, under the protection of the park, be permanently preserved.

In addition to the species already mentioned, the badger, striped skunk, least weasel, mountain weasel, bobcat, raccoon, coyote, black bear, mountain lion and mink

are established in Yosemite and other national parks in California. The species just mentioned is still fairly numerous in various sections of California, but the time will undoubtedly come when, like the grizzly bear and wolverine, they also will be rare or extinct outside our national parks. Let us hope that the National Park Service will be able to continue with its present policy of protecting, so far as possible, all forms of native animal life found within the parks, so that they may be preserved for those who come after us.

YOSEMITE'S 82nd BIRTHDAY

By C. A. HARWELL,
Park Naturalist

March 25, 1933 was the eighty-second anniversary of the discovery and first entry of white man into Yosemite Valley. Development of this national park and increase in travel and popularity in the last few years have been so remarkable that it is good to give pause to consider conditions and hardships of those early days in our park history.

The Mariposa Battalion, headed by Capt. John Boling, on an expedition to capture and remove to a reservation the band of Indians known as "Yosemites," entered Yosemite Valley by way of Inspiration Point and camped under El Capitan facing Bridelveil Fall, March 25, 1851. Names here given were assigned to these features on that day. Dr. L. H. Eunnell, the medical officer of the party, upon returning to Mariposa gave out the first account of this wonderland in the Mariposa Gazette, which has been continuously published since that day.

Another Rare Bat in Yosemite

C. C. PRESNALL Junior Park Naturalist

Another specimen of a rare animal has been found in Yosemite Valley, thus adding to the fame which the region already possesses among those who search the world for new and rare scientific discoveries. The new find, a mastiff bat, is the largest of North American bats, with a wing spread of 18 to 21 inches, and was formerly thought to occur only in the hottest portions of California, Arizona and Texas. Strange to say, three of these creatures have been found in Yosemite Valley; one was found in 1924 near the present site of Ahwahnee Hotel, another in 1932, near the Old Village, and now the third discovered frozen to death on April 18 of this year at the entrance of the Ahwahnee grounds. An unusually severe frost had occurred the previous night, and it is possible that the bat had migrated from the south and could not resist the cold climate. Bats that hibernate here through the winter were heard flying before and after the cold night. Apparently they had retired during the freezing spell to warm crevices unknown to the mastiff bat, whose presence in this unfavorable climate is unexpected and unexplained.

Knowledge of all bats is limited, and the mastiff bat, rare even in the south, has given scientists practically no opportunity to study its habits. One significant fact has come to light in regard to the specimens found in Yosemite. All of them were found during the summer months, and according to Frank Stephens' "California Mammals" the few mastiff bats found in Southern California were all discovered in the winter. This gives some strength to the theory that

the bat is a migratory species that may breed in Yosemite or farther north. (*Editors Note:- Later study by A. Brazier Howell shows that this species breeds in the south.*)

The mastiff bat (*Eumpos californicus*) is well named, since it has pendulous upper lips that give it the mournful appearance of a mastiff dog. Its ears are enormous, like two great funnels, and completely obscure its tiny eyes. In pursuing insects through the dim evening skies a bat depends almost entirely upon its sense of hearing and can avoid collision in the air by detecting sound waves of air currents reflected back from objects in its path.

TO A SNOW PLANT

Sweet crimson snow plant of the steeps,

From rugged mountain tops she peeps.

Beside some tall and stately tree
She nestles where the sunbeams see
And cheer her lonely life.

Her home 'midst winter's melting
snows

Is near where mountain torrent
flows.

The whirling winds come rushing
past

And yet her brightness round is
cast

To grace the nearby crag.

By Florence Ethel Sternberg.
1250 Arguello street, San Francisco.

Why Deer Drop Their Antlers Each Year

By C. C. PRESNALL, Junior Park Naturalist

Why do deer shed their antlers every year? That is a favorite topic of discussion among Yosemite visitors who happen to see the deer in the act of dropping their antlers during December and January. The question came to our attention again in February when the tule elk, of which a small herd is kept in Yosemite Valley, commenced shedding antlers. This article is an attempt to explain the things that cause antlers to drop off annually.

Many different theories have been advanced to explain the phenomenon. I once thought the growth of a new set pushed the old ones off, since the new antlers on an elk started growing immediately after the old ones dropped off. But mule deer wait several months before starting new growth. The true cause was found by a close examination of the end of a freshly detached antler, which appeared roughened like sandpaper, or as though the horny substance had been etched with an acid. This suggested that the connection between skull and antlers had been weakened by being dissolved away, but looking at the scar on the head of an elk that has just cast an antler I saw nothing but blood, as might be expected.

The dissolving action of the blood is explained by Caton, in "The Deer of America," as follows: "Now, these blood vessels retaining their vitality within the articulation (of antler and skull) commence a new and important work which is assigned them—that is, the work of absorption. They pick up particles, or rather groups, of granules, of what I call the articular plate, and carry

them away, and when a sufficient number of these particles have been thus removed, the antler becomes loosened from its seat, or at least the point of junction becomes weakened, and the antler drops off or is more generally removed by some slight force before it has become completely loosened so as to drop off by its own gravity."

Why this dissolving action should take place in the winter or early spring, or in fact why it should take place at all, is a question that must be answered by laboratory research workers in physiology. The average sportsman is content with the knowledge that the whole process of growing and shedding antlers is to insure an undamaged pair when the mating fights take place each



fall. It is simply a secondary sex characteristic which has been brought to such a fine degree of perfection as to challenge the interest of layman and scientist alike.

Sage Thrasher is New Bird for Yosemite

By ASSISTANT POSTMASTER CHARLES MICHAEL

My bird walk in the rain on the morning of the 29th of April brought many surprises and added several names to the monthly bird report and a new species to our Yosemite check list. Several shy white-crowned sparrows flew across the road into a ceanothus thicket. I followed them, and in the thicket discovered four fox sparrows and a handsome green-tailed towhee. The green-tail was singing in the rain, the fox sparrows uttered only their small call-notes. This is the first time I have ever heard a green-tailed towhee sing on the floor of the valley. Both of these sparrows are common above the "rim" during the summer months, but rarely are they seen on the floor of the valley.

At the edge of Kennyville meadow near the large river pool came the next surprise. He looked a plump little bird, his feathers all fluffed out to keep warm. As he hopped about on the lawn he had the drooping-wing pose of the robin. At the end of each series of hops he paused, straightened up and twisted his long floppy tail in the manner of a mockingbird. This was a new bird to me, never in my life had I seen him before. His upper parts were light grayish brown, his tail was brown with

white margin on the outer feathers and white tips at the corner of the tail. These tail markings were not conspicuous as the bird with lively running hops moved about on the ground. The breast was gray with black streaks running from throat to belly.

I first thought that the bird was some sort of a thrush, but his behavior was all wrong. Thrushes do not scurry out over the open meadows, racing here and there in pursuit of spiders. Somehow the stranger kept reminding me of a mockingbird. And then I discovered that he had the mockingbird eye and not the large innocent eyes of a thrush. The bird seemed reluctant to fly, and as I followed him about he must have covered an acre of open meadow. He was not particularly shy, and at times I got close enough to see his yellow eyes. Finally I forced him to fly and then I caught a glimpse of his white tail markings. At home I checked up on the bird and became convinced that it was a sage thrasher.

After 13 years of observation in the valley it is thrilling to encounter a bird that had not been previously reported and more thrilling, of course, to happen on a complete stranger.





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Dan Anderson