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Spotted Owl

Strix occidentalis occidentalis

(By Charles W. Michael)

Acting as foster father to a Spotted Owl increases one's responsibilities. During the second week of June a young, but very wise looking Spotted Owl was brought in to the Museum. At this time he was three or four weeks old, his wing and tail feathers were not developed and he was very soft and furry to the touch. After a couple of weeks this owl had gotten so much publicity that peace was no longer his during the daylight hours, neither was there peace for his keeper. His keeper, Ranger Naturalist, Ray Gilmore, persuaded me to take the owl over to my camp where it was cooler and where the owl could lead a more natural life.

At the Museum the owl was christened Herman; some said Herman Gilmore, but this Gilmore denied. Anyway to me and to his

public he is known as Herman, or Hermie. Herman came under my care on June 24. At first he was kept in a large cage, but when his wings grew strong and he learned to fly a little he was turned loose.

Herman will eat raw meat in a pinch, but he prefers mice and so I keep four traps set all the time in order to satisfy his appetite. In the morning I sound his hissing call which brings him down from his perch for a mouse. At first he was somewhat slow in coming down for breakfast, but now he has learned to know the meaning of the call and he responds at once. Herman is a big owl now almost full feather. He is in the movies and I must say that he is a very photographic subject.

Herman is a bird of strange and ludicrous mannerism. He often comes to the ground where he appears to be quite at home. On the

ground he often lifts high on his long legs and with a rolling, swinging stride he swaggers about like a sailor just ashore after a long voyage. In spite of the drollness of this swinging, swaggering stride one gets the impression of tip-toed stealth. And then suddenly he pounces on some object as though making a kill. Evidently he is practising the arts of his bloody trade.

Usually after satisfying his appetite Herman struts about, going through a series of grotesque movements. He stretches his neck and rolls his head loosely about as though it were fastened by a swivel-joint. At other times he draws his head down between his shoulders and goes through a course of dignified bows. He seldom blinks and I have never seen him move his eyes without moving his whole head. His eyes are very dark, appearing black in some lights, deep blue in other lights and always his large eyes are beautifully luminous.

When Herman bathes if there is sufficient water he plunges in breast deep, with only his shoulders and head above the surface. Like a sea bird taking a bath he splashes about often plunging his face under the water. Sometimes for three minutes, he will splash about, and when he finally climbs out of his tub he looks like a water-soaked dishrag. When thoroughly soused he flies to the ground, shakes his head and wipes his face on the dry pine need-

les. His first concern seems to be to dry off the long whisker feathers about his eyes. When thoroughly bathed he must play about on the ground and shake well his feathers before he is able to lift to his perch in the pines. His preening is a long process.

Herman wears a pompadour of fur-like feathers over his head and a fur-soft mantle extends over his shoulders. His breast feathers are also fluffy and long fluffy feathers drape from his thighs. The lower part of his legs are covered by ash gray closefitting spats which extend quite to his toe-nails.



When crouched on a perch Herman stands about eight inches high from the soles of his feet to his crown. This measurement does not include his long wings which extend down from his perch another eight inches. With neck, legs and body stretched he will stand close to sixteen inches high. Often while perched he rests on one leg. The fist of the drawn up leg is tightly closed and almost hidden in the

loose belly feathers. Then perching on a flat surface he rests on the soles of his feet with h's toes spread wide for a pedestal.

We have had Herman with us for over a month now and so far his only utterance is a drawn out hissing "sip" which ends with the final "ip" accented abruptly. This hissing sound appears to be forced upward from his lower belly.

HERMIE GETS A BAND

(By A. E. Borell)
Naturalist

On June 9, 1934, Mr. Howard Twining brought to the Museum a downy young Spotted Owl (*Strix occidentalis occidentalis*) which he had found on the trail above Mirror Lake, Yosemite Valley. The Owl was kept at the Museum two weeks and was then moved to Camp 19 where Mr. Charles Michael studied its habits as recorded in a previous nature note.

Realizing that before long "Herman" would learn to catch his own food and would desert Camp 19, on August 15, 1934 we placed an aluminum band on his right leg bearing No. A722142.

After Herman leaves we may never hear of him again, but there is a chance that some one may see a Spotted Owl wearing a band and we will be fairly certain that it was Herman, as no other Spotted Owl has ever been banded in Yosemite. If he meets with a fatal accident

some one may recover the band and we will at least know Herman's fate. We may also learn that Adeline might have been a more appropriate name than Herman for this Owl.

ANIMAL LIFE ON HALF DOME

By Ranger Naturalist, James E. Cole

To most people it is a marvel that any animal can exist on the top of a bald high mountain peak such as Half Dome. Four species of animals have been seen there so far this year by the writer. Early in the spring (about May 1st), Mount Lyell Salamanders (*Eurycea platycephala*) and Sierra Nevada Rosy Finches (*Leucosticte tephrocotis dawsoni*) were found. The Salamanders which are commonly called Water-Dogs or Newts were located under flat rocks in most places while the Finches were feeding on the snow in a loose flock.

The two other animals noted were the Golden Mantled Ground Squirrel (*Calospermophilus c. chrysoideirus*) and the Yosemite Cony (*Ochotona schisticeps muir*). The squirrels there become quite tame and are seen by many people. Much patience, however, is required to get a good view of the Cony, because of its retiring habits. Such an occasion was afforded this spring when the latter animal entertained a group of about eighty people for thirty minutes.



New Birds for Yosemite

(By Charles W. Michael)

ANTHONY GREEN HERON

After a wait of fourteen years the long expected visitor finally arrived in Yosemite Valley and had it not been for the help of the Blue-fronted Jay I very likely would have missed it.

On the morning of August 18, 1934, a large bird was seen flying down the river lane. From where I stood, 200 yards away, the bird appeared to be about the size of a Band-tailed Pigeon and about the same color. However, the wing-beat and the general manner of flight struck me as being unpigeon-like and then as the bird disappeared into the heavy foliage of an oak that stood on the river-bank a Blue-fronted Jay immediately began to scold. Soon a dozen jays gathered and were scolding loudly. Also other birds of the neighborhood had joined in the mob scene. Such a commotion impelled me to investigate in spite of the fact that I had to wade the river. When I was just about in the middle of

the river the strange bird took wing and flew directly over my head and I could see its reddish brown throat and its feet stuck out behind like a rudder. When it passed over head and flew straight away up the river I could see that it wore a loose cap of very dark feathers and I was thrilled to recognize the Anthony Green Heron.

Once again the raucous scolding of the jays had led me to an adventure. There was no apparent reason that should cause the jays to pick on the heron, except that it was a stranger in a strange land. The jays were not much concerned for they did not follow the heron, who was last seen hunched down on a comfortable perch in the shade of a canopy of cottonwood leaves.

About the middle of August 1939, Mrs. Michael and I saw an Anthony Green Heron at Merced Lake twelve miles above Yosemite Valley. Twice on subsequent dates in the lower Merced Canyon lone Anthony Green Herons were seen from the

train window. Consequently they were to be expected in the Yosemite Valley. But, surely fourteen years is a long time to wait for an expected guest.

MARSH WREN

It was pure luck, or perhaps the good fairies, that caused me on the morning of August 24, 1934, to choose the right spot on the river-bank from which to watch and to listen. I had 57 species of birds for the month; the August average for the last 13 years is 58 and I was out this morning to bring the month's number up to the average.

Below me on the gravel-bar were several dense bunches of rushes, each bunch being separated from the other by a ring of raw gravel. The largest bunch was about three feet across, the other half this size. From out of the rushes there came a call-note which had a familiar sound to my ear, and yet I could not place it. This note was an abrupt "chee!" reminding of the note of a Brewer Blackbird. The note sounded several times and then I got a glimpse of movement at the base of one of the rush clumps. Then there was a glimpse of the bird and from the size, the mannerism, and the cocky up-tilt of the tail I felt sure that the bird was a wren. But what sort of wren? It had a distinct light stripe over his eye. In response to my squeaks, up through the rushes it came and for a brief instant paus-

ed in the sunlight where I had a clear view. Now I knew it for what it was—the Marsh Wren (*Telmato-dytes palustris*).

Grinnell and Storer report having seen the Western Marsh Wren on three different occasions in Yosemite Valley. For fourteen years I had been on the lookout for this bird and it is only now that I can report success.

Cassin Vireos Protect Nest

By M. E. BEATTY

Assistant Park Naturalist

Birds have the well known habit of attacking other birds or animals when they get too close to their nests or young. An interesting example of this has been going on for about a week with a pair of Cassin Vireos, directly behind the writer's home. These small birds are constantly going after the jays, robins and even squirrels that come close to their nesting tree. Scolding and diving at the trespasser, they deliver a peck and swiftly repeat the process until the animal leaves. It makes a rather unusual sight to see such a small bird going after something 4 to 8 times its own size.

Another interesting observation was that the Vireos bird paid no attention to a pair of California woodpeckers working in their tree. Evidently they were on good terms as they had no fear of the woodpeckers bothering their nests or young.

A Moonlight Hike to Eagle Peak

(Ranger Naturalist James E. Cole)

Arising over the south rim of Yosemite Valley, the moon, at midnight on June 28, 1934, inaugurated a new activity of the naturalist program for visitors in Yosemite National Park. Lighted by numerous flashlights and occasional patches of moonlight, a hiking party of two hundred people wound its way like so many glow worms over the trail that ended with a view of the sunrise over the Sierra Nevada. Beneath overhanging Golden Cup Oaks (*Quercus chrysolepis*) and amidst huge granite boulders the procession meandered up zig-zags to the tune of many a merry trail song.

The expected lunar rainbow at the base of the upper Yosemite Fall did not materialize. But after a warm hike up the talus slope, spray, carried by a cool breeze compensated for the lack of this phenomenon. At the top of the Falls Trail the pleasantly cool breeze below rose to the proportions of a gale blowing, as it seemed, from the north polar regions. Within the shelter afforded by the forests beyond the gap, a calm prevailed, disturbed only by the gusts of wind rustling the tree tops.

Half-way up to Eagle Creek Meadows a faint glow could be seen over the mountains to the east. Dawn was heralded in by the awakening of birds. The Western

Wood Pewee (*Myiochanes r. richardsoni*) started calling at 3:45 a. m. to be followed a half hour later by low plaintive notes of the Olive-sided Flycatcher (*Nuttallornis borealis*). Just as the reflected rays of the rising sun tinted the tops of the pines with a golden sheen, the Townsend Solitaire (*Myadestes townsendi*) filled the morning with a silver cascade of sparkling melody. From a dead snag atop a huge rock, it sang with the joy of the morning as its theme.

From Eagle Peak, the jagged crest of the Sierra was silhouetted against the morning blue of a cloudless sky. The rays of the sun descended on the bold western flank of Conness Mountain in narrow, nearly horizontal bands. Above the Cathedral Range a golden halo of light rose against the gray and azure of the clear mountain air. Suddenly between Cathedral and Unicorn Peaks a fiery disc of molten heat burst into being. Steadily it grew, but as with Moses on Mt. Sinai, no mortal with naked eye could look into the brilliance of this giver of life. Sunrise over the Sierra.

Beneath lofty Red Firs (*Abies magnifica*) with tips lit by the newly risen sun, numerous campfires were kindled. Soon to the odor of boiling coffee and frying bacon, keen appetites were ap-

peased. The sounds of crackling campfires, sizzling bacon, rippling stream and singing birds left an impression which was exceeded only by the memory of the recently risen sun.

Fortified by, and satisfied with, a hearty breakfast, the party broke up to return to the Valley by various routes. Fishing gear was much in evidence, so probably many trout rested in frying pans that evening. Some members of the party returned straightway to their camps to prepare for hikes to other points on the rim. The remainder elected to follow Eagle Peak Creek and study nature. First, a beautiful mountain meadow was investigated. Gorgeous Indian Pond Lilies (*Nymphaea polysepalum*) with yellow flowers supported by pads floating on the surface of a pool were an attraction that not even ankle deep water was able to deter. Through low lying masses of blooming Labrador Tea (*Ledum paludosum*) and erect Lodgepole Pine (*Pinus contorta*) thickets the group broke trail along the edge of meadow and stream. A marvelous display of flowers not often seen by tourists, occupied the attention of plant lovers. In one meadow the sudden flushing of a Junco (*Junco oreganus thurberi*) led to the discovery of its nest. Within a cup sunk in the ground, four blue eggs broadly spotted with brown lay well concealed under

grasses and sedges. On a limb near by, the mother announced her anxiety by an incessant repetition of her alarm note. Considerable hunting for orchids was rewarded when the graceful green flowered Rein-orchis (*Habenaria sparsiflora*) was found.

After viewing the Upper Yosemite Falls from a ledge near the top, a rest beneath a gnarled, stubby Sierra Juniper (*Juniperus occidentalis*) was in order. The possibility of a side trip into the spray of the waterfall was discussed, but decided against because of the attendant danger. A few individuals decide to return to camp by way of North Dome. The rest of the party started down the canyon in the heat of the sun which a few hours earlier had so thrilled this now weary but inspired group.

From the expressions of praise and gratitude, it was evident that none of the hikers had ever taken a more enjoyable and spectacular trip. Thoughts of this excursion will long remain alive and vivid in their memories: occasional glimpses of moonlight through lacy leaves; solemn silence of early morning beneath towering pines; sleepy awakening of birds in the twilight of dawn; exuberant chorus of bird music under magnificent Red Firs; appetizing odors of food from scores of campfires; study of nature along mountain stream and meadow; and sunrise on the Sierra.



MUSEUM NOTES

THE TREE AND FLOWER ROOMS IN THE MUSEUM

Paul Hudson

Field School '32

Yosemite is being recognized more and more as an outdoor laboratory for students of botany and nature in general. This is because of the large number of plant and animal species found within the boundaries of the Park, and of the great range of elevation (2200 to 13,000 feet). This great variation in altitude, along with other climatic factors, is largely responsible for the five vegetation belts or Life Zones of Yosemite, and creates an ideal situation for the large and varied assortment of plants and animals.

A large collection of these plants have been assembled in the Museum herbarium and are available to the botany students and scientists. The following are represented in the barium: 69 families, 243 genera, 591 species, and 835 plants, including duplicates. Two hundred and seventy-five plants are on display in the Tree and Flower rooms making a total of 1110 mounted specimens available at the present time.

Of the 36 species of trees found in the Park, 22 are on display in the

Tree Room, and it is hoped that the collection will be complete by early spring. This exhibit will include a cross section of each tree, cones (for the conifers), and mounts of the fruit, needles or leaves, seeds and other distinguished characteristics.

The Tree and Flower Rooms, undoubtedly, will soon be one of the most attractive sections of the Museum.

TAME TANAGER

Annabel, tame tanager at the Mariposa Grove of Big Trees, has left for Central America as is the custom of tanagers at this time of the year. Some concern is voiced for Annabel, however, since an over enthusiastic visitor at the Wawona tunnel tree seized her by the tail and pulled out all of her tail feathers.

Even after her unfortunate experience with this person, Annabel continued coming to Bert Bruce for daily hand-outs, but would often come near going into a tail spin when alighting. She appeared just in time to have lunch with Mrs. Roosevelt under the Four Guardsmen near the Museum a few weeks ago, and was easily recognized without her tail feathers.

But tail or no tail, she is now touring the southland.



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Dan Anderson