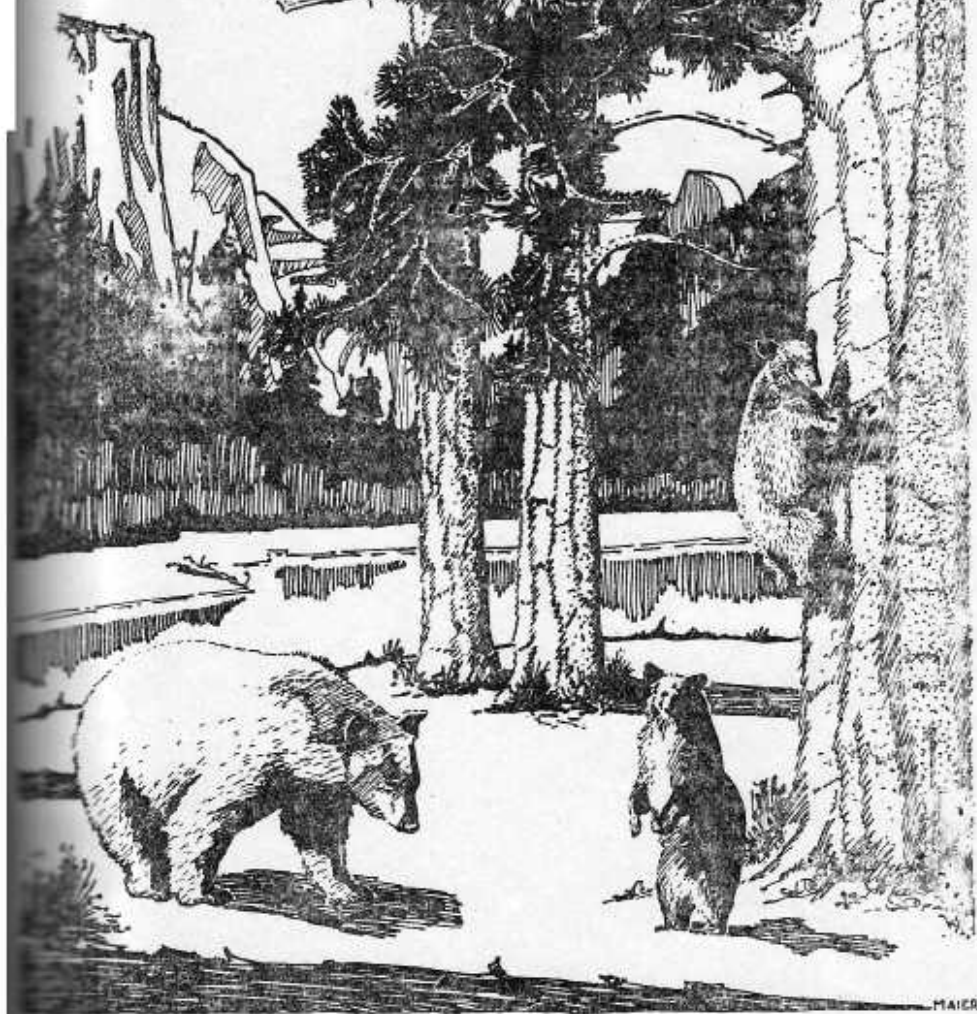


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BREWER BLACKBIRD

(*Euphagus cyanocephalus*)

The Brewer blackbird is about the length of the robin, but is a bird of more slender build. His whole body is a glossy, iridescent blue-black and the only contrasting color is his whitish-yellow eye. The female is decidedly smaller than the male; she is dull, sooty black and lacks the conspicuous white eye. The song is a clear whistled ch-shee, the call-note a harsh check.

The Brewer blackbird is the one species of bird that has shown a noticeable increase of numbers in the Yosemite Valley. Ten years ago there were not more than six nesting pairs on the floor of the valley and for several years thereafter there was no great increase in numbers, but since 1924 there has been a steady increase in the number of nesting pairs. During the last two seasons it has been quite possible to find a hundred birds on a morning's walk.

Why the Brewer blackbirds should be the only birds to show a rapid increase in number in the valley is quite inexplicable, but such is the case. It may be that the death rate is exceedingly low among them, or it may be that

more birds are moving in from lower elevations to nest in the valley. In any event we are glad to have them in the valley for they are bold but confiding, and quick to make friends with the considerate camper.

In normal years the first Brewer blackbirds arrive in the valley soon after the middle of March. These first few birds are probably scouts sent out to reconnoiter and report back to the members of their tribes who have been wintering in the San Joaquin valley. In any case a few birds appear and then depart and it is not before the first week of April that Brewer blackbirds really become common in Yosemite Valley.

The first Brewers to arrive in the valley are all males, the females do not come in until the males have been settled for a week or ten days.

The Brewers are sociable birds, they like company and until the time they become involved with their nesting duties they are likely to be found associating with the red-winged blackbirds. Occasionally these early arrivals are caught in a late snow storm and then, in

company with robins, they come to the back doors to beg a handout to tide them over the storm.

When we first became acquainted with the Brewers in the Yosemite, and for the two following seasons, they showed a strong preference for nest locations in the young yellow pines about the Kenneyville field; in fact we found their nests in no other kind of tree. But in the spring of 1923 they suddenly changed their habits, deserted the yellow pines completely, and took to the mistletoe bunches as more suitable for their nesting needs. Seemingly this was a very good move, for the nests were much more effectively concealed and more nearly inaccessible. And besides with the oaks hung heavily with mistletoe bunches, nesting sites were available far beyond the needs of the blackbird population. The change of nesting site from pine to mistletoe may have been in some measure responsible for the rapid increase of the Brewer population in the valley, for a nest situated in a mistletoe clump at the outer end of an oak branch would be in most cases beyond human molestation and also beyond the reach of marauding ground squirrels.

With his two principal enemies eliminated the Brewer would have a, very fair chance of successfully rearing his young. And furthermore, living in close community in the mistletoe-clustered oaks, the Brewers have adopted the principle of mutual aid. Should hawk, jay, woodpecker or squirrel attempt to raid a nest all birds of the colony band quickly together to rout the intruder. And may it be said that a band of angry blackbirds scolding and striking is quite enough to embarrass a most formidable foe.

In the Yosemite Valley food abundance or the lack of abundance has probably affected the Brewer blackbirds neither one way nor the other. The great changes that have taken place in the valley during the last ten years have all been caused by the devastating and ever increasing tide of humanity.

This human tide has been favorable to the Brewers rather than otherwise for these blackbirds are among the few species of birds that take kindly to civilization.

The assistant park naturalist says that the Brewer blackbirds are more like humans than any other bird. Perhaps this is the reason that they take so kindly to people.

Many birds hop, some few birds have a mixed gait; the robin for instance runs a few steps and then hops a few steps, but the Brewer blackbirds walk. On the ground they have a lordly manner. They hold their heads high and they step with a long, swaggering stride, and yet somehow they manage to appear leisurely and dignified.

They feed mostly on the ground in the open meadows. They are keen foragers, they strut along jabbing here and there and never is it long before they have a bill load of food to take home to their hungry young. And, besides, they have learned to "strut their stuff" among the campers, where they get many a choice mouthful.

The Brewer blackbirds build a bulky nest. The frame work consists of rather coarse material, such as weed stems and grasses and the outside finish is not particularly neat. The commodious cup is neatly lined with horsehair and other fine material. The number of eggs ranges from four to six. They are of a gray green ground color and heavily blotched with brown or per

naps lavender.

Both parent blackbirds take part in the feeding of the young. When carrying food the birds go directly to the nest, no attempt being made to conceal the location. When the young have left the nests, and have grown strong of wing, the family groups gather in flocks to go vacationing in the high mountain meadows. In late summer flocks of Brewers may be found in the meadows above timberline. As the valley-bred birds move upward Brewers from lower elevations move into the valley to take their places.

Occasionally in the late summer months flocks containing several hundred birds come pouring into the Yosemite. Flight maneuvers of a flock of Brewer blackbirds are a sight well worth seeing. Through difficult formations the birds swing and wheel in unison, and then, as the flock settles, each individual bird comes gently drifting down on set wings.

The last straggling Brewer leaves Yosemite Valley about the first of November.

A BEAR AND HER CUBS

By **JOE BURGESS**
Ranger Naturalist

A long day's hike, a supper of trout cooked over an open fire and a bed of fragrant fir boughs. The music of Clark creek as it crosses the Merced Pass trail and a night with brilliant stars. The healthy sleep of weariness and a crisp autumn morning when one lies for a short time enjoying the warmth of blankets before turning out; and there you have the setting for the little incident herein described.

We were enjoying just such a

few moments when a bear with two cubs, blond and brunet, came ambling down the trail. The mother evidently got our scent, for she stopped and stood up on her hind feet to get a better look. Sensing danger, she turned and crossed the stream. Here she again stopped and, after a little uncertainty, it looked as though she deliberately sent the little brunet back to investigate. Be that as it may, she stayed across the stream with Blondy while the other cub took a devious path back to our camp.



Here he began a thorough investigation; nosing around among pans and kettles and looking with hungry eyes at our saddle bags suspended between two trees. Apparently satisfied that nothing edible was to be found, he picked up our small dish mop and scampered back to his mother for her commendation. And so began another glorious day in the Big Yosemite mountains.

P. S. The dish mop was recovered a few yards down the trail—unharmful!

Unearthing the Home of a Golden-mantled Ground Squirrel

By RANGER NATURALIST
REYNOLD E. CARLSON

Many and curious are the articles employed by the golden-mantled ground squirrels to furnish their homes, I learned at the Glacier Point camp ground. Everything from San Francisco Examiners to a Herbert Tareyton cigaret stub was unearthed from one burrow investigated on the morning of August 29, 1933.

Interest in the burrow had been aroused during the previous week, when two campers noticed the little squirrel tearing off bits of their paper supply with its teeth, then carrying the bits to its burrow. Quite frequently the squirrel would find the pieces too large to go through the hole and would have to stop at the entrance to crumple them with his paws.

The burrow entrance was located between two white firs. The passageway, approximately three inches high and three and a half inches wide, ran about six inches beneath the surface of the ground for two feet, and then went gradually deeper. Four and one-half feet from the entrance the investigator found the root of a tree, about eight inches in diameter, stretched directly across the path of the tunnel. Though for a while it was difficult to find which way the squirrel had dug, it was soon discovered that the hole passed beneath the root. About one and a half feet from the intersection of the hole and the root, and at a depth of one and one-half feet, a chamber, about five inches wide and 10 inches long, was unearthed.

The end of the chamber caved in

as a result of the digging process, so that its direct connection with what followed can only be surmised. What followed was the discovery, a few inches to the side and about four inches deeper, of the cache. The cavity was about five inches wide, five inches high, and 11 inches long. The last six inches or so were packed tightly with the paper and other miscellany as follows:

Over 600 pieces of newspaper, ranging from one-fourth inch scraps to a piece six by four and a half inches. The dates August 13, August 15, and August 17 were discernible on the scraps.

One Hood River apple wrapper, 10 by 10 inches—quite a mouthful for a small squirrel.

One piece of rope, 18 inches long.

Fifty-three pieces of paper composed of toweling, wrapping paper, labels, writing paper and paper napkins.

Three sheets of Kleenex, practically full size, cigaret stub, robin feather, one small piece of cotton, and one piece of cellophane.

Three leaves of wormwood. These puzzled the investigators at first. One of the campers relieved the difficulty, however, by saying that she had brought the leaves from Yosemite valley and that the squirrel had doubtless stolen them from her.

It is significant that no food of any kind was in the chamber. However, an apricot pit was found in the passageway to the chamber. The paper was doubtless intended to keep the squirrel warm during its winter hibernation.



Pioneer Shrines in Yosemite

By GRACE NICHOLS

Field School, 1933

(Editor's Note: The concluding article of a series on Yosemite pioneers follows. The first two articles appeared in previous issues.)

JOSEPH LECONTE whom Dr. John C. Merriam, head of the Carnegie Institution, characterizes as the greatest geologist and one of the greatest philosophers he has ever known, came West in 1869 to teach geology, physiology and certain allied subjects in the newly organized University of California. He remained in active service as a member of the faculty for more than 30 years, and was one of the most popular and well-beloved instructors ever to be connected with the university.

His first contact with Yosemite occurred in 1870, when he spent a summer in the Sierra in company with eight students from the university and Frank Soule, a junior professor. In his "Autobiography," LeConte describes the expedition as follows: "The trip was made in the roughest style of camp life, each man carrying his bedding and extra clothing in a roll behind his saddle, and a pack horse bearing the food and camp utensils for the party. We had no tent, but slept under the trees with only the sky above us. I never enjoyed anything else so much in my life—perfect health

the merry party of young men, the glorious scenery, and above all, the magnificent opportunity for studying mountain origin and structure."

As a result of his studies made during this and succeeding summers, he was the first scientist to bring forth the theory of glaciation as a major factor in the creation of many outstanding features of the Sierra landscape.

He was particularly fond of the Yosemite region, making 16 trips to the valley during his lifetime. In discussing the reactions as he approached the valley on one of these visits, he says: "There are two kinds of enjoyment of scenery as of everything else. The one is the enjoyment of the same mel-
lowed and hallowed by association. The one effects more the imagination, the other the heart. I had been in Yosemite so often that I now loved it for its association with previous delights."

When one considers this great love for the valley which endured and grew stronger with the years, it seems especially fitting the LeConte's life should have reached its conclusion surrounded and sheltered by the majestic beauty and peace of the valley. A friend gives the following account of his death which occurred in Camp Curry on

July 5, 1901: "Professor LeConte set out for the valley with his daughter, Mrs. Davis, to show her the scenes and wonders of the region. Arriving at the camp at the base of Glacier Point on July 3, he joined members of the Sierra Club there. He was 'considerably fatigued, but was in his usual high spirits. For the next two days, he was the life of the party, driving with his daughter all over the valley, walking to nearby points of interest, and explaining the geological phenomena to crowds of eager listeners. On the evening of the fifth while very tired from a tramp, he ate a hearty dinner, and soon afterward complained of a severe pain in the region of the heart.' A physician was summoned at once and diagnosed the trouble as angina pectoris. Everything possible was done for the relief of the sufferer, and in the morning he seemed much better but at 10 o'clock, when the doctor was absent procuring additional remedies, his condition became acute and he died some five minutes later."

The tent that he had occupied on this occasion was shaded by a huge oak. This tree later died, but its stump was preserved intact, and is marked by a cairn of glacial boulders which had been previously collected by LeConte and David Curry from the Bridal Veil Morain. It can be seen near the same fire circle in Camp Curry.

The LeConte Memorial Lodge was erected in his memory in 1904 under the auspices of the Sierra Club. It was situated back of Camp Curry. In 1918 the Curry Company desired to expand by erecting a series of bungalows in the region occupied by the lodge, but the Sierra Club objected on the basis that this expansion project would completely

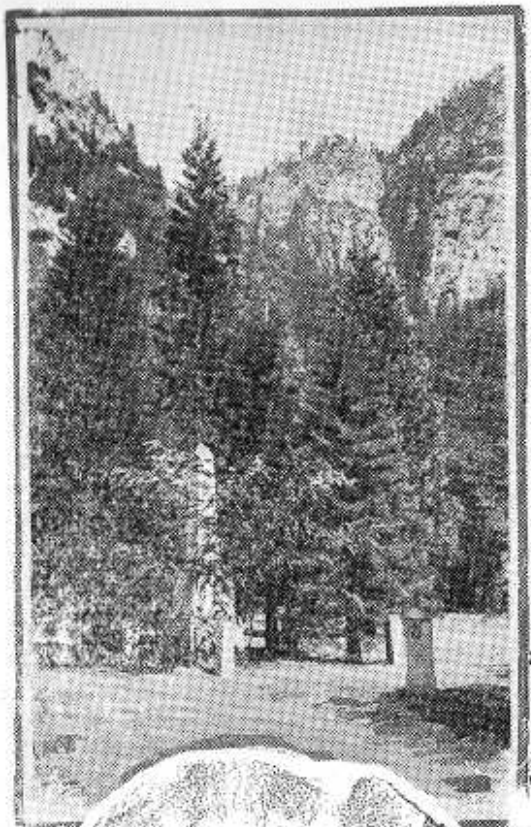
surround the lodge thus rendering its location less advantageous. The difficulty was finally settled by the payment of \$3000 to the Sierra Club by the Curry Company in return for which the lodge was dismantled and moved to its present location opposite Camp 16.

At present the lodge houses a nature library, and is a general headquarters for the dispensing of information regarding the H. I. G. Sierra country. It is open to the public during May, June and July of each year. It is hoped that the building may sometime be acquired by the park for the housing of a permanent geological exhibit.

VALLEY CEMETERY

In a sheltered place on the north side of the valley where the Yosemite Fall makes majestic music through the years, sinking to a barely audible pianissimo in late summer, and rising in a grand crescendo of thunderous, crashing sound in spring flood time the Fathers of the Valley lie sleeping. And surely no spot on earth could offer a more sublime setting in which to view the Resurrection morning than this peaceful plot of ground, shaded by oak and cedar and sequoia.

Here sleeps Galen Clark beneath the trees he loved and tended through the years—his gravestone a section of Yosemite granite hewn out by his friend John Conway from the third pinnacle of Cathedral Spires which fell from its high estate nearly a century ago. Here too, is the grave of J. M. Hutchings with its monument of rough-hewn Yosemite granite fittingly inscribed; and the final resting places of others less known to fame, who shared the hardships of the early days in the valley.



GALEN CLARK'S GRAVE
Yosemite Cemetery

A gallant company of trail-blazers—as one stands in reverent contemplation of their busy, useful lives now completed, one can truthfully say of them, "The good that they have done will never come to an end." For by their unswerving devotion to the cause of conserving natural beauty, they made possible the development not of Yosemite alone, but of our entire national park system which will constitute a source of abiding joy and pleasure to all of us as long as our country shall endure.

WAWONA DEER, MOUNTAIN LIONS, AND COYOTES

By **ROBERT P. BEAL**
Ranger Naturalist

The Wawona basin is well known as a wintering ground for the mule deer of Yosemite. Here the winters are usually mild and feed plentiful though winters of extreme cold and heavy snow may turn the basin into a death trap.

The winter of 1933-34 has been extremely mild and the writer, engaged in insect control work, has had an excellent opportunity to observe the deer wintering in this region. Preceding the light storms, the deer have gathered in large numbers on the warm south slopes. The influx of deer into the area has been followed by an influx of their natural enemies, mountain lions and coyotes.

Coyotes have frequently been heard during day light hours and one of our party observed three

coyotes in pursuit of a small band of deer. No mountain lions have been seen, but several deer carcasses have been found which are believed to be the work of the mountain lions.

Such a carcass was found near Alder Creek during the month of February. The first note of its presence being the odor of decaying organic matter. Working "upwind," bits of deer hair were noted. The trail led to the base of a large pine and cedar, growing close together. Here large quantities of deer hair and hide were found covered with pine needles, evidently the cache of a lion.

Evidently a mountain lion had made the kill and buried the carcass between the two trees. Later the coyotes robbed the cache and cleaned the carcass of practically all meat.

FROM FIELD NOTES

SCARLET SPLENDOR SEEN

Snow plants are abundant this year. Glacier Point, as well as the Mariposa Grove, has many. Along the old trail between Half Dome and the Merced Lake trail are scores. Occasional clumps, a dozen or more plants in a single group, making a glow of color seen long distances through the pines, have been reported by several hikers on trails above the rim. In the wild flower garden in back of the museum are some flourishing transplanted specimens. One individual attained a stature of over 15 inches before going to seed. C. W. S.





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Dan Anderson