

YOSEMITE NATURE NOTES

VOL. XIX

August 1940

No. 8



Jeffrey Pine On Sentinel Dome

Yosemite Nature Notes

THE PUBLICATION OF
THE YOSEMITE NATURALIST DEPARTMENT
AND THE YOSEMITE NATURAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION

Published Monthly

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THE ARCTIC THREE-TOED WOODPECKER ON THE GLACIER POINT ROAD By Charles Michael

On the warm sunny day of May 13, 1940, under cloudless skies, John, Fitz, and I spent several hours along the Glacier Point Road. Between us John and I had almost promised to show Fitz a new bird for his "Life List." As we neared our objective a woodpecker on bounding wings was seen flying away from a group of lodge-pole pines. The car was parked at the first available spot and we walked back to where we had last seen the woodpecker. We could not locate the bird, but on the snow at the base of the lodge-pole pine where a pair of Arctic Three-toed Woodpeckers had nested during the summer of 1938 were fresh chips. A few feet above the old nest-hole a new hole had been started. From the appearance of the chips lying there on the snow we judged that they had been dropped this very morning.

Off in different directions we with eyes and ears alert to catch sound or sight of the bird. After about fifteen minutes John and I sat down on a granite slope that was free from snow and let Fitz continue the search. Fitz wanted to see that

woodpecker—two years before he had missed the nesting birds by a single day. And I remember that Fitz and I searched the wood for an hour or more, thinking that the young birds could not have gotten far away.

John and I had not long enjoyed our sun-bath when a shout from Fitz sent us plugging through the snow. We arrived too late, but Fitz had certainly gotten a thrill. The pair of Arctic Three-toed Woodpeckers had alighted in a small white fir tree not far from where Fitz stood and there before his eyes they had responded to the "will of the species." Fitz had noted no unusual behavior leading up to the mating act; no nuptial dance of any sort, nor was there any exchange of notes between the birds. Woodpeckers of other species are as a rule garrulous, even vociferous, during the courting scenes, but here not a sound was uttered.

Later we heard a loud and rapid vibration of bill beats. The woodpecker had a good sounding board on the dead spike of a tall lodge-pole pine and as we looked through



the binoculars we could see his yellow crown patch flashing in the sunshine.

Not once during our stay of an hour or more did we hear the woodpeckers utter a single note, however, we had been entertained by such noted songsters as Town-

send Solitaire, Cassin Purple Finch and Ruby-crowned Kinglet. And too, we left the neighborhood with the feeling that here was a good prospect for further study of the nesting habits of the rare Asctic Three-toed Woodpecker.

ANOTHER NEW BIRD FOR YOSEMITE

By Ranger Naturalist Vincent Mowbray

At 10:30 a.m. on February 1, 1940, which was a warm, sunny day, of a warm, open winter, I was surprised to see an owl fly from an Incense Cedar at Rocky Point, Yosemite Valley. The bird flew in my direction until it was within seventy-five feet of me then turned down the road, disappearing behind the rock pile. It was in sight for about forty seconds and in that time I was able to note the light tan color streaked with black, the light

patches on the upper surface of the wings, and that there were no conspicuous ear tufts present, which indicated that it was a Short-eared Owl, (*Asio Wilsonianus*).

During the next several days, several of us, including members of the naturalist staff searched this area for the bird but without success. I feel sure of my identification, however, because I have frequently observed Short-eared Owls in the vicinity of the Oakland Airport.

NOTES ON THE WREN-TIT IN TENAYA CANYON

By Ranger Naturalist Vincent Mowbray

On September 29, 1939, I heard a Wren-Tit singing on the Snow Creek Falls trail in exactly the same spot where one was heard on July 26, 1939 by members of the Yosemite School of Field Natural History (see Smith, *Yos. Nat. Notes*, Vol. 18, No. 12, p. 127). The elevation at this 6600 feet. These records aroused my curiosity as to the possibility of other observations of the Wren-Tit in this locality. In Dr. Joseph Grin-

nell's field notes for 1915 I found that he heard "at least two Wren-Tits" in the same general locality on September 29 of that year. Dr. A. H. Miller has told me that he observed a Wren-Tit in this same vicinity during the summer of 1920.

From these records it seems that there is a possibility that the Wren-Tit might be a resident bird in this section of Tenaya Canyon.

Feeding Habits Of The Sierra Crossbill

By Ranger-Naturalist M. D. Bryant

The Sierra Crossbill (*Loxia curvirostra bendirei*) was rare in the vicinity of Tuolumne Meadows during the summer of 1938 but was unusually abundant during July of 1939. One or more flocks was observed daily during this month. On July 8 flocks of ten, twelve and fifteen birds were seen. The crossbills occasionally feed on crumbs left at campsites, on barnyard refuse, or on seeds picked up from the ground. However, the usual forage niche is near the tops of Lodgepole Pines (*Pinus contorta*), where the crossbills secure the seeds by opening unripe cones. The purpose of this article is to give an exact description of one method used by the crossbill in opening the cones. The observations recorded were made with field glasses at a distance of about twenty feet.

The crossbill grasps the cone with the beak and severs its connection with the branch by a sidewise movement of the head. This is usually done while the bird is in an upright position but may be accomplished while it is hanging upside down. If the cone is dropped, as is often the case, no attempt is made to recover it. The cones that are retained by the beak are then held firmly against the branch by the combined use of the beak, breast, and feet. The upper mandible is used to loosen the tip of the scale. The head is then turned laterally and both mandibles are shoved under the scale so that the

scale is spread widely when the head is straightened. The scales are opened progressively from the tip or near the tip of the cone toward the base. After the scales have been pried apart, there is a rapid movement of the mandibles which results in the extraction of the seeds and leaves the scales in a shredded con-



dition. A large number of seeds are left in the cone. The average time spent in working on a cone is about two minutes but a close inspection of the cones shows that some have

been thoroughly opened and that others have only a few scales near the tip pried out. Since the Sierra Crossbill feeds in groups a large

number of cones may be found under a tree upon which they have been feeding for only a short time.

NORTHERN BROWN TOWHEE

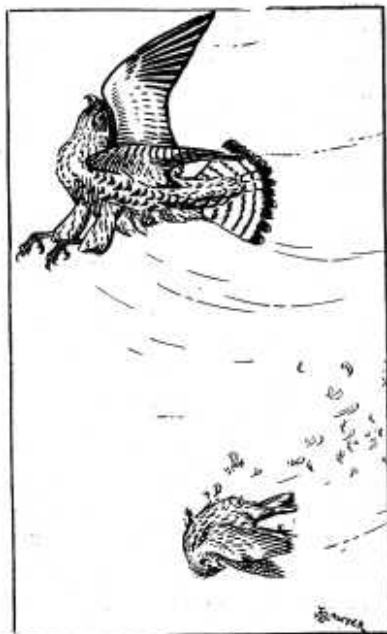
By Ranger Naturalist Enid Michael

The Brown Towhee, *Pipilo crissalis carolae*, is resident in the district about El Portal just below the Park boundary and it occurs sparingly within the Park a few miles up from El Portal. However, my records of the past twenty years show not a single record for Yosemite Valley proper. During the post-nesting season even non-migratory birds are inclined to wander. The young of the season are likely to go forth in search of adventure, but this seems not to be the case with the Brown Towhees.

Resident birds at El Portal and neighbors of the Brown Towhee such as California Jay, Bushtit, California Quail and Western Gnatcatcher do occasionally wander into Yosemite Valley. Why not the Brown Towhee? While there is nothing spectacular about the Brown Towhee in color, song or behavior I really would like to meet up with one in Yosemite Valley because they are among my very oldest feathered friends. I have known the Brown Towhee practically all my life for they used to come to the back door to pick up crumbs when I was a mere child. My mother introduced me to "Brownie" when I was three or four years old.

Brown birds feeding in the brown grass, the Brown Towhees place no

reliance in protective coloration, but at the first sign of danger they dash to the cover of the brush thicket far from which they never stray. With long tails and short wings they are adept in dodging through the twig-gery of a thicket and once in the thicket they can easily out maneuver their enemy, the Sharpshinned Hawk.



From the security of their home thicket the Brown Towhees may even go so far as to tease a hawk, coming to the top of the thicket to jeer the killer; daring him to stoop, being quite confident of their ability to

avoid capture. Of course the Sharp-shinned Hawk depends on stealth to aid him in his acts of bloody murder and so the wise Towhee keeps an eye on the hawk until he leaves the neighborhood. The sharp-eyed California Jay knows all that goes on in the neighborhood and he is likely to be the first one to give the warning shout when a hawk appears, but seemingly he is a bird of short memory and is likely to leave cover while the enemy is still present and thus not only does he warn the towhee of danger but also, inadvertently perhaps, acts as a buffer between the towhee and the killer.

The California Jay has an evil reputation. He is said to be an enemy of the smaller birds, nevertheless it seems to me that there is a mixture

of good and evil which strikes a balance in the scheme of things.

The call-note of the Brown Towhee is a single, sharp, sparrow-like "chirp," distinctive because of its peculiar quality. The song is a series of chirps strung together. The first two or three notes may come with hesitancy and not equally spaced, as though the singer were not sure just how to start the song, but now comes a rapid trill of six or eight notes, increasing in tempo and becoming more musical as they drop slightly in pitch. The song is remindful of the song of the wren-tit, but it lacks the uniform consistency and the enthusiasm of utterance. The Brown Towhee is not likely to be heard in song except at the height of the mating season.

PINE GROSBEAKS FEED ON MISTLETOE

By Betty Hone, Field School '39

We were cooking supper at our first High Sierra Trip camp in Tuolumne Meadows, July 26, 1939, when somebody called "Pine Grosbeak." Everyone rushed out with binoculars to watch the brilliantly colored male feed a gray-coated youngster. Mr. Pell noted some natal-down still on the head and the slightly streaked breast. The grosbeaks came again early next morning. In all a male, female and two young were seen. Mr. Mowbray saw an immature grosbeak later at our McCabe Lake camp.

On August 7, 1939, in Cold Canyon not far above Glen Aulin, we saw an immature (or female) feeding on mistletoe. The mistletoe was parasitic on Lodgepole Pine and was identified by Mr. Carl Sharnsmith as *Arceuthobium americanum*. The bird appeared to be feeding not only on the flowers and fruits but also on the leafy parts of the plant. At intervals it gave a call note which was re-echoed by another bird which was hidden from view.

PHOTOGRAPHING THE WASHINGTON LILY

By Ranger-Naturalist Arthur Carthew

One of the most difficult flowers to photograph in such a way as to do justice to its great beauty is the Washington Lily (*Lilium Washingtonianum*). This lovely flower, named so appropriately after Martha Washington, is a dweller of the chaparral covered slopes, where all but the very top of the plant is usually obscured by the surrounding vegeta-



tion. Although rather widely distributed along the whole length of the Sierra Nevada it is never found in large stands and is always a special delight to the flower lover who chances upon an occasional specimen deep in the chaparral.

Early in July an exceptional opportunity was given me to photograph a particularly fine specimen growing along the highway about a mile toward Wawona from the South Entrance Ranger Station. This

plant stood out quite apart from the dense thickets, exposing itself in its fully beauty. A number of plants of the Mountain Misery (*Chamaebatia foliolosa*) formed its only consort and they were too prostrate to detract from the majesty of the lily. At the time of photographing there were three full blossoms, eight buds, and three faded blossoms. It reached a height of some four and one-half feet. Although growing in full view of the highway it is doubtful if many of the thousands of visitors passing close by every day witnessed this lovely flower, such is one of the penalties we pay for speed.

NATURE NOTELETS

By Vincent Mowbray

A pair of Bush-Tits were observed at about 5000 feet elevation on the Four-mile Trail to Glacier Point on May 28, 1940. A short search failed to reveal a nest.

On May 21, 1940, I found a small White Fir (*Abies concolor*), about one foot in height, at an elevation of 9000 feet on the Clouds Rest Trail. The tree was growing in under a large rock in a well protected situation. This species is generally to be found from 3000 to 7000 feet elevation in the Yosemite region.

AN EXPERIENCE WITH THE SIERRA GROUSE**By Ranger-Naturalist George A. Petrides**

On August 6, 1939, two members of the Yosemite School of Field Natural History, James Huss and the author, were permitted an exceptional opportunity to view, at close range, an adult female Sierra Grouse accompanied by a three-fourths grown young bird. These birds were encountered upon the forested, western slope of Shepherd's Crest at an altitude of approximately 10,800 feet.

The adult bird was the first to be seen. It was standing upon a large boulder and was easily visible above a dense growth of low willows. As the observers approached gradually, the female grouse ducked and bowed and wagged its tail repeatedly, all the while emitting a clucking note much like that of the domestic chicken. Its entire attitude expressed its irritation upon being disturbed.

Not until the adult had been approached to within fifty feet, however, was the young bird noticed. At that time, the adult bird flushed and flew low over the willows for a distance of approximately 150 feet. Upon approaching the original rock perch more closely, the reason for the adult's agitation became apparent to the observers as an almost fully-grown young grouse flushed and flew toward the new position of the adult, landing at about the half-way point.

The fact that female grouse may remain with their young at least until they have almost attained their full

growth is thus apparent. The clucking note of the parent likewise verifies vocally the close relationship of this wild species to the domestic chicken.

NEW HOME FOR ANTS**By Richmond Hodges**

Yesterday, June 26, 1940, the telephone operator told me the telephone coin box dime slot at Camp 12 was clogged, and as I am custodian of coin boxes I went over to investigate. I found it alive with ants; they had, in fact, built a nest in it, using the coin slots to get in and out. I can put myself in the place of those ants—busy beings as they are. Here was a ready-made home, deep and dark, and no work to do except to raise a family. (Of course that's not much work when you're experienced.)

I found a dime stuck just within the top of the dime slot, due, apparently, to the dirt brought in by many little feet. When I placed the key in the coin box to remove the draw, ants immediately swarmed over my hand. I withdrew the draw and dropped it on the ground, and underneath where the draw had been were the eggs and larvae. The ants were greatly excited at the daylight suddenly pouring in, and began at once to remove their precious possessions. How they worked! But all in vain; we washed them all away with hose water.



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Dan Anderson