

# YOSEMITE NATURE NOTES

PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Volume II

June 26, 1923.

Number 3

W. B. Lewis, Superintendent

Ansel F. Hall, Chief Naturalist

## VISIT THE YOSEMITE SWAMPS

Those who wish to see especially exquisite gardens should visit the Yosemite swamps. There is one just beyond Camp 9, one near the Iron Spring and several between Camp Curry and Happy Isles. The wet spongy earth of the swamps shaded by Dogwood, Cottonwood and Alder is the favorite home of a happy company of plants.

Here the graceful Lady Fern has unfolded thousands of fronds. High above the ferns the Cow Parsnip waves a gigantic umbrella of white flowers. The Alpine Lily lifts its clusters of promising buds that now show shades of orange. The slender white spikes thrust up through the ferns are the spring contribution of the Sierra Rein-orchid, the first of the Yosemite orchids to bloom. Crowding in among the ferns and along the path is the Enchanter's Nightshade, *Circaea*. She is ever ready with secret spell to discomfort those who mar the tranquil beauty of the marsh.

## LIVE REPTILES ATTRACT MUSEUM VISITORS.

The exhibits of living snakes are attracting many visitors to the Yosemite Museum. Probably the most interesting specimen in the collection is the Rubber Boa or "Double-Ended Snake." This is a northern representative of the noted Boa family, and it has been given credit for constricting its prey as does its tropical relatives. It has the habit, when disturbed, of coiling into an intricate knot, hiding its head in its body folds and presenting its blunt tail which may be easily mistaken for the head. This snake never attempts to protect itself by biting.

## TRAILL FLYCATCHER REBUILDS NEAR OLD NEST

Three summers in succession a pair of Traill Flycatchers have built their nest in some wild rose bushes near Stoneman Bridge. This year the nest is hardly six inches above the old last year's nest which is still in place on a lower branch of the same rose bush. This Flycatcher, unlike its near relatives, builds its nest near the ground of rootlets and fibers, other species of the same genus utilizing cottony material.

## THE LARGE BROWN ANIMAL OF HALF DOME

Hikers to Half Dome report a large brown animal in the rocks well up the Dome where vegetation is scarce. This is a Marmot which has consistently made its home on the Dome for several years. The same animal is often called Woodchuck or Ground Hog. It is in reality a large kind of ground squirrel which inhabits the higher country. Later, when the Tioga Road is open, one of the commonest questions asked the Nature Guides will be: "What animal did we see scampering over the rocks near Tioga Pass?" Even though one knows that Marmots feed on roots and herbage, yet it is difficult to explain how the one on Half Dome ekes out an existence. Judging by his avoirdupois he does, in fact, more than eke out an existence.

## POISONOUS MUSHROOMS FOUND.

A number of fine specimens of the deadly poisonous mushroom, *Amanita Phalloides*, have been found in Yosemite during the past week. The most poisonous of our mushrooms belong to this genus. They may be recognized by having a cup at the base of the stalk, a ring about the stalk, and white spores. The color of the spores may best be determined by placing the caps of the mushrooms gills downward on a piece of paper, covering with an inverted glass to keep out the air currents. The ripe spores drop downwards, leaving an imprint in the exact form of the gills.

## BABY BIRDS.

The actual nesting season of the birds on the floor of the Valley is nearly over and family parties are now the rule. Parent birds have come from seclusion and may be seen busily foraging for food and carrying it to the young birds hidden in nearby foliage. With the young birds out of the nest new chattering food calls are heard. The baby black-headed grosbeak has a peculiar call resembling the mewling of a lost kitten. Many a bird student thinks he has discovered a brand new bird when first hearing a baby grosbeak and he is disillusioned only when he espies the characteristic head stripes and large bill which also mark the adult female.

## HEN AND CHICKENS

The tourists upon the stage, driving in from El Portal, are often attracted by an orange and red flower growing upon the rocky banks along the road or upon the steep cliffs of the Yosemite. When the passengers examine the plant and see its rosette of thick leaves and fleshy stem they are inclined to pronounce it a kind of cactus. This cactus like plant is commonly called Hen and Chickens and it is a member of the Stonecrop family. It thrives upon the steep walls of Yosemite. Here it pushes a root into a crack in the rock and drinks freely of the water that seeps down from the snow-fields above. Much of this water is stored in the fleshy leaves. During the long summer, after the snow banks are gone, the Stonecrop draws upon the moisture and food stored in its leaves.

### THE MOUNTAIN WEASEL

One of the smallest of the predatory or carnivorous animals was caught and brought to the Museum during the past week. This lithe and active animal, the Mountain Weasel, has on its bill-of-fare a large assortment of other animals, some of them much larger than itself. The Weasel is very aggressive and is a deliberate murderer, often killing for no other reason than the pleasure of doing so. Out in the open, away from men's poultry houses, the Weasel is to be credited with doing some good; here its food consists largely of the California Ground Squirrel and other harmful rodents.

### RED-SHAFTED FLICKER REARS BROOD NEAR SENTINEL BRIDGE.

Many passersby have stopped to watch a pair of Red-shafted Flickers feeding their young in an old stub at the side of the road near Sentinel Bridge. For a week past a couple of the baby birds have been old enough to spend most of their time looking out the front door and their oft-given calls have attracted attention. The flicker, although a woodpecker, feeds largely on the ground, ants being the favorite food, but in nesting habits this bird imitates his relatives. Another pair of flickers built their home in an old stub in the meadow below the village.

### CAMP ROBBERS.

Since the gray squirrel disappeared from Yosemite Valley two years ago, the California Ground Squirrel is becoming exceedingly conspicuous, much to the concern of some of the campers. Several camps have been robbed by these little animals of late. A sack of six pounds of walnuts was stolen from a tent in Camp 19 by one family of these aggressive rodents.

### THE BLUE RACER.

A sixth species of snake, a blue racer, is now to be found in the terrarium at the Yosemite Museum. Usually, a flash of greenish olive and some wiggling grass and this snake is gone, for it is a "racer." Its uniform color above and its smooth scales make this harmless snake especially attractive to those who are willing to make a pet of a reptile.

### THE YOSEMITE MOLE

A common mammal of the Valley seldom seen is the Yosemite Mole. This little burrower has given up his life above ground and lives by incessant search for earth-worms and insects beneath the surface of the soil. As a result of this existence in sub-terrenean darkness the animal has lost its eyes, rudiments of those organs being found beneath the skin. To make up for what it cannot see a remarkable development of the organs of smell enables the mole to keep accurately in touch with its surroundings. A specimen captured while burrowing near a tent in Camp 19 lived but a few days in confinement at the Yosemite Museum. The Mole's appetite is almost insatiable. A quantity of food nearly equal to its own weight is required every twenty-four hours.



Digitized by  
Yosemite Online Library

<http://www.yosemite.ca.us/library>

Dan Anderson