

YOSEMITE NATURE NOTES

VOL. XX

September, 1941

No. 9



Yosemite Nature Notes

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

Published Monthly

VOL. XX

SEPTEMBER, 1941

NO 9

A TRIP TO SHEPHERD'S CREST---BY ONE WHO SURVIVED Helen K. Sharsmith

"Folks, a final word now about our exploration trip to the Little Lost Valley of Shepherd's Crest tomorrow. It's for the hardened mountaineers among you, and it's going to be a work-out. About seventeen miles round trip, no trail; the country stands on end, and we climb to 11,600 feet. We'll meet at 7:30 A.M., drive to Saddlebag Lake, and start walking from there. Wear husky shoes and bring a big lunch; you'll need them both. And remember—it's a **real** hike; don't come unless you feel equal to it. Now, let's end our campfire as usual by singing 'Good-night, Oh Campers'."

Exploration trip, country stands on end, work-out! Tack that challenge to as enchanting a name as "Little Lost Valley of Shepherd Crest," and you've a combination hard to resist. Especially so when the enticer has lured you on with a half-hour's preliminary account of the wonders of that geologic gem, the Little Lost Valley.

When this Tuolumne Meadows naturalist said "tough trip," though, he meant it, and those of the Tuolumne campers who had been on

many a trip with him, summer after summer, knew it too. So early next morning when the naturalist assembled his gang at Saddlebag Lake, Tuolumne's "tough guys," both would-be and proven, were waiting for him. He surveyed his group of thirty-four with a quizzical eye; took in the footwear, noted the familiar faces; discovered some new ones. To these latter ones he gave a second glance. It was the largest all-day turnout for the summer, and he had tried to scare away all but the hardened!

"Well, gang, it's a long way there and a longer way back," he warned. "Does everyone still feel like it?" No dissents. "A lot of nice stopping places along the way, if you change your minds. All right, fellows, let's go!"

Single-file, we started out on the sharp rocks of the fisherman's trail around Saddlebag Lake—the blue sky above; bluer lake below. Across the lake were the rich, red slopes of Tioga Crest. Everyone was gay, tongues wagging, acquaintanceships starting. From Saddlebag Lake we cut cross-country, passing the

route which leads to the Conness Glacier and Mt. Conness, heading toward the granite wall which connects North Peak and the southeastern extremity of Shepherd's Crest, and picking our way between the numerous Lundy Lakes. The largest and deepest of these many-patterned alpine lakes lies near the base of North Peak, and here we rested at cliff's edge high above the water, enjoying the wonder of this mountain fairy-land.

Our relaxation was cut short with a hearty, "We've just well started, folks. Let's go!" Again our legs adjusted, or tried to adjust to the steady, measured, mountaineering pace of our leader, which he assumed so tirelessly and with such ease that he was the perfect example for all. Already there were a few murmurs begrudging that pace, but always they were mixed with admiration.

"How does the man do it?" someone remarked in an audible side whisper.

Trailless country, yet our leader chose an unswerving route; always making the footsteps count; always avoiding the difficult places; consistently leading us through the lovely spots. But the latter he couldn't help; they were everywhere. There were twinkling streamlets to cross on precariously balanced boulders; there were alpine flowers set like jewels in the green sedge carpet which lay soft beneath our feet. There was a granite talus to skirt, and then a jointed, salt and pepper granite cliff to scale. It was the first steep climb.

Did the tough guys take it? You bet! But the party began to spread. And what was that—a stifled groan? "Does that man never rest?"

"Somebody stop him," called a voice from the rear.

"Oh, ranger," relayed a sympathetic chap, "can you tell us what this flower way down here is?"

The naturalist grinned and stopped while the laggards caught up. Then he obliged them with a botanical discourse while their hearts slowed down and their breath climbed into longer pants.

"On again? I just got here," objected the last arrival indignantly, but already the leader was a steep pitch ahead. This time, however, an old reliable was left behind to form a rearguard and encourage the stragglers.

The top of the wall at last, and on the other side, almost at our feet, were the McCabe Lakes. The highest of these lakes is nested between the bases of North Peak and Sheep Peak, and the others lie at successively lower levels on a shelf above the lovely, wooded valley which leads into Virginia Canyon. Lundy Lakes drain into Mono Lake, McCabe Lakes into the Tuolumne River, and thus we were on the crest which separates Pacific Ocean and Great Basin drainage areas. To our right was the sheer wall of Shepherd's Crest. We sat down to rest and to enjoy the beautiful scene. We could not see the Little Lost Valley, but our leader pointed out the 1000-foot chute which we must climb to gain entrance to it. Hearts dropped as he

explained that first we must descend to the wooded valley far below us, before we could start to climb the chute.

To reach McCabe Lakes, adventurous fisherfolk have worn a trail straight down this 1000-foot drop. Our down-hill muscles creaked as we put them to the test of this first steep descent. At last we reached the meadows near the lakes, and soon were in the forested valley below. The almost level ground came as a great relief to all, but the leader kept up his steady pace. "It's a long way up," he reminded us.

When we reached the point where we must turn and begin to climb again, we stopped and held a conclave beside the stream. Several of the would-be mountaineers had had their fill; they proposed to wait in this cool, forested spot while the rest of the group climbed to the Little Lost Valley. It was "do or die" for the rest of us, but as we started up the talus more than one looked longingly backward at the little group which lolled there in the shade—softies, yet how we envied them!

Now we were in for the longest, hardest pull of all, a 1,000-foot scramble up the very steep chute to the lip of the Little Lost Valley. It was slow, weary work. Gradually we climbed back to alpine elevations; the forest below us dwindled, and the view of distant horizons increased. We plugged on and up, and now we were very hungry as well, but our adamant leader said, "Lunch on top." Weak knees or no, we were in this to the finish; those who had

tapped their lunch bags stuffed back their half-eaten sandwiches guiltily. On and up we plugged, and finally we were there!

It was a pretty tired outfit that stretched out on the rocks of the Little Lost Valley, but lunch and a rest, and we were ready to look at the surroundings we had come so far to see. First glimpses were a bit disappointing to us who had not geologist's eyes, but our leader willingly loaned us his. With his lucid explanations, this Lilliputian cup of a valley lived for us.

The Little Lost Valley is bowl-shaped, with sloping granite talus walls on all sides except where we entered. There a lip leads out to the chute we climbed. This chute forms the only possible entrance to the Little Lost Valley, for the sheer walls of Shepherd's Crest, upon the edge of whose summit the Little Lost Valley is perched, drop abruptly from the valley's rim except at this one point. The naturalist called our approach the "secret entrance." Now we had enough restored energy to climb to the east rim of the valley. From the highest point of Shepherd's Crest, 11,600 feet, we looked down into our tiny, hanging valley remnant, and saw how the valley rim forms aretes, which join the main arete of Shepherd's Crest. The naturalist told us once again how this little valley was once part of a much larger valley area, probably formed in Eocene times when the Sierra was still a low range of hills. Uplift brought increased erosion, and glaciation hastened the carving out of

mountain profiles, but a remnant of the original valley escaped these destructive forces. There that tiny remnant hangs, high above the rest of the world, and there we were, probably the third group ever to set foot in it, and undoubtedly the very first women, of whom there were five.



Mt. Conness and Conness Glacier

Now we gave heed to the mass of peaks lying around us. On North Peak, Sheep Peak, and Mount Conness we could see other remnants of unglaciated erosion surfaces whose history coincides with that of Little Lost Valley. But no other is so dramatic, so diminutive, so isolated. Northward we looked down into the head of Virginia Canyon where the country is of metamorphic rock, rich browns and reds in strong contrast to the more prevalent granite.

Already 3 P. M., and haste had to be made. Those weary muscles would not make the homeward trip seem one step shorter. So down into the valley we slid, and down the chute we spilled to rejoin the softies who were waiting for us at the bottom. Then the steady, hard plugging began. Our heels had weights upon them, and the climb up to the North

Peak shoulder seemed interminable, so, too, the equally steep descent to the Lundy Lakes. Conversation dwindled; it was getting late—sun was set, but at last there was Saddlebag Lake ahead of us in the deepening dusk. Only two more miles now, and the rocky, fisherman's trail to guide us; one foot before the other, over and over. Complete darkness and only the crunch of boots on sharp metamorphic rocks. The longest two miles . . .

8 P. M., Saddlebag Lake behind us, and there we were, back at the cars and the road. Blessed fetters of civilization, we chastened mountaineers thought. Still pep enough left to swear it was worth it, but next time we'll believe that man when he says "tough trip." Even I will, and I'm the naturalist's wife.

NATURE NOTELET

At the edge of the Museum Wildflower Garden early on the morning of May 28, 1941, Associate Park Naturalist Beatty and I watched an adult Sierra Chichasee transporting its young. Although the young chickaree was nearly one-third as large as the parent, little difficulty was displayed by the mother as she swiftly ran along through the tall grass. The young one had the appearance of a little fur ball as it clung to the breast and throat of its mother. They both were last seen as the mother ran across the road west of the museum and disappeared in the thickets beyond.

—Willis A. Evans



A RATTLER TAKES A SWIM

By Ranger-Naturalist Russell Lewis

Although rattlesnakes usually live in a place where they can get water occasionally, they don't go floating end over end down Tenaya Creek. Several members of our all-day hiking party observed such a sight on June 16, 1941, about noon.

The water was rather high in Snow Creek and in Tenaya Creek. Our party of some forty hikers knew that they were going on a roughing hike where there was no regularly maintained trail. As we crossed Snow Creek, the possible dangers of poison oak and rattlesnakes were briefly explained. It was also pointed out that I had been up Tenaya Canyon several times during the last two summers without seeing a single rattlesnake, and that because of the abundant water supply there would be little likelihood of encountering one of the rattling reptiles on this trip.

We had hiked but a short time above Snow Creek Falls when we met a Pacific Rattlesnake (*Crotalus oreganus*). It was practically on the trail, and residing in some moist, decaying wood at the base of a tree. The snake was about 30 inches in length.

A few minutes later we found an-

other one on the trail. This one was encouraged to go into a sack, and was brought back to the museum for exhibition in the terrarium behind the museum where regular reptile talks are given during the summer months.

As we were eating lunch near Box Canyon a third rattler came floating down the stream. It was not swimming gracefully through the water as snakes often do. The fast-flowing Tenaya Creek was such that the snake seemed to be just tumbling along down the stream. We guessed that the snake had probably in some way or other fallen into the creek, and had not been able to maintain itself in the swift current.

It was rather surprising to see three rattlers on one trip, when we had not expected to find even one. Our trip was climaxed by seeing a beautiful Coral King Snake on our return.

NATURE NOTELET

When District Ranger John Bingaman went into his garage at Mather Ranger Station, near Hetch Hetchy, on the morning of April 21, 1941, to drive out his patrol car, he discov-

ered a Calliope Hummingbird perched on his saw. At first glance this tiny bird was so numb with cold that it appeared dead. Picking it up, Ranger Bingaman noted a slight indication of life, and carried it into the warmth of the house. Mrs. Bingaman at once took charge, and by means of an eye dropper administered a few drops of honey water, which the bird seemed to swallow. Within an hour's time the hummingbird was up on its feet demonstrating that it liked honey water by thrusting its tongue into the eye dropper for more. Then really com-

ing to life, it suddenly took advantage of an opportunity for freedom and was off on wing into some bushes.

Two days later the Bingamans



again noted a Calliope Hummingbird hovering around their garage. They concluded it must be their friend looking for some more honey water, but it stayed only for a brief moment, and was off again.

—M. E. Beatty.

CALIFORNIA EVENING GROSBEAK

By Ranger Naturalist Enid Michael

The Evening Grosbeaks are among the first of the summer visitants to arrive in Yosemite Valley; they follow close on the heels of the blackbirds. Some years they arrive in the valley as early as late February; other years they may not appear before April. When the Evening Grosbeaks first arrive in the valley, they travel around in small flocks, visiting the Cottonwood trees to feed on the leaf buds. They may occasionally be seen in the same tree with Band-tailed Pigeons, who come to feed on the flowers of the Cottonwood. In late April and early May when the Elm trees are in fruit, flocks of Evening Grosbeaks may be found daily harvesting the crop of tiny seeds. When this crop has been consumed, the grosbeaks move into

the white firs, where appetites are satisfied on green leaf buds.

Each summer for the last fifteen years, a few pairs of Evening Grosbeaks have been nesting on the floor of Yosemite Valley, but by far the greater number move to nesting grounds above the rim of the valley. The usual nesting site of the Evening Grosbeak is high on a horizontal branch of some tall pine. While the female is incubating eggs, the male bird may bring her food; but even when there are no nesting cares and the birds are foraging together, the male may present his mate with some choice bit of food. When being fed the female is likely to flutter her wings like a young bird.

In late July, the Evening Grosbeak again become numerous on the floor

of the valley. Back from the high country they come with their young of the season to harvest the crop of coffee berries. No coffee berry bush on the floor of the valley is overlooked for the fruit is early sought by Band-tailed Pigeon, Western Tanager, Robin, Black-headed and Eve-



ning Grosbeak. The pigeons and the robins gobble the berries whole; the tanagers munch off the pulp from

ripe berries, and the two grosbeaks hull the berries and crack the hard seeds to get at the meat. Hulling the berries and cracking the hard seeds are a slow process, but the Evening Grosbeaks, being persistent and consistent feeders, manage to get their share of the fruit, and besides they are willing to eat the fruit before it is fully ripe, which gives them a head start on other birds.

On the afternoon of August 8, 1940, a female Evening Grosbeak feeding in a coffee berry bush was under observation for sixty minutes, and during this time forty-two berries were plucked, peeled, and consumed. Another bird, a handsome male, was able to get away with eight berries in ten minutes. A hungry robin could swallow eight berries in a couple of minutes.

RED-TAILED HAWKS IN YOSEMITE VALLEY

By Ranger-Naturalist James R. Sweeney

Although the Western Red-tailed Hawk, *Buteo borealis calurus*, is a resident of the entire Yosemite region from the lower foothills up as high as 12,000 feet at points along the crest of the Sierra, it is not often seen here in Yosemite Valley.

The Red-tailed Hawk is one of the largest birds of prey in the Yosemite region, and is exceeded in size only by the Golden Eagle, *Aquila chrysaetos*, which is sometimes seen above Eagle Peak. The Red-tailed Hawk is characterized by its large size, general dark coloration

throughout, and short fan-shaped tail which is bright reddish-brown in the adults and for which designation this bird is named.

Upon two occasions within one week the writer observed this bird of prey: On June 7, 1941, while conducting the auto caravan, we stopped at the Wawona Tunnel, and while there two adult birds appeared from the vicinity of El Capitan, sailed above us, and lighted in a dead yellow pine above the tunnel about 75 or 100 yards from where we stood. We observed them for about two or

three minutes until they took flight again, sailed directly over our heads and down the canyon toward the west. The second occasion was on June 11, 1941, when one adult Red-tailed Hawk was sighted overhead along the north wall of the cliff above Mirror Lake, between Washington Column and the Snow Creek zigzags. The bird proceeded eastward up Tenaya Canyon, and disappeared above Snow Creek Falls.

This particular species is very beneficial to the ranchers and farmers because its main diet consists of ground squirrels and gophers, which are detrimental to crops of various kinds. It should not be hunted, but

rather protected in order to help bring about a control of ground



squirrels and gophers which are increasing rapidly each year.

FEEDING ACTIVITIES OF THE CALIFORNIA WOODPECKER

By Ranger-Naturalist Lloyd P. Parratt

A pair of California Woodpeckers (*Melanerpes formicivorus bairdi*) had a nesting hole some 20 feet up in one of the dead cottonwoods back of the Old Village.

The nesting site faced northwest, and was best photographed in late afternoon. On July 16, 1940, from 3 to 5 p. m., the young fed only twice, which is once each hour. Former Park Naturalist Harwell and Charles W. Michael, who has made accurate bird observations in Yosemite for twenty years, both stated that this was an unusually long interval between feedings. The first time the female fed the young, and the second time both male and female fed while their pictures were taken in color.

That same morning Mr. Michael had observed the parent birds feed-

ing the young on the average of every ten minutes; again on the morning of July 18, they were observed feeding at intervals of about 20 minutes. On the afternoon of the 18th, when the light was full on the nesting hole, the young were again fed at intervals of one hour. It is strange that feeding times should be so different in morning and afternoon.

Some clannishness was observed among the woodpeckers. Four woodpeckers seemed to share responsibility in caring for the young. At one time the young were fed by two adults, while a third adult went into the nest and cleaned it out. The birds were going to the Michael feeding station, one-half mile from the nesting site, for the suet which constituted a good share of their food.



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Dan Anderson