

YOSEMITE NATURE NOTES

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Yosemite Nature Notes

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F. A. Kittredge, Superintendent
M. E. Beatty, Assoc. Park Naturalist

C. F. Brockman, Park Naturalist
H. C. Parker, Ass't Park Naturalist

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INTO THE BACK COUNTRY

By Bob W. Prudhomme, Museum Assistant

You have all heard of the world-famous wonders of Yosemite Valley, its cliffs and thundering waterfalls, but I wonder how many of you are aware of the vast wilderness of peaks and passes, and the countless lakes and lush mountain meadows that lie waiting along the trails beyond the crowds on the valley floor.

On the week-end of August 22, 1942, a fellow employee and the writer were fortunate to spend two days at May Lake, a beautiful glacial tarn nestled at the foot of Mount Hoffmann, which stands in the approximate center of the park. There are few areas in the Yosemite region which combine such a variety of wild yet peaceful grandeur, and of plant and animal life, as this comparatively small area upon and immediately adjacent to the slopes of Mount Hoffmann. The lake is typical of the many in the park which are of glacial origin, being situated on a shelf of granite and metamorphic rock which swoops down from the eastern shore into the Tenaya Lake basin. Yet nature has generously softened the stark granite features with the rich tones of the Mountain

Hemlock and of the White-bark Pine which ascend high upon the mountain slopes—trees which might well be called the "Sentinels of the High Sierra." And, too, the alpenglow from May Lake is unforgettable, as the dying sun throws its rich colors of rose and coral over the landscape. Such great mountains as Conness, Dana, Gibbs and Mammoth as viewed from a vantage point above the lake, assume a new beauty quite distinct from their appearance earlier in the day. Then, as nightfall casts its heavy shadows over the range and the first evening star appears, the warmth and friendship of the campfire beckon.

Dawn comes quickly in the High Sierra, and though the writer failed to rise at the appointed hour, it was not long before all was ready for the ascent of Mount Hoffmann which is always an inviting climb in the cool of early morning.

Spring in Yosemite does not come and go as in the hot plains of the San Joaquin, but rather climbs the mountains with the passing months. When in Yosemite Valley, the meadows have turned to hues of bronze

and gold, it is springtime at elevations of from 8,000 ft. to the highest summits of the park, over 13,000 ft. above the sea. And so it was on the slopes of Mount Hoffmann—vast gardens climbing to the very summit of the peak, adding life and color to the barren granite boulders and crumbling shale. Close to the lake shore, where the trail begins to climb, we found the richly colored Lewis Monkeyflower or Lewis Mimulus with each blossom like a frail shell of coral pink; among the rocks the stately Sierra or Little Leopard Lily and the California or Red Columbine nodded their scarlet heads in the cool breeze. Along the creek just to the right of the trail, and in a refreshing meadow, perhaps a quarter of a mile above the lake, the Lambstongue Groundsel or Senecio, with its clusters of tiny golden blossoms, and the violet Aster Fleabane, better known as the Sierra Daisy, were growing in great profusion. The American Bistort or Knotweed and the Western Yarrow were all about us, keeping company with the flaming Pine Paintedcup, commonly called Indian Paintbrush. Among the many fragrant flowers blooming on the high mountain slopes, the Subalpine Spirea is certainly not to be missed by even the most casual observer. Growing among the rocks in massed clusters of feathery pink, and much like a soft pin-cushion in form, the spirea is always a favorite among the flower lovers. True, these mountain sides are wonderful gardens, but there is more than all

this to meet the eye in one's course to the summit.



Subalpine Spirea

On Mount Hoffmann we sighted at least five Sierra Nevada Marmots, scanning us from the safety of their retreats among the rocks and boulders. Two or three at a time would come out to watch as we drew near, and it was all too amusing to note the size of these animals with their short legs and fat, golden-brown bodies. The Alpine Chipmunks, so tiny that they are often passed unnoticed, and the colorful Golden-mantled Ground Squirrels were at play among the rocks; winging overhead, a Golden Eagle soared about gracefully on wonderful wings, while the Mountain Bluebird skipped from rock to rock displaying its brilliant blue coat in the sunlight.

On the summit, 10,921 ft. above sea level, one is rewarded with a view considered by those who know Yosemite well to be the finest in the entire park. On all sides are won-

derful contrasts of scenery; to the east rises the noble crest of the Sierras, a vast chain of crags and ragged peaks extending from north to south. The forests and meadows of the Tuolumne Meadows country are magnificently banked against the slopes of these great mountains. To the southeast, Yosemite Valley is visible with Half Dome, Cloud's Rest and Sentinel Dome outstanding as the most familiar landmarks. Directly beneath the north wall of Mount Hoffmann, which drops sharply from the summit, are a series of glacial tarns, many of them having the appearance of huge drops of ink spilled on the granite. Only the deep indigo blue of these lakes can suggest their great depth. Northward are the rugged walls of the Tuolumne Canyon, tremendous in contrast to the soft forests flowing westward into the arid foothills of the range.

Returning again to our camp at May Lake, we made ready to leave the solitude and peace of our mountain retreat, though knowing the memories and the store of renewed knowledge that we would take back with us would not easily be forgotten. The inspirations and readjustments of true values derived from such a trip are priceless; and if one is willing to take the effort to get out on the trail, away from the smooth pathways of civilization, he will surely then find the meaning of the word, "inspiration," and return to his home, a richer man in both mind and body; and looking back on those wonderful days, he might well re-

member the words of Henry Van Dyke who once wrote, "Lead me out of the narrow life, to the peace of the hills and the sky."

SKINK KILLS BEETLE

By Ranger-Naturalist H. F. Cofer

On the morning of July 14, while on a nature walk our group saw a mature Western Skink (*Eumeces skiltonianus*) kill a large Spined Pine Borer beetle (*Ergates spiculatus*). We were on the path along Tenaya Creek beside Camp 9. The beetle was about one-fourth as long as the body of the lizard. The encounter was first noted when the lizard darted from under a rock at the side of the trail, seized the large borer in its jaws, and immediately returned to the rock, but did not go under it. The beetle was caught about midway along the side of the body, and although one wing was held securely, the other was beating vigorously. On several occasions it was nearly able to tear away from its captor, but each time just as it was apparently successful, the lizard would suddenly take a new hold with its jaws. As we crowded closer, the lizard backed under the rock, but its head with the beetle was still visible. Since we needed this species of lizard for display at our talks on the reptiles at the museum, I attempted to collect it; however, the lizard had a different idea and disappeared completely, beetle and all, under the rock.



MUSEUM NOTES

GOOD LUCK TO ASSISTANT PARK NATURALIST HARRY C. PARKER

By Elizabeth H. Godfrey, Museum Secretary

Of the permanent museum staff, Assistant Park Naturalist Harry C. Parker is the first to leave for service in the armed forces.

On October 1 of this year, Harry received a promotion from Junior Park Naturalist to his present grade of Assistant Park Naturalist. Shortly afterwards he took a week's annual leave, and when he returned to the museum he broke the news that he was going to be married on October 17 to Miss Katharine D. Johnson, a graduate of the 1941 Field School, and known to all her friends as "Kit."

The museum staff at once went into a dither of excitement, for it had been some time since a wedding had occurred in our "office family"; moreover, we were all extremely fond of Kit, who had been coming to the valley on a number of occasions during the past summer as a USO hostess.

The wedding ceremony was performed on the date scheduled at 2:30 in the afternoon in our beautiful out-of-door cathedral, Yosemite. It was a bright, sunny day, and the spot chosen was in the shadows of stalwart oaks at the base of El Capitan. Kit's father, mother, brother,

and sister-in-law were present. In addition, there were the museum staff, their families, and Superintendent and Mrs. Frank A. Kittredge.

After the ceremony, there was a pleasant reception at the home of Associate Park Naturalist Beatty. When ice cream, cake and coffee had been served, the staff presented the bride and groom with a combination electric grille and waffle iron.

Unfortunately, war parts many newlyweds, and the day before his wedding Harry received notice of his induction into the Army. After spending two weeks in the valley, Kit returned to San Francisco to her position as a geologist for the Standard Oil Company, and Harry was separated from his position on the museum staff during the early part of November to do his bit in winning the war.

MUSEUM NOTELET

Chief Le-mee, who has participated in our Indian demonstration programs with his colorful ceremonial dances for many past summers, was also inducted into the Army during November.

GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES OF YOSEMITE JOIN COLORS

The following is a list of the permanent members of the Yosemite National Park Service organization who have joined one of the branches of the armed forces. The list will be added to from time to time in order to keep the record complete.

Eugene A. Drown, Park Ranger	- - -	2nd Lt., Coast Artillery
Russell McKown, Landscape Architect	- - -	Capt., U. S. Army
Selmer J. Logeland, Sewage Plant Operator	- - -	U. S. Army
Elmer L. Hommel, Clerk-Stenographer	- - -	U. S. Coast Guard
Elmer H. Nelson, Clerk-Stenographer	- - -	U. S. Coast Guard
J. Winston Churchill, Personnel Clerk	- - -	U. S. Army Air Corps
Carleton E. Smith, Chief Engineering Aide	2nd Lt.,	U. S. Army Air Corps
Elton M. Hilton, Park Engineer	- - -	Capt., U. S. Army
Otto Brown, Wildlife Ranger	- - -	U. S. Army Mountain Troops
Arthur G. Holmes, Park Ranger	- - -	U. S. Army Mountain Troops
Samuel L. Clark, Park Ranger	- - -	U. S. Army Mountain Troops
Lester M. Moe, Park Ranger	- - -	Lieut. J. G., U. S. Navy
Harry C. Parker, Assistant Park Naturalist	- - -	U. S. Army
Margaret Boyd, Secretary to Superintendent	- - -	U. S. Navy WAVES
Annie Marie Dudley, File Clerk	- - -	U. S. Navy WAVES

—Compiled by Ralph Anderson, Park Photographer and Information Clerk.

BEASTS THAT PASS IN THE NIGHT

By Ranger-Naturalist Enid Michael

The Pigmy Owl has sung his good-night song, and retired for the day. The first stars appear, and the bats begin to fly, announcing their presence by thin mouse-like squeaks. They can be seen sweeping around the electric light, plucking their evening meal of insects from the air. The cricket in our cabin tunes up. He has a ventriloquial manner of speech, and he sounds like four or five crickets. The Horned Owls wake up, and we like their conversation—the deep “whoop whoops” of the male bird and the garrulous female in answering calls. Her voice is pitched slightly higher on the scale,

and she does more talking. The bear comes down the rocky slope, dropping each footfall precisely. He moves silently on his heavily padded feet. His trail leads past our cabin door, and he is disappointed to find us sitting on the doorstep. He is a big fellow, and would like to stand up on his hind legs and lick the crumbs from the bird feeding tray. Now starting on his nightly prowling he must make a detour to avoid us, and he grunts his dissatisfaction. Soon we hear the banging of the garbage can as he throws off the lid, and we know that he is making his first call. Not much loot in the garbage can

these nights as the camp is almost deserted! The bear will have to lengthen his patrol if he wants to fatten up for his winter sleep. And there will be more competition too as bears move down from the highlands.



Now our campfire is crackling brightly, lights and shadows are playing on the tree trunks. A piece of pitch wood is placed on the fire; the feeding tray is lighted up, the shadows are chased higher up the tree trunks, and are lost among the foliage. The white-footed mice come out from hiding. They scurry across the open space to pick up crumbs under the feeding tray. They are cautious animals and at first they stick close to the shadows. They move very fast across the open space, and all we see is a flash from their white bellies. I pile up a cone of chick-feed in the light from the fire, but close to the black shadow of the oak. This food proves

irresistible. A mouse darts out to investigate; he darts back and forth between the cracked corn and the shadow. He soon gains confidence; sits up on his haunches, and with his front paws he pokes food into his cheek pouches. His "shoe-button eyes" shine brightly in the firelight, and his large ears gleam white as he faces us. With big ears and big eyes he is a handsome looking animal. With cheek pouches full, he hurries away, and with empty pouches he hurries back again for he is making hay in the firelight and storing food against those rainy days to come.

High up in the oak we can hear the scratching hurried feet of the flying squirrels. They are coming out for their supper, or perhaps I should say, coming out for their breakfast as they sleep all day, tucked away in some old wood-recker hole. Light from the campfire makes them a little shy about coming to the feeding tray, and yet each squirrel is sure that he doesn't want the other fellow to get there first. They jockey for position as they come down the tree trunk, scolding one another. We can hear the scratch of their scampering toenails as they come down the shadowed side of the tree. Finally, a squirrel comes into the light, and gazes at us with big innocent eyes. His body appears frozen to the tree trunk, his nose wiggles, he smells those hot cakes on the tray. There is no apparent effort, seemingly; he just lets loose from the tree, and

glides across space to the feeding tray. There is the gentle thud of padded feet; the wide, flat prehensile tail clings to the edge of the tray for a moment, and then he settles down to feast. Wretched table manners he has; he grows like a cat eating fish when his companion wishes to join him at the feast.

Such is the entertainment one may have about a private campfire in Yosemite Valley where animal life is protected.

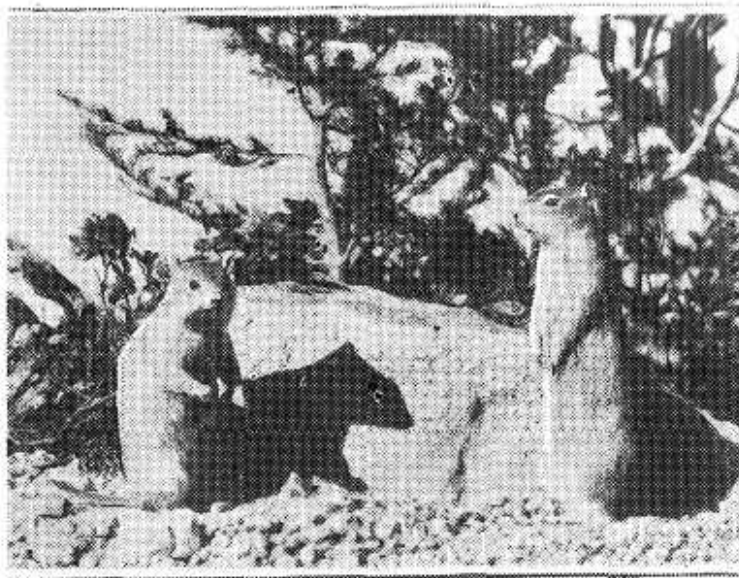
THE CALIFORNIA BADGER AT WORK

By Helen K. Sharsmith

The California Badger (*Taxidea texus neglecta* Mearns) is found discontinuously throughout California in open, unforested areas irrespec-

tive of altitude. It is readily recognized by the peculiar, horizontally flattened body, and the distinctive black and white head markings which contrast with the brownish gray color of the rest of the body. It is one of the most common carnivorous animals in Tuolumne Meadows, but is seldom observed because it is active mainly at night. Grinnell and Storer, in "Animal Life of Yosemite," record only two occasions when badgers were found at work during the day. Thus the small group of Tuolumne Meadows campers who witnessed a badger industriously digging out a rodent burrow on August 17, 1942, had an unusual sight.

The badger was working in the open meadow across the road from the small soda spring which occurs



Belding Ground Squirrels

about a mile east of the main group of soda springs. He was rapidly and energetically enlarging his victim's burrow, totally oblivious to the interested onlookers who were standing 15-20 feet away. At this close range we had an excellent opportunity to see how admirably the entire body of the badger is organized for digging, the method by which he obtains his food (mainly ground squirrels and pocket gophers). He had a heavy, muscular body about 18-24 inches long, horizontally flattened to produce a squat aspect, large feet equipped with long, straight claws, a long nose, and a short tail.

The complete abandon with which this badger was attacking his task gave us fine illustration of the way badgers use their great strength to obtain food, rather than by depending on stealth and cunning. This badger furiously clawed the ground as he enlarged the burrow opening and disappeared from view. Every few minutes he emerged, sometimes tail first, sometimes head first, and rushed to another opening about 15 feet away. This opening he would plug up, then dash back to the first hole to continue his frenzied digging. We watched for about 15 minutes, while he dug with unabated energy. We could not await the outcome of the badger's efforts, but did not doubt that his zeal would soon be rewarded by a satisfying meal of Belding Ground Squirrels.

CHICKAREE

By Ranger-Naturalist H. F. Cofer

At the north end of Sentinel Bridge, on June 1, at 2 p. m., an adult Sierra Chickaree was seen transporting one of its young by carrying it in the mouth. (See Yosemite Nature Notes, September 1941). They were followed for some distance in order to determine how the young was held. Apparently, the mother had caught her offspring midway between the front and back legs on the underside, while it in turn was clinging on by clasping its legs around the neck of the adult. Its tail was also wrapped around her neck.



Although the young chickaree was about one-fourth grown, the mother showed no difficulty in running along the road. An effort was made to tree them, but to no avail, and they were last seen as the mother ran into tall thickets along the river.



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Dan Anderson