

# YOSEMITE NATURE NOTES

Vol. XXI

August, 1942

No. 8



# Yosemite Nature Notes

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

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

C. F. Brockman, Park Naturalist  
H. C. Parker, Junior Park Naturalist

VOL. XXI

AUGUST, 1942

NO. 8

## AN INVITATION TO THE HIGH COUNTRY

By Elizabeth H. Godfrey, Museum Secretary

If you are a nature lover and really wish to see Yosemite National Park, you should by all means sign up for one of the seven-day hiking trips in the High Sierra, which leaves every Monday morning during July and August from Yosemite Valley under the leadership of a ranger-naturalist.

Upon request to the Superintendent a folder giving full details regarding this 70-mile jaunt (10 miles or so a day) is gladly sent. This pamphlet, "Off the Beaten Trail," tells you among other things that the total expense of the trip is approximately \$25—meals and lodging being paid for as taken at the various High Sierra Camps. The folder gives you an idea of the type of clothing to wear and to carry along in your knapsack, as well as a brief description of the country covered and the scenic attractions to be enjoyed.

There are fifteen in each hiking party, including the naturalist conducting the trip. Among the group one finds doctors, attorneys, business men, students, teachers, office workers, salesmen, mothers and daughters, fathers and sons. Regard-

less of station in life, most of these people have a sincere love of nature and are eager to learn all about the wildflowers and trees growing along the trail; to become familiar with the birds that call to them as they go; to see bear, deer, and other wild-life in its natural surroundings, and to observe some of the significant features of the rugged terrain which may be keys that unlock portions of the geological story.

Each evening, having refreshed themselves with a hot shower, food, and a brief rest, the hikers sit around a blazing campfire where they become better acquainted with each other by singing songs and putting on stunt programs. The naturalist in charge answers questions, and when needed administers treatment for sunburn or blistered heels.

These trips have become so popular that in order to be certain of an opportunity to go on one of them it is wise to make your reservation at least two months in advance. Occasionally, however, it is possible to sign up as late as a week prior to the starting date of a hike, due to cancellations. In this connection, it

is regretted that some who make reservations do not advise us when circumstances prevent their going. Consequently, some of our parties are not filled to capacity, even though we have alternates signed up on our list who are eagerly waiting for a last-minute cancellation to come in so that they might be included in the party.

This year, our first trip, which started Monday morning, July 6, was almost completely booked by the middle of February. Such public demand for this type of interpretive service is particularly gratifying to the naturalist department, since the primary purpose of these hikes is to lure park visitors away from the over-crowded conditions that prevail on the floor of Yosemite Valley during the height of the season, and to give them an introduction to the beauty and inspiration of the high country.

The principal requirements to go on one of these seven-day hikes is to be in good physical trim and to own a comfortable pair of walking shoes. Reservations for children under 10 years of age are not accepted, and it is preferred that older ones be accompanied by relatives or responsible friends. Only those having the endurance and stamina essential for the long hikes made each day should attempt the trip. Last summer the youngest seven-day hiker was a boy of 11, and the oldest, a man of 70. Both were physically capable of the strenuous trip. The elderly man was an artist, Max Antlers, who since early manhood

had dreamed of one day visiting and painting the High Sierra. Along the trails he would stop to sketch an irresistible landscape, and then exert himself to join his group that had progressed far ahead.

"At Vogelsang," he related, "I was so nervous and excited I could hardly paint; it was so wonderful!"

Mr. Antlers made many sketches on the trip, two of which were at Vogelsang Pass—one looking each way from the 10,600-ft. pass. At May Lake High Sierra Camp, which was the last stop of his party, he flashed on his canvas a sketch of Mt. Hoffmann at sunset, rising in abrupt splendor above the quiet waters of this gem of mountain lakes.



Climbing the Hoffmann Thumb,  
Seldom is that any hiker is not completely enchanted with the in-

spiring experience of hiking in the High Sierra, and following each trip letters, expressing appreciation and enthusiasm for the wonderful time enjoyed, stream into Superintendent Kittredge's office. Last summer one such letter was received from a former Austrian manufacturer, whose prosperous business had been confiscated by the German Government. A portion of it is quoted, because it is typical of the numerous letters received from other hikers:

"The ranger-naturalist leading our trip was much more than a guide to all of us—he understood in a wonderful way how to stimulate deeper appreciation of nature by taking advantage of every opportunity to explain to us the geology, flora, and fauna of the High Sierra. It was his skill and social talent that welded together, into one congenial group of friends, fourteen people from many walks of life, most of whom had never seen one another before. The trip was one of the most thrilling I have ever had, and my sojourn in Yosemite Valley and the visit to the High Sierra camps will always be remembered as such."

The following poem sums up the impression of the writer after encountering a group of seven-day hikers one Sunday afternoon last August, just as they descended the

last lap of the homebound trail to set foot on the valley floor:

Give them the trail and a knapsack  
bag

And they'll hike along until muscles  
lag—

Up to the rim from the valley floor  
Where souls find boundless space  
to soar—

Higher than highest snow-capped  
peaks

'Til starry heavens brush sun-burned  
cheeks.

Wednesday or Thursday's indefinite;  
They're lost in the spell of the in-  
finite.

With evening comes haven—mortal  
desire;

A lodge, a bed, good food, a fire.

Whether blistered heel or muscular  
pain

They're out next day on the trail  
again.

The ones who take the seven-day  
hike

Swear they have never experienced  
the like,

They're grimy from mingling with  
the terra

But they've breathed in the charm  
of the High Sierra;

With worries sunk, and all fretting  
dead,

They have Nature's peace in their  
hearts instead.





# YOSEMITE ANIMALS

## 1939 BEAR POPULATION OF THE GLACIER POINT AREA

By Ranger-Naturalist Arthur Carthew

Although visitors to Glacier Point are greeted by one of the familiar park signs warning them against feeding or molesting the bears, seldom does one have an opportunity to observe these animals around the Point itself. This is not proof that the area is devoid of bears, for quite the contrary is true, as one might easily learn were he to visit the garbage pit, some two miles from the hotel, at the proper time. During the summer of 1939, while on duty at Glacier Point, I had an exceptionally fine opportunity to observe these animals, for during that season the garbage truck hauled its load to the disposal pit each morning between 7 and 8 a.m., where it was eagerly awaited by the "first table."

The pit itself is off the main highway, well concealed from the public gaze by the red firs and lodgepole pines which timber the area. Although merely a yawning hole in the ground, it enjoyed a patronage both steady and enthusiastic. Many were the dramas, the fights and near fights and probably the romances that took place in this spot. And to

add further interest, the hermit thrushes early in the season, provided a symphony to give the occasional observer something to remember always.

The bears frequenting the pit were regular enough to become quite well known to myself. Occasionally, a new face would appear, or a regular boarder remain away for a week or so. Twenty-eight bears were identified, although seldom were more than a dozen present at once. Toward the latter part of August, with the approach of the hibernation period, the number tended to increase.

The black bear exhibits two color phases, black and brown. During 1939, in the Glacier Point area, brown bears predominated as the following table indicates:

|                                     | Black | Brown |
|-------------------------------------|-------|-------|
| Adult bears - - - -                 | 4     | 9     |
| Partly grown - - - -<br>(2-4 years) | 3     | 4     |
| Cubs of year - - - -                | 3     | 5     |
| Total - - - - -                     | 10    | 18    |

One partly-grown animal had

such a light coat that he was referred to as "Snow White" by the boys in charge of garbage disposal. It is classified as brown in the above table.

Eight cubs were born that year, including two sets of twins and a set of quadruplets—the first on record in Yosemite. One set of twins was especially well-proportioned and fine looking. The second set of twins was somewhat smaller than the first, although larger than the quadruplets, all of whom were under-sized. Particular attention was given to observing the quads because of the exceptional nature of the case. They were first seen in the middle of June, although it was not until July 26 that they were first photographed, by which time the mother was bringing them into the garbage pit to feed.

The mother was a brown bear with a large white patch on her chest, which served to easily identify her. She proved to be a diligent mother, ever on the alert to protect her oversize family from any danger. It was not long before she learned that her family was a special photographic attraction, and readily obliged by bringing her family into the garbage pit when other bears were chased out. On one occasion when I failed to chase the other bears out of the pit for some time, she circled around to my side as though inquiring as to the cause for delay.

From the start one of the cubs seemed a bit more tired than his mates; seldom could he muster sufficient courage to reach the garbage pit. On one occasion he became iso-



lated from his mother and the other cubs only to cry so loudly that the mother returned to the rescue, chasing away a much larger bear in doing so. During the first two weeks in August, the timid, under-sized cub disappeared, and it was feared it had been killed. Later in the month it was again seen with the rest of the family, limping about on a badly injured leg. Apparently the mother had kept him well-concealed for a time while the wound partially healed. Oddly enough, following this accident its timidity disappeared, and it was soon limping its way into the pit, in spite of the presence of older and larger bears.

Bears are usually relatively quiet animals, making few sounds most commonly described as growls or woofs. During the summer, I was greatly impressed by the sound used by the mothers in calling and directing the cubs. It could be likened to the sound made by a clucking hen calling her brood, but slightly more guttural. Only the mother bears were heard to make this particular noise. In walking along the mothers constantly repeated this sound, occasionally increasing the pitch when one of the cubs strayed too far away. When danger threatened the call became quite loud and more staccato, blending into a pronounced snarl. The other sound most commonly emitted was a loud "phoo" made by the rapid expulsion of air through the teeth of the half-opened mouth. This was an anger sound, made in anticipation of a fight which seldom materialized. Seldom in the

course of the summer did I hear the growls and woofs usually attributed to bears.

Although the black bear is rated as a tree climber, it must not be presumed that this animal is arboreal. Adult bears which I observed were rarely seen climbing, and then only with considerable difficulty. This is not surprising, considering that the weight of a full grown adult is several hundred pounds. On a lodgepole pine near the pit were seen numerous long claw marks, many over 6 inches in length, giving indication of the "slip" that must occur when an adult bear climbs, and which must certainly be a factor in the reduction of climbing efficiency. Only when serious danger threatened, and when a ready exit was not available were the adult bears observed to climb trees. Cubs, on the other hand, are quite adept in this line, and would scoot up a tree in a hurry when alarmed or reprimanded by the mother.

Although the bears fed in the garbage pit, their general appearance was trim and well groomed. On one occasion a set of twins was seen to arrive at the pit with fur all fluffed and preened in such fashion that only a bath and careful combing could achieve. I investigated the area to the south of the pit, and followed well-worn paths until I arrived at a small meadow with numerous pools of water still surviving the latter part of August of that particularly dry season. Around the pools the flattened grass and great paw marks in the mud indicated

this was the bathing ground of the local bear population. Unfortunately, I was not able to witness any of the ablutions performed.

The main path continued south of the meadow, over a small summit, and dropped down into the Mono Meadow Basin, where, probably, the bears sojourned during their periodic absences from the region of the pit.

The opportunity of getting acquainted with these wild creatures was my good fortune, and it was with real regret that early in September I had to bid adieu to these fascinating animals.

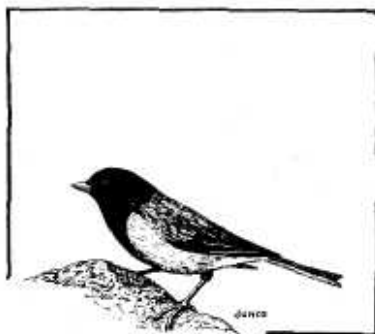
#### NATURE NOTELET

By H. Asmussen, Field School, 1941

On July 25, 1941, while en route to Crescent Lake, our second camp site on the 1941 Field School High Sierra trip, William Bennett, Iver Madsen, and I were crossing a small meadow just above Buck Camp (elevation 8100 ft.) which was fairly blanketed with shooting stars. In passing, our attention was caught by a pair of juncos that were making quite a commotion, indicating that a nest was near at hand. We immediately began parting the tall shooting stars, and after some searching found the nest, which was empty. Close-by, however, there was quite a movement, as though something was trying by a series of jumps to work its way through the heavy vegetation.

Our natural conclusion was that

this movement in the grass was caused by a young junco learning to fly. A few minutes later, it was amazing and startling to behold a predator of the juncos' nest—a Garter Snake, pushing itself along the ground in slow advances with the fore part of its body lifted above the matted vegetation in order to carry off its prey—a young junco, which it was preparing to swallow by inches.



At once I was seized with a desire to photograph this Garter Snake as it headed toward some Labrador tea. I attempted to head the snake off, hoping it would calm down long enough to get a picture, but my interference had no such effect, so I stepped on the snake's tail. Immediately it opened its mouth at about a 180-degree angle, and disgorged the young bird, which had been swallowed head first to the projecting wings. The disgorged bird was dead; the snake had no meal, at least until we left, and I had no picture. Cruel as it appeared, the Garter Snake was carrying out the laws which govern the delicate balance of nature, and with which man is often tempted to interfere.



**A WILDLIFE PAGEANT****By Ranger-Naturalist Lloyd P. Parratt**

It is, indeed, surprising the abundance of wildlife that can be observed in a brief time in Yosemite National Park in a selected spot, if one will but stray a short distance from the beaten trails, and watch and wait for what might happen.

One day last summer, the writer discovered a Red-shafted Flicker's nest in an old, dead snag above the Wawona Tunnel, and sat down to wait for those few exciting moments when the parent birds would arrive at the nest with food for their young. Between such fascinating feeding times the monotony of waiting was most agreeably alleviated by a veritable wildlife pageant that took place within a two-hour period.

A persistent cat-like call from a thicket announced the presence of a Sacramento Towhee which did not actually put in an appearance. A Western Wood Pewee alternately perched and flew in pursuit of insects in true flycatcher manner.

Several Golden-mantled Ground Squirrels with their copper-colored necks and black and white striped backs foraged for food with rapid, nervous movements, and a short distance below them the less appealing California Ground Squirrel, with a distinct wash of white on its shoulders, dug energetically; also, evidently in search of food.

Some 40 feet away, and even more dramatic in their sudden ap-

pearance, were three adult Mountain Quail scratching and feeding on ground litter, and uttering a sound not unlike a hen calling her chicks. Their long, slender, erect plumes above blue-gray heads bobbed about spasmodically as these birds carefully inspected the area.

Near my "box seat" a Mountain King Snake arrayed in brilliant bands of red, black, and yellow came slinking into view to bask and sparkle in the sunshine beside a granite boulder.

High above White-throated Swifts soared in magnificent flight, all the while uttering their characteristic shrill twitter.

A Blue-bellied Lizard stuck its nose out from under a rock, and finally gained enough courage to creep about in a layer of dead leaves, looking for insects, pausing now and then to characteristically raise and lower itself by the front limbs.

While the main feature of this wildlife pageant was the feeding of the young Red-shafted Flickers, and listening to their insistent strident clatter for food—strange sound effects—the "side acts" mentioned afforded a most interesting diversion, and demonstrated the abundance of wildlife that can be witnessed in a two-hour period in one comparatively small area.



Digitized by  
Yosemite Online Library

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

Dan Anderson