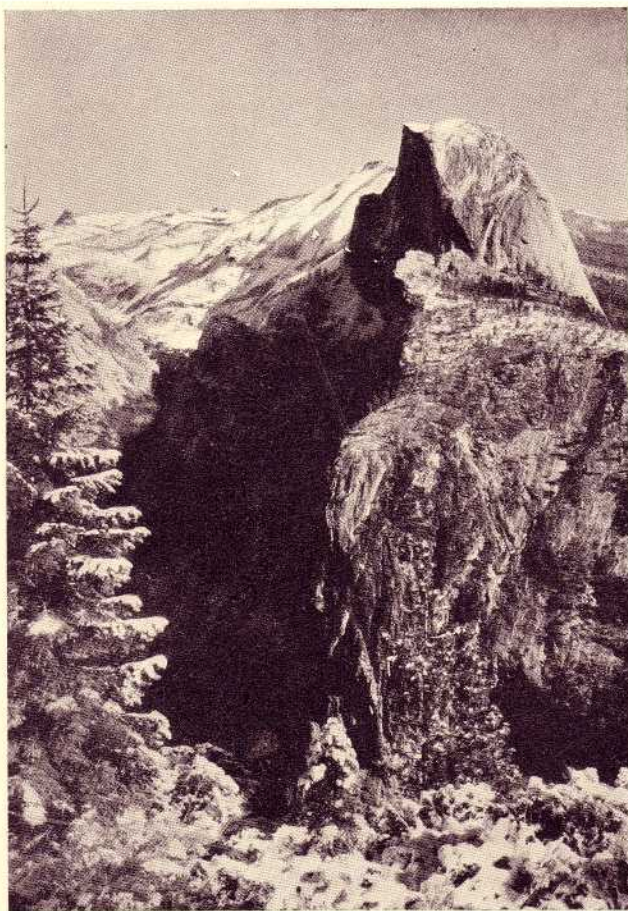


# **Yosemite Nature Notes**



*Photo by Anderson*

# Yosemite Nature Notes

THE MONTHLY PUBLICATION OF  
THE YOSEMITE NATURALIST DIVISION AND  
THE YOSEMITE NATURAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION, INC.

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## SQUIRREL ANTICS

By Donald Edward McHenry, Park Naturalist

All evidence clearly indicated that the squirrels, at least some of them, in the Government residential area in Yosemite National Park were going completely berserk. The malady even threatened Walt Gann, Government Electrician, when he heard the news for he just knew that roofs were not removed from houses by squirrels. Bears, maybe, but squirrels, heaven forbid!

Responding to an emergency call from Mrs. Gann, Walt desperately extricated himself from a maze of telephone wires, cables, switches and other accouterments of his profession and sprang heroically to the rescue. However, Walt grossly underestimated the magnitude of the catastrophe, for the very existence of his home and hearth-side was threatened—and in the dead of winter at that.

Gazing skyward to where his wife's trembling finger pointed, the full realization of the horror of the situation burst upon him. Of a verity, the California grey squirrel<sup>1</sup> had completely lost its head and was ferociously tearing away at the shakes on the roof of the Ganns' domicile. Well directed missiles from the Gann family punctuated its savage activities only long enough for it to hiss its defiance in the general direction of its assailants. Even the determined dive-bombing of some

irate blue-fronted jays<sup>2</sup> served only to intensify its activities. This approach failing, Walt cautiously crept up the roof towards the frenzied squirrel only to beat an ignoble retreat when the creature whirled to attack him. Again splinters flew right and left as the squirrel pursued the destruction to which it had apparently dedicated itself. Was this not sufficient evidence that the animal had gone insane!

As Walt at last admitted his defeat both in analyzing or controlling the situation, he sent for the Park rangers. Even their repeated attempts to dislodge the evilly disposed squirrel were met with no greater success than were those of Walt. They then decided that since the squirrel was obviously "off its base" it had better be controlled before the entire roof had to be rebuilt. Already Government Carpenter-Foreman Ed Bowman, loaded with a bundle of brand new shakes, was on his way to repair the damage so that the Gann family could retire that night with a whole roof over their heads.

But with the dawn of a new day another squirrel appeared on the roof with a determined fanaticism for further destruction. He, too, was attended by the raucous administrations of the blue-fronted jays who had attacked the squirrel of the previous day. Again the rangers to the

1. *Sciurus g. griseus* Ord

2. *Cyanocitta stelleri frontalis* Ridgway

rescue and once more Ed Bowman rushed another bundle-and-a-half of shakes to the scene.

To date Ed has succeeded in making temporary repairs of about 40 holes in the Ganns' roof ranging in size from about one-and-a-half to six inches. In some cases entire shakes had been removed by the squirrels. It was during this second repair job that Ed made a significant discovery. Beneath the shakes of the roof he found caches of "bucketsfull" of shelled acorn split in halves.

Here then was the apparent reason for the frantic antics of the squirrels and for that matter of the jays too. Snow up to 22" deep lay over the ground and festooned the trees and shrubs. Where food was usually sufficient during the average "open" winter condition on this north side of the valley, little or no food was now available. Little wonder that when the hungry squirrels located the cache of acorns beneath the roof shakes they made persistent and frantic efforts to recover them in spite of all possible interference. The interest of the blue-fronted jays in this cache of food can also be appreciated.

And how did these acorns get there? Ed Bowman asserts that without a doubt they were put there by woodpeckers, most likely by the California woodpeckers.<sup>1</sup> These birds made holes along the edge of the shakes and shoved the acorns through them into the space between the tar-paper sheathing and the shakes. Mice have been known to store nuts in such concealed places but Ed found no evidence that any of these creatures had been there or that it was likely that they could enter these spaces. Then, too, the roof, and as a matter of fact, the sides of the building were riddled with woodpecker holes. Many of the



holes in the roof were directly over the places where the acorns were found stored.

Life has been somewhat easier for the Ganns since the first vigorous onslaughts were made on their roof. The snow cover has reduced somewhat, doubtlessly revealing other sources of food. At present a new brigade of squirrels is visiting Walt's home, but either they are much more timid souls or they are more inclined to respond favorably and cooperatively to his admonitions. Today Walt can point with understandable pride to his multihued patched roof with but 24 new holes as evidence of a successful campaign against the "berserk" squirrels.

This is by no means the end of the story—Oh no. Now George Harless, another Government Employee has squirrels in his belfry. Recently the more aggressive squirrels of the neighborhood, having been discouraged by their experiences at Walt's hands, moved in on George. They have discovered a new and promising largess beneath the shakes of the roof of the Harless home. Although less dramatic and deprived of the opportunity for heroic endeavor equal to Walt's, George and his

<sup>1</sup> *Melanerpes formicivorus bairdi* Ridgway



squirrel problem seem destined soon to move into the limelight with Ed Bowman again peddling more and still more shakes as he resumes his role as defender of roofs over the heads of Park Service employees.

## TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO

(No. 2)

By Carl P. Russell, Park Superintendent

In the February, 1949, Yosemite Nature Notes there appeared under the title, "Twenty-Five Years Ago," the first of several proposed articles on the history and development of the Yosemite Museum and its appendages. In this, the second of the series, I wish to call attention to the initial impetus given by the **Stockton Record** in the launching of **Yosemite Nature Notes** as a printed journal.

**Yosemite Nature Notes** has always been a small and unpretentious paper with a limited distribution to regular subscribers. However, its influence as the mouthpiece of the Yosemite Naturalist Department should not be measured by the number of addresses on its mailing list. Each year "Special Numbers" of the magazine are printed in quantity in order that certain especially interesting chapters of the Yosemite story may be available to park visitors in a handy, inexpensive form.

Examples of the popularity of the special numbers may be found in the table. In total there have been twelve special numbers since 1938 which have gone into the hands of at least 168,000 readers.

The effect of this interpretive literature upon a certain segment of the great body of Yosemite visitors is important from the standpoint of National Park Service objectives. It may be said without presumption that **Yosemite Nature Notes** does contribute to the advancement of public appreciation of Yosemite National Park and to the promotion of the cause of conservation, generally. It does this at no great expense to the United States Government and it seems pertinent to record here some word regarding its origin.

In March, 1924, Mr. G. E. Reynolds, Editor of the **Stockton Record**, invited the Yosemite Park Naturalist to make regular weekly contributions to the "Out-O-Door Section" of his Saturday paper. Enid Michael, part-time employee of the Yosemite Naturalist Department, had already established Yosemite columns in the same paper. Mr. Reynolds treated the contributions from both writers quite generously as he made his page lay-outs, and the response from readers was good enough to encourage the Yosemite contributors to maintain a steady flow of sketchy short articles on natural history ob-

Title of Article	Yosemite Nature Notes Date	Number Sold
101 Wildflowers of Yosemite.....	June, 1938	12,956
Yosemite Indians .....	July, 1941	10,664
Self-Guiding Auto Tour of Yosemite Valley.....	January, 1942	43,717
A Brief Story of the Geology of Yosemite Valley.....	April, 1943	32,969
Principal Waterfalls of the World.....	January, 1945	17,814
A Guide to the Mother Lode Country.....	January, 1948	7,044

servations, Indian evidences, and the affairs of pioneer days in the Park. Out of this literary endeavor grew the printed **Yosemite Nature Notes**, run off on a job press in the Yosemite Museum from type shipped to the Park by the **Stockton Record**. The Yosemite Natural History Association made this possible by buying the accouterments of a print shop, and the **Stockton Record** donated the type from its Linotype machines, the Park Naturalist added printing to his varied duties. His print job was amateurish, indeed, and the labors of composing each number and getting it off the press were time-consuming and almost painful, but once started the Nature Notes series was continued each month without a break in continuity and has so continued ever since. Those numbers of the small journal printed during the early years of its existence are now hard to find as libraries and collectors

have discovered when they attempt to assemble complete files.

Gradually through the years, the printers' techniques of the Naturalists who held the Yosemite job improved, and a more creditable job of printing was done. However, the work continued as a local, amateurish job-press enterprise for 22 years. In 1947, the Yosemite Natural History Association found that its assets were such as to permit it to contract with a Fresno printer to produce the monthly issues, and the Yosemite Naturalist Department was able to dispense with its print shop. The business of editorial work and layout is still a local job, however.

**Yosemite Nature Notes** was first produced as a mimeographed booklet in July, 1922, by Ansel F. Hall, Park Naturalist. It continued to be mimeographed until January, 1925, at which time the printed series here referred to had its beginning as Vol. IV, No. 1.

## FURTHER OBSERVATIONS ON THE HUNGRY SQUIRRELS

By Oscar A. Sedergren, Chief Ranger

The recent case of squirrels chewing holes through the roofs of some of the government houses, referred to in Mr. McHenry's article, has given vent to a great deal of interest, curiosity, and humor.

The rangers' attention was first called to the oddity by a local resident who came to the Ranger Office with a mixture of excitement, fear and concern. He related that a squirrel was on his roof making the shakes fly, several big holes had been made and when an attempt was made to chase the animal off, he insisted that he had been chased off the roof by the squirrel.

Intermittent damage of this nature, climaxed by a call to the Ranger Office, aroused the curiosity of the

Chief Ranger who in company with the carpenter made a thorough investigation of the roof top under attack by a squirrel. Here they discovered numerous caches of acorns just beneath the shakes of the roof.

Examination of these acorns, which had evidently attracted the squirrels, suggested that the caches were composed of an accumulation over a period of time. Most of the acorns had become so dried that the hulls had fallen off allowing the exposed meat to separate in halves. Doubtlessly it was the more distinct odor of these exposed acorn kernels which caught the attention of the squirrels and set in motion the train of amusing events which were to follow.

**THE YOSEMITE NATURAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION, INC.**

**A Report for the Calendar Year of 1948**

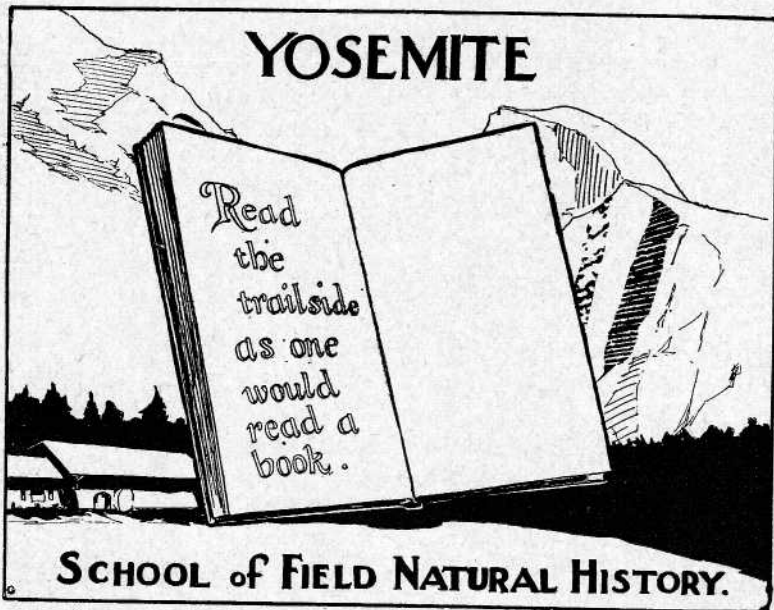
**By Donald Edward McHenry, Director**

The Yosemite Natural History Association has enjoyed a most profitable year during 1948. Its contribution to the naturalist program made possible much public service which, in face of the deplorable lack of sufficient appropriated federal funds, would otherwise have been impossible.

The most urgent mechanical needs of the naturalist division have been satisfied with the purchase by the Association of a Cine Kodak Special 16mm moving picture camera, two semi-automatic 2" x 2" slide projectors and two 8' x 8' portable beaded screens for use of the naturalists at Glacier Point and the Wawona-Mariposa Grove area, a 12' x 12' beaded screen for the campfire program at Camp 14 in the Valley and a Sound Mirror magnetic tape recorder. With the latter a number of live recordings of interviews with

pioneers of the Yosemite region have been made. One of these was Mrs. D. A. (Mother) Curry, cofounder of Camp Curry, whose voice was recorded just six weeks before her passing at her Yosemite home. Recordings of local Indian chants and other parts of Indian ceremonials as interpreted by "Chief" Lee-mee were also made. All these recordings have been added to the growing collection of such materials in the museum library. Other minor physical aids for the naturalist work were also purchased during the year such as projection lenses, minor additions to the museum intercommunication system and the like.

The publications program of the Association has prospered during the year. Subscriptions to Yosemite Nature Notes increased 62% over 1947. The new format including the use of color covers has doubtlessly



had some bearing on this trend. Nevertheless Yosemite Nature Notes by itself is still running at a loss, the difference being absorbed by profits from other sales publications. Funds for the publication of the 1949 special issue "A Guide to the Giant Sequoias of Yosemite" were authorized.

During the year thirty-two books have been obtained for the Yosemite reference library through funds furnished by the Yosemite Natural History Association. This brings the total number of bound volumes in the library to 2,445. This does not include the very large collection of separates and journals. Fifteen volumes of journals, etc., were bound during the year also through the use of similar funds. The Association authorized the expenditure of \$125.33 for the printing of the prospectus and the application forms for the Yosemite School of Field Natural History which reopened this summer after having been closed since the beginning of the war.

The Association purchased supplies for the installation of an up-to-date bookkeeping and stock record system inaugurated by Chairman Cramer and Mr. Morgenson, Board members and expert account-

ants, and the employment of a qualified accountant to close the books of the Association at the end of the month was authorized. Up to now these services have made unreasonable demands upon the inexperienced services of the naturalist staff making impossible that much interpretive service.

65,560 pieces of interpretive literature were procured during the year and 64,694 items were sold. Sales during 1948 were unexpectedly 30% above those of 1947. Receipts exceeded expenditures by \$3,817.97 giving the Association a cash balance at the close of the year of \$8,654.97. \$8,122.63 of this will be absorbed in commitments including such things as a grant-in-aid to Dr. Carl Sharsmith for his revision of Hall's **A Yosemite Flora**, which is considerably out of date and has been out of print for a number of years, for reprinting a large number of reissues of interpretive literature, and the authorized purchase of library equipment, books, for binding of books and for similar purposes.

Detailed statement of the business of the Yosemite Natural History Association will gladly be furnished any member upon written request.

### ENSEMBLE FOR STRINGS?

By Richard G. Beidleman, Ranger Naturalist, 1948

"Say, Ranger, what are all them wires we seen along the road since we came into the park?"

"Not another question about strings!" McFarland and I, ranger naturalists at the Mariposa Grove Museum, would groan to each other. Throughout the summer of 1948 we had been bombarded daily by what seemed to us to be hundreds of questions on one subject: what are the strings or wires along the roads in the park?

At first, we tried responding with

a stock answer. "Oh, those are guide lines for the men who are digging out gooseberry and currant bushes to prevent the spread of blister rust to the white pines, particularly the sugar pines. We have, you know, some of the finest stands of sugar pines in the world right here in Yosemite!"

For the visitor with an interested gleam in his eye, we would perhaps continue. "A crew usually composed of three men works uphill between each pair of strings, digging out the





bushes. In some parts of the park the bushes are being eradicated by spraying with chemical 2, 4D rather than by digging."

If the visitor wanted more information, we would play our "ace-in-the-hole." "About 250 men have been working on blister rust control in the park this summer. And, believe it or not, during the month of July the forty-man crew at the Wawona Blister Rust Camp dug out 75,000 bushes!"

Sometimes, even after divulging that astounding bit of information, we would go into the history of blister rust infection in the United States and into its life cycle, pointing out that the rust spreads by wind from infected trees to bushes over a distance of up to several hundred miles, whereas it can only spread a few hundred yards from infected bushes back to the pine trees. We emphasized that there were still no cases of blister rust reported within the park, although it was to be found in Northern California.

By summer's end we had become automatic in our answers, rattling off blister rust information while we counted publications in the museum, sold geological survey maps, or

cleaned Sequoia cones and candy wrappers out of the drinking fountain.

Finally, we could stand it no longer. On the first of September, we turned the tables; and when people asked us what the strings were, we responded by inquiring what their ideas on the phenomenon might be. Over a period of five days we officially recorded thirty-five people who asked the question; and their answers, we discovered, were much more interesting than the answer we had been expounding throughout the summer!

Several of the questioned tourists felt certain that the strings were for a survey of some kind, a few unimaginative individuals confessed that they didn't have the slightest idea, while one visitor almost uncovered the truth by suggesting that the strings were guides for men grubbing out shrubs harboring beetles. From the sublime it was not far to the ridiculous, with the contribution of some of the following answers:

1. Preserving or treating trees.
2. Lead to burned trees.
3. Lead to trees that need doctoring.
4. Lead to trees that have to come out.



5. Lead to some camp or trail.
6. Lead to diseased trees.
7. Lead to insect-infected trees.
8. Lead to diseased trees or poison oak.
9. Guides for cutting Christmas trees.\*
10. Trails leading up somewhere.
11. Have something to do with tree growth.
12. Lines for fire prevention.
13. Lead to trees sold for lumber.
14. Have something to do with snow measurement.
15. See how deep the snow is.
16. Strings leading to the road.
17. Strings pertaining to certain plants.
18. Strings indicating seedlings.
19. Guide lines for clearing trees.
20. Strings following deer paths.
21. Wires for lightning.
22. Fixing that part of the road.
23. Guide lines to bring back lost people.
24. Guide lines back to trails for somebody lost.
25. Traps for photographing wildlife.
26. Strings to hold trees up.
27. Cables for walking tours, but don't look strong enough.
28. Aerials.

And finally, after we thought we had heard everything, a Southern Californian turned up at the museum one afternoon who was convinced that the strings were being used to subdivide lots for the city of Los Angeles!

There remains no doubt in our minds that in Yosemite National Park the summer season of 1948 was no "holiday for strings!"

### FASTIDIOUS BEAVERS

By Emil F. Ernst, Park Forester

Why is it that beavers will not tolerate golf balls? The golf professional employed at the Wawona Golf Links, Kenneth E. Edwards, knows very well that the beavers who have recently ensconced themselves in the creek that flows through the Wawona Meadows have a strong antipathy toward golf balls. This antipathy redounds to Edwards' personal profit for he has obtained as many as 5 ejected golf balls in an early morning's walk along the banks of the multipledammed creek. Everett estimates that he has benefited to the extent of 50 or more reclaimed golf balls in the last golfing season which is also the first summer season for the newly established beaver colony in the Wawona Meadows area.

It could not well be fastidiousness

for when the newly constructed beaver dams went out in the early spring of 1948 due to high water these same beavers did not hesitate to use pieces of garden hose, wire, and similar artifacts of man in the hasty reconstruction of the destroyed dams. Is it possible that the beavers suspect these round white objects to be the eggs of competing water inhabitants and by ejecting them forcibly from the mud in the bottoms of the developed ponds they will prevent the inroads of undesirable neighbors?

However fastidiousness, jealousy, competition, or any other reason notwithstanding Mr. Edwards will be pleased to have these interesting new inhabitants of the park continue their nightly casting forth of pearls in the form of golf balls.

\* Logging and Christmas tree cutting is strictly prohibited in national parks which are preserved as wilderness sanctuaries in contrast to the policy practiced by the United States Forest Service in the national forests.



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Dan Anderson