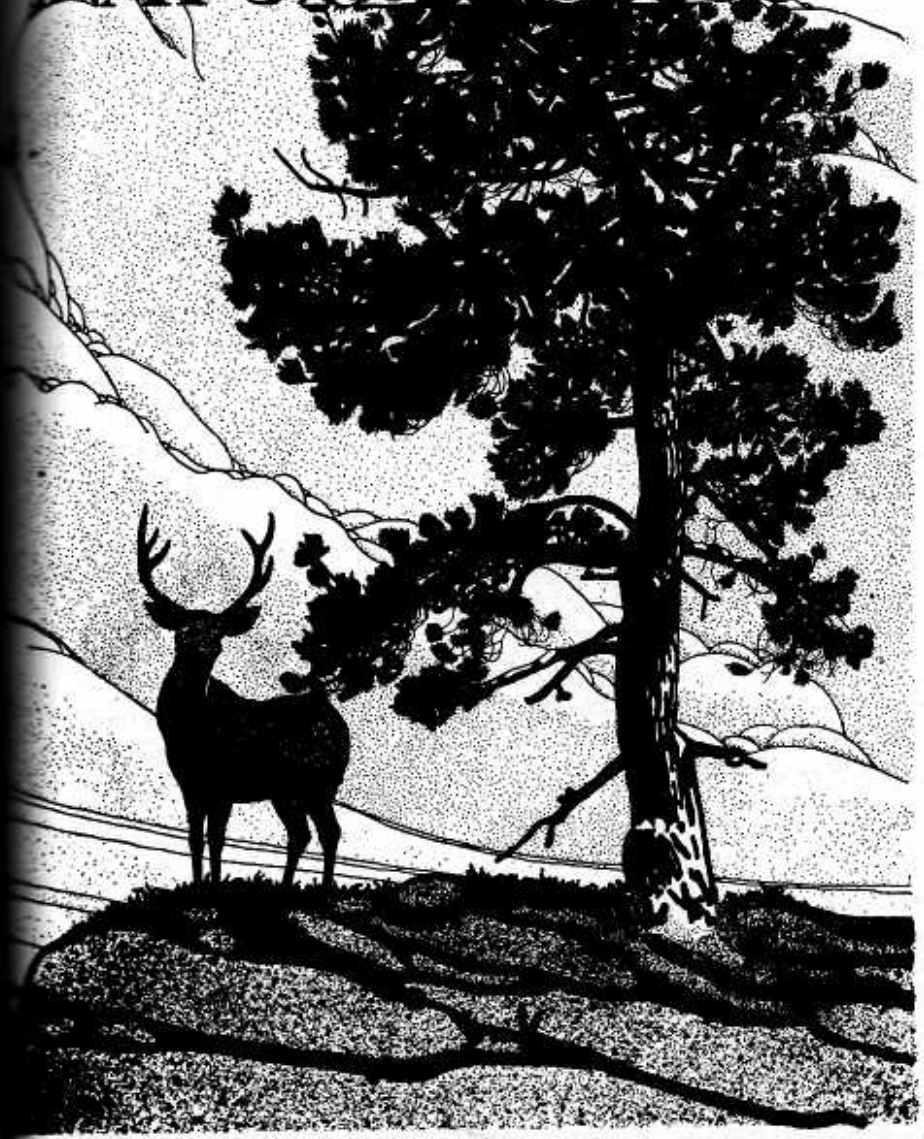
YOSEMITE NATURE NOTES



Volume IV September 15, 1925 Number 17

VACATION-LAND IN OUR HOMES

THROUGHOUT THE YEAR

Few of us are fortunate enough to spend more than a short vacation each year in our mountain playgrounds. How many of us, as we stood upon the heights and felt the thrill of fellowship that comes with first-hand acquaintance with the birds, the flowers, the trees and the mountains themselves, have wished that the inspiring influence of these associations could be with us throughout the year in our everyday life.

Our government is doing its part to help us to more thoroughly enjoy and understand our great playgrounds, the National Parks. In Yosemite we find a splendid museum and a corps of naturalists who conduct daily field trips along the trailsides and who deliver evening campfire lectures on a wide variety of natural history subjects. But why should we be satisfied with but an introduction to the trailsides of our beloved Sierra? Is there no way in which we may continue our friendship with the Big Country during each month and each week of the year?

There is a way! Lovers of the California mountains have organized to interpret and present in popular form all of the manifestations of Nature of the Sierras and more particularly of Yosemite National Park. Primarily the YOSEMITE NATURAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION concerns itself with the living things of the Yosemite region; yet it must necessarily be a factor in inspiring a regard for American Wild Life in general.

YOSEMITE NATURE NOTES, which has been published in mimeographed form by the Park Naturalist for a number of years, has been adopted as the official organ of the Association. Cooperating with the government, the Association prints "Yosemite Nature Notes" weekly during June, July, and August and monthly throughout the remainder of the year, each of the twenty-four issues being sent to all members.

If you are one of the hundreds of thousands who love Yosemite, you will wish to keep in touch with her through the Association. There are hundreds of thousands of others who have no conception of the big message of the Out-of-doors. You will want those uninitiated to learn of what the Park has to offer.

Act now! Fill out the enclosed application for membership and mail it with a check or money order for $2.00 to The Park Naturalist, Yosemite National Park, California. Every cent of the $2.00 will be devoted to keeping you in touch with your Yosemite.

YOSEMITE NATURE NOTES

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BLOOD LUST IN WOODPECKERS

By Enid Michael

On the morning of August 24 I happened to witness what I believe to be unusual behavior on the part of a California Woodpecker (Melanerpes formicivorus bairdi). While I was walking through a grove of Kellogg oaks on the north side of Yosemite Valley my attention was attracted by the excited chatter of a number of Wood pewees (Myiochanes richardsoni). I had just seen young pewees being fed by their parents and on hearing the notes of distress my thought was that one of the young pewees had gotten into trouble. Young birds, like children, have a way of getting into trouble. However, I was shocked to discover a young pewee in such real trouble. On a branch about twenty feet above my head there was a California Woodpecker, and apparently in his very face there fluttered a small bird. Diving from above and striking at the woodpecker were two wood pewees. Between blows the scolding flycatchers fiercely snapped their mandibles. The onslaught became too hot for the woodpecker and he sought safety in flight. As he left his perch the cause of all the excitement came to me in a flash. The bird that appeared to flutter in the face of the woodpecker was really a captive. Melanerpes had pounched upon a young wood pewee and was about to satisfy his blood lust when parent pewees came to the rescue. The young pewee was held by the shoulder, and thus with his body and one wing free he was able to offer considerable resistance. The woodpecker could not fly far with his struggling victim and when he came to perch again in a nearby tree we was immediately pounced upon by angry parent pewees. Under this second attack he loosed his hold and the young pewee fluttered away, apparently uninjured. Perching on a dead twig the hero of the adventure stood the inspection of his parents. Soon the excitement died away and flycatchers were again plying their trade in an attempt to satisfy the insatiable appetites of young birds.

It so happens that Wood pewees and California woodpeckers nest commonly in the same groves. If it were the practice of California woodpeckers to feed upon young pewees it is not likely that pewees would choose to nest in the favorite groves of the woodpeckers. But, suppose that pewees were so foolish as to nest in the stronghold of their enemies, then would it be strange that we had never before seen the result of this maljudgment? No: I am inclined to think that this particular woodpecker was a bloodthirsty individual, and not the normal Melanerpes.

FOLLOWING SPRING UP THE MOUNTAINS

By Nancy Yerkes

Student in the Yosemite Field School of Natural History

As Yosemite is remarkable for its wide range of floral habitats, so is it delightful in the joyous succession of seasons up the slopes to the mountain tops—each shorter than the last till in that highest zone winter holds sway most of the year.

Here within a range of some 3000 feet we may find marsh, meadows and swamp, coppice, woods and sheltered deep grown slopes, desert flats and burning sand slides, mountain meadow and alpine wastes.

We may come in February for the first stirring of spring in the low valleys and follow that fresh beauty up the heights month after month till its last flash on the mountain tops in August and September.

Upon my first visit to Yosemite in May, 1920, spring had possession of the valley. The dogwood (Cornus nuttalli and C. pubescens) lit up the dark trees along the road from El Portal and in the deep woods were many of the delicate associates of the Hypatica and Dogtooth violet so dear to the easterner after howsoever short a sojourn in California. There were all the violets, blue, yellow, and white. (Viola oxyceras, V. pupurea and V. blanda).

So it was with some disappointment that coming this year in early July I found all the summer flowers far advanced. Though deep and lush with full summer's promise, yet it seemed, "that there hath pass'd away a glory from the earth." Along the ways the fireweed (Epilobium angustifolium), the Artemisia, Yarrow (Achillaea millefolium) and Goldenrod (Solidago elongata) are rushing on to their showery display, but along the hedges the roses (Rosa californica) hang full of dried clusters of blossoms and up the slopes the message "Late, too late" comes again from the curled panicles of "Ocean Spray." The wave of spring has broken here and receded to another level and only its brown spray lingers on the chaparral. The richest valley woods are still misty here and there with the dainty Gilea leptalea and Lessingia leptoclada, and there are, too, flashes of bright Canchalagua (Erythraea venusta) and Clarkia (C. rhomboidea) and deep stands of Godetia (G. viminea) and larkspur (Delphinium andersonii) and pale Collinsia tinctoria, but, for the most part, the pine floor is dry and summer sweet.

But if you will leave all this mature beauty and pass up the hot Yosemite Falls trail, past the fruiting Ceonothus integerrimus and Manzanitas (Archtostaphylos nevadensis and A. patula), the shining golden-cup oak (Quercus chrysolopus) and the dusty Chinquapin (Castanea sempervirens) and turn left along the Eagle Peak trail into the high woods and meadows, you will still catch that first glory of spring. It has not yet quit the earth, but only mounted higher. There in the woods are now to be found the daintiset and most delicate of the first annuals and lilies. In the deep wet woods are all the sweet violets, the Columbine (Aquilegia truncata) tall nodding larkspur (Delphinium hansenii, D. decorum, D. andersonii) scattered acres wide in that soft shifting sunlight. And there are the tiniest Collinsias (C. Wrightii and C. Torreyi), the bright Mimulus nanus and M. memphiticus, mountain blue bells (Mertensia siberica) with a and M. memphiticus, mountain bluebells, B. hyacinthina, var. lacies; B. grandiflora, Calochortus venustus, C. nuttalli, Lilium washingtonianum, and Camassia quamash. And in the meadows, also, are even pools of the Indian pond lily (Nymphaea polysepalum) and the well-loved shooting star (Dodecatheon jeffreyi).

They are all still there, with many more, and in such fresh luxuriance as is hardly to be seen in a lower level spring tide. The peace of a high country is upon them and the lightness of a fresher air. Go up now. You are not too late for spring.

NOTICE OF CORRECTION.

In "Yosemite Nature Notes" of September 8 on page 86, the tree in which the elk's horns were found was called oak; it should read madrona.

AFIELD WITH THE NATURE GUIDES

YOUNG RED-BREASTED SAPSUCKERS

The adventure of the day was a visit with two young red-breasted sapsuckers. I was passing along the edge of Stoneman Meadow when I heard, coming from a dense willow thicket, those strange, mechanical squeaky bird notes that sound much like the notes coming from a rubber doll when squeezed by the baby. By moving cautiously toward the sound I was able to get within a few feet of the author. This young sapsucker was a very striking bird. On his back was woven an intricate design in black and white which gave the impression of a handsome shawl thrown over the shoulders. His dark smoky head and breast gave off glints of deep red color which suggested the color that was to come to the mature bird. In the mature bird the entire head and breast is a bright red. I rather liked better the appearance of the young fellow, his colors were more subdued.

While I was watching the first bird was joined by a second so much alike in size and color as to be a twin brother. When the second bird arrived there seemed to be some slight argument. The argument was nothing serious and soon both birds were feeding peacefully on adjoining branches in true sapsucker fashion. Occasionally one or the other of the birds would raise its head *to utter a few squeaky notes.*

Evidently the sapsuckers had been working in this particular thicket for a number of days, as there were thirty or forty willow shoots that had been barked in patches to the sapwood. Some of the older wounds were beginning to dry up, while many fresh cuttings were oozing sap freely. About each running wound were numerous flies; there were flies of at least six different species. And these feeding flies were not the only ones that knew of the sapsucker's work. An Anna hummingbird also was attracted and came to sip sap from the flowing wounds. The sapsuckers seemed not to begrudge the "hummer" a share which had been freed by their industry. And neither hummingbird nor sapsucker, while I was present, made any attempt to capture the winged insects that were feasting at the banquet board.

We had never before seen sapsuckers in willows, therefore, it was with interest that we noted their work. These birds worked upon small willow twigs about an inch in diameter, they worked out irregular roundish patches, the larger being an inch across. The sapsuckers observed at work in the orchards of the valley construct an orderly sap-trap of roundish or squarian holes about one-fourth of an inch across, running part way around the tree trunk, *in parallel rows.* When working upon Kellogg oaks it has been observed that the birds make rectangular cuts an inch or less long, and arranged in an orderly pattern with narrow strips of bark between. *The sapsuckers in the* willows followed no set pattern; their work was careless. The small twigs upon which they worked may have had something to do with the lack of order in *their sap-trap or this may have* been due to the bird's inexperience.—Enid Michael.

* * *

A LATE NESTER

On Thursday, August 13, 1925, when we made camp in a clump of lodgepole pines opposite the Tuolumne Meadows checking station we unconsciously intruded on the domain of a Wright Flycatcher. First to attract our attention was the tender call of the birds each morning. We could see them hopping about in the branches overhead and easily identified them. Soon we located the snug nest in the top of a Lodgepole pine five and half feet from the ground. As we watched from a distance we saw the sparsely down-covered heads and opened mouths of two nestlings. The female came quite often and the male but seldom. When we woke we could see the mother on the nest patiently waiting for the sun to warm things up and start the insect wings.

On Monday we did not notice the birds nor on Tuesday morning. Tuesday evening I went to the nest for the first time and found the two young birds cold and dead. One of them had a hole in the abdomen. The cause of the tragedy shall always remain a mystery and while there are several suppositions they are but guesses.

Some mammal or bird may have killed the one and frightened the parents away.

The *parents* may have been annoyed by our presence, although we were careful not to go closer than ten feet to the nest, and abandoned it. As the nights were very cold the young could easily have frozen *to death.*

Some disease may have caused their death, after which they were abandoned and the one was partially eaten.

The thing which attracted us in the *first* place was that there would be birds but a few days old at that time of year in Tuolumne Meadows. This species of bird, however, depending as it does upon insects for food, is notably late in rearing its young.—R. D. Harwood.

HOW A CHIPMUNK PROVIDES

Glacier Point is a fine location for studying the habits of the Tahoe chipmunk, Eutamias speciosus frater, which occurs abundantly there. The small rodents are freely fed by people about the hotel and are even found snatching crumbs inside the cafeterias as well as on the open-air porch.

At the nature guide lookout a large carton of vermicelli and rolled oats has lasted out the summer in spite of the fact that about a half pint a day has been fed to the squirrels and chipmunks. A golden mantled ground squirrel found that the food supply was kept in this box, so he gnawed a hole through the side of it and in late afternoon he would fearlessly enter the box, even while several people were watching him. Once the box was picked up with him inside and thereafter he hesitated about stuffing himself in public view. As soon as the chipmunks found where this squirrel was getting so much more food than they were they entered the box, too, and many lively chases followed.

These little brightly marked chipmunks have a great curiosity and will search out a known food supply which may have been hidden from them. When the carton was finally emptied one chipmunk spent a half hour looking for it and permitted the guide to touch him while he climbed around the stone wall.

Of course, these chipmunks were not able to consume so much food on the moment, so filling their cheek pouches with vermicelli, already chewed up to the proper length they would dash off with it and bury it. This they did by rapidly digging a series of holes and dropping a little of the food in each one. When the mouth was empty they began to cover the holes, using their front paws entirely as shovels and rakes.

One industrious chipmunk was found cutting green acorns from the huckleberry oak. This he did by clambering out onto the slender twigs which yielded alarmingly under his weight. He ran out of sight with them, one at a time, and it is not known where they were being deposited.

Chipmunks are valuable foresters because out of the quantity of seeds which they bury many are not recovered, but germinate. Many of our forest monarchs owe their existence to some chipmunk's instinct to store a food supply for the hard times of winter.—David D. KECK.

THE FLORA OF THE LEDGE TRAIL

The Ledge Trail in its mile and a half of length offers an interesting study in flora. At first sight one imagines the trail, after leaving the wooded valley floor, passes precipitately over dry and more or less uninteresting bowlders of a talus slope and is prepared to see, in contrast with the other trails to Glacier Point, comparatively few trees, shrubs, ferns and flowers. This is a mistake, for an actually looking the climb, the whole trail is found to be clothed in verdure of Transition and Canadian Life Zones.

The total change in elevation made by the Ledge Trail is approximately three thousand feet since the Valley floor already has an elevation of 3960 feet and the elevation of Glacier Point is 7200 feet. On the Ledge Trail then one covers approximately 1500 feet of Upper Transition Zone and 2000 feet of Canadian Zone.

In addition to the changes in flora due to elevation, the beautiful Staircase Falls still further enriches the flora by the addition of the water-loving plants.

It is surprising, too, how much of truly rich soil is found along the trail in spite of the talus over which it passes. From its very nature, though, there can be no characteristically meadow growing conditions, but aside from that, its flora reflects in its wideness of range the life zones through which it passes.

The lower part of the trail, in fact, almost the first half, is well shaded by the California Black Oak, the Broad-leaved Maple, Yellow Pine, Incense Cedar and White Fir. The lower part, too, is heavily lined and flanked with shrubs: the California Laurel, Syringa, Elderberry, Deerbrush, Service Berry, Coffee Berry, Mariposa Manzanita, Wild Raspberry, Wild Goose Berry and Wild Current which straggle companionably along the trail, with mimuli, pentstemons, wild ginger, alumroot draperia, gayophytum, Clarkia, phacelia, cow parsnip, giant hyssop, interspersed with branckens, the cliff-brakes, (or the Pellaeas).

When the trail reaches the canyon, or approximately the last half of the climb, the red fir has become conspicuous, together with the small-leaved maple, while the Ocean Spray, Green Manzanita and Bitter Cherry are the new shrubs. Here the glorious yellow Mimulus implexus, the great soft pink Mimulus lewisii and their flaming sister Mimulus cardinalis, together with Sulphur Flowers, azure and deep blue delphiniums, the rare and graceful Gentian detonsa and the pale exquisite sprays of Saxifraga punctata become a marvelous setting for the Staircase Falls stream.

Beside the falls at the very heart of the Ledge Trail, where mosses cling to the bowlders, and water continually seeps through, the soft tracery of the Five Finger fern fronds sway gently with the breeze, lending their pale green witchery to the magic beauty of the way. On the rim lofty Sugar Pines stand guard over it all. This is the Ledge Trail in mid-summer, and comparing the range of its flora with that of any other trail in the Yosemite, there is little doubt that for an equal climb no other trail can offer so much in variety and beauty of flora.—Mabel E. Hibbard.

THE YOSEMITE NATURAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION

ITS PURPOSES

1. To gather and disseminate information on the wild-life of the Sierras.
2. To develop and enlarge the Yosemite Museum (in co-operation with the National Park Service) and to establish subsidiary units, such as the Glacier Point lookout and branches of similar nature.
3. To promote the educational work of the Yosemite Nature Guide Service.
4. To publish (in co-operation with the U. S. National Park Service) "Yosemite Nature Notes".
5. To study living conditions, past and present, of the Indians of the Yosemite region.
6. To maintain in Yosemite Valley a library of historical, scientific, and popular interest.
7. To further scientific investigation along lines of greatest popular interest and to publish, from time to time, bulletins of non-technical nature.
8. To strictly limit the activities of the association to purposes which shall be scientific and educational, in order that the organization shall not be operated for profit.

MAY WE SEND YOU EACH ISSUE OF YOSEMITE NATURE NOTES?

Your check for $2.00 sent to the Park Naturalist, Yosemite National Park, will help to pay the cost of its publication for one year and make you a member of the Yosemite Natural History Association for the same period.

FROM THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON OUT-DOOR RECREATION

Called by PRESIDENT COOLIDGE

"THAT THE CONFERENCE ENDORSE NATURE STUDY IN SCHOOLS AND THE EXTENSION OF THE NATURE STUDY IDEA TO EVERY AMERICAN SCHOOL AND FAMILY; . . . . . THAT THE ESTABLISHMENT OF MUSEUMS OF NATURAL HISTORY IN NATIONAL PARKS WILL INCREASE THE EDUCATIONAL RECREATIONAL VALUE OF THE PARKS".—*Resolution of the Conference.*