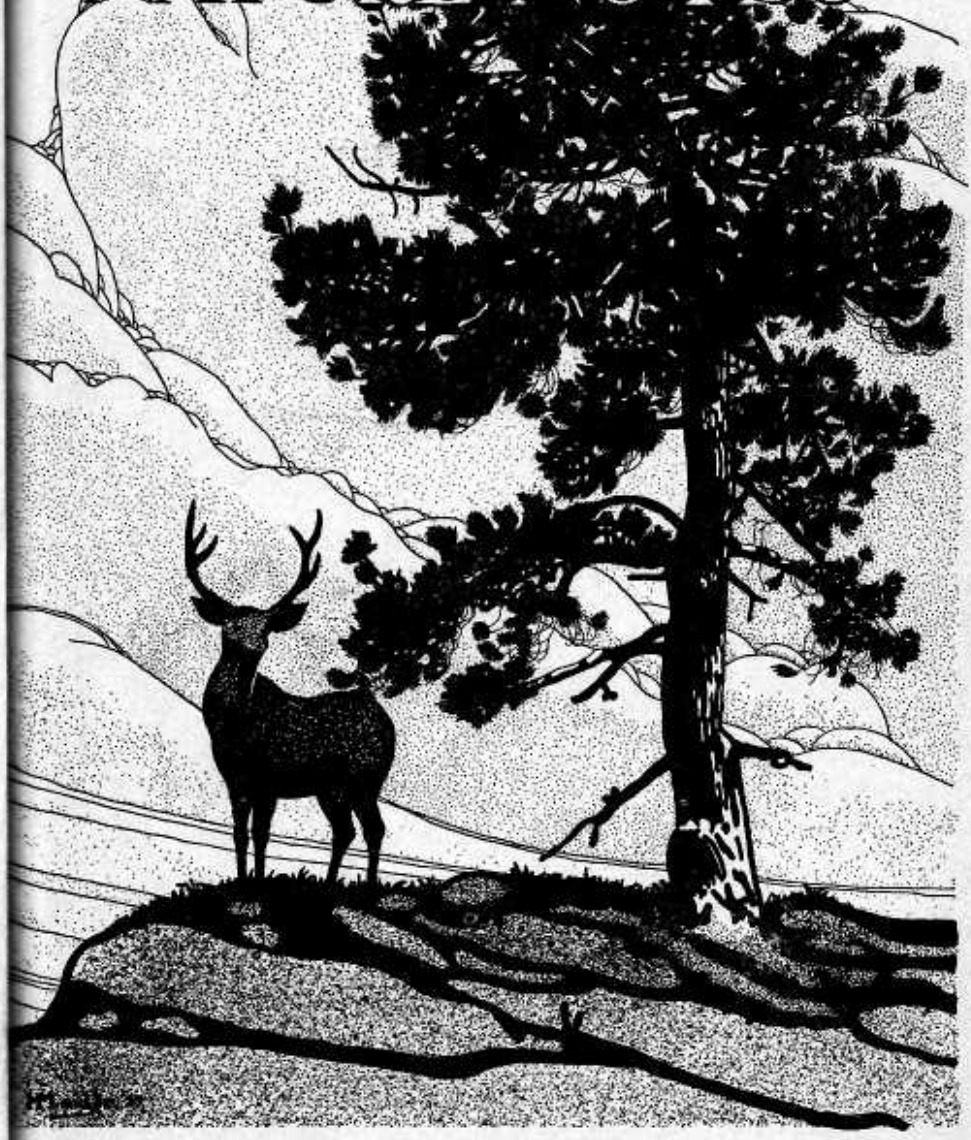
YOSEMITE NATURE NOTES



Volume IV March, 1925 Number 3

A PERSONAL INVITATION.

YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK IS YOURS! WE OF THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE WANT TO HELP YOU TO MAKE FRIENDS WITH YOUR PARK AND TO UNDERSTAND IT IN ITS EVERY MOOD. ALL OF THE FOLLOWING SERVICE IS OFFERED TO YOU *free* BY YOUR GOVERNMENT:

Visit the Yosemite Museum!

Here you will learn the full story of the Park — what tools were used by the great Sculptor in carving this mighty granite-walled gorge; who lived here before the white man came; how the Days of Gold led to Yosemite's discovery; how the pioneers prepared the way for you; and how the birds and mammals and trees and flowers live together in congenial communities waiting to make your acquaintance.

Plan your trail trips on the large scale models in the Geography Room.

The Yosemite Library in the museum provides references on all phases of Yosemite history and natural history.

Popular lectures on Yosemite geology and other branches of natural history are given by nature guides at scheduled times each day.

The nature guide on duty will be more than willing to answer your questions on any subject.

Go Afield with a Nature Guide!

Take advantage of this free service that will help you to know your Park. A competent scientist will conduct you over Yosemite trails, and from him you may learn first hand of the native flowers, trees, birds, mammals, and geological features.

See Schedule of Nature Guide Field Trips.

Visit Glacier Point Lookout!

From there you will obtain an unexcelled view of Yosemite's High Sierra. The binocular telescope will bring Mt. Lyell to within one third of a mile from where you stand; you can recognize friends climbing trails several miles away. The Nature Guide in attendance will help you to operate it and will explain what you see.

A small library is at your command.

You will enjoy the informal nightly campfire talks given here.

Attend the Nature Guide Campfire Talks!

In addition to the museum lectures members of the educational staff give talks as a part of the evening program at Camp Curry and Yosemite Lodge. Non-technical explanations of how Yosemite came to be; what you may expect of Yosemite bears; how the local Indians lived; what birds you see about your camps; what trout you will catch in Yosemite waters; how you may best visit the wonderland of the summit region; and scores of similar subjects are given by the National Park Service Nature Guides.

ALL OF THESE OPPORTUNITIES ARE PROVIDED FREE OF CHARGE BY YOUR GOVERNMENT.

—TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THEM—

YOSEMITE NATURE NOTES

Volume IV March 1025 Number 3

"UNNATURAL" HISTORY

By C.P.RUSSELL
Park Naturalist, Yosemite National Park

I THINK we must all be conscious of the nation-wide tendency to accept nature study as a thing of importance. Of late years a movement has developed that places wild life among subjects receiving thoughtful consideration from the people as a whole. Time was when it was thought a fit subject to amuse children, perhaps, or to engage the cartoonist's freakish, begoggled professors, but hardly worthy the time of men and women with worldly interests.

Just what has brought about the change I am not going to attempt to point out, but the evidence of a reformation are at every hand. The magazines and periodicals of highest standing and greatest circulation pay substantial prices for articles on natural history The publishers have not done this because they are propagandists favoring popularization of nature study; they have done it because their readers demand material of such a nature. Recently a magazine has appeared in the East which publishes nothing but articles on natural history. It has been seized upon by the people as a thing needed; its subscription list has grown by leaps and bounds. In the Yosemite we see another manifestation of the changed attitude of the public. Not many years ago it appeared that the hosts of park visitors were captured only by the mere novelty of the place; if attempts were made to interest crowds in fundamentals of the science that explained the great valley, they were bored—bored with anything great unless it was novel. The crowds of those years found happiness with the stage drivers who might point out zoological resemblances on the cliffs—a dog's head here, a crouched lion there, etc., but bona fide Yosemite zoology—not for them.

As an example of the changed attitude in Yosemite, let me say that now during the months of June, July and August more than one hundred thousand visitors learn something of rocks, trees, flowers, mammals, birds, snakes, frogs, etc., and like it. Come back for more, in fact.

Dr. Bryant, Originator of Nature Guide Service

Four years ago Dr. H. C. Bryant of the California Fish and Game Commission conceived the idea of

interesting summer resort crowds in nature. He was detailed to visit the Lake Tahoe resorts and interest tourists with the possibilities of "reading a trailside," and indirectly to preach conservation. From this first nature guiding grew the Yosemite Nature Guide Service. Dr. Bryant is still the backbone of our organization. Each summer nine competent scientists are kept busy in the Yosemite helping the thousands to appreciate better the natural wonders preserved for them.

It is a part of our program to correct misconceptions of nature and in keeping with such a plan we sometimes outline a number of superstitions and myths that have ensconsed themselves about some of our native wild animals.

Old Guides Find
Tourists Gullible

One of the first lessons in natural history, or rather unnatural history, that every child receives concerns the stork and its well-known deeds. And this bird's mythical part in peopling the earth is just as much an actuality as are many other commonly accepted happenings in the animal kingdom. Why such an accumulation of myths should have been handed down by a people of woodsmen and hunters is hard to understand.

It is amusing to note the indignation with which some people refute the statement that their pet fables have no scientific foundation. Recently a lady visiting the Yosemite Museum lost patience with and all faith in the Yosemite Nature Guide Service because the park naturalist expressed doubt that her brother had killed a "stinging adder" on the valley floor. The reptile in question was reputed to be armed with an exceedingly sharp spine, an inch and a half long, on the end of its tail. That one supposed to be familiar with the wild life of the region should not have seen one of these remarkable creatures seemed to the lady to be proof enough that the park naturalist's position was poorly filled. Indeed, "stinging adders" were not rare, they were known to occur throughout the Sierras, she declared. That was my first inkling that the Pacific rattlesnake had a poisonous rival in the Yosemite. Some weeks after this revelation I sat beside a camp fire at one of the high-country lakes.

With me were a half dozen employes of the Yosemite National Park Company, who were terminating their summer services with a hike into the back-country wilds. One of these was a grizzled old packer and guide, who was escorting two belated New York tourists to streams full of Eastern Brook trout. The conversation turned to snakes and almost immediately the old guide revealed his knowledge of poisonous stinging adders, more deadly than rattlers. According to his ervsion, this fearsome snake is double ended. The tail looks exactly like the head except for the sharp spike that it carries and the whole body is slate colored and very smooth. In all probability the interesting and absolutely harmless rubber boa, common in the Sierra, provided the foundation for the "stinging adder" idea. The incident goes to show how such "bunk" may be handed out as authentic information. The old guide with his lifetime experience in the mountains is looked upon by the tourists as the last word in woodcraft and nature lore. To any he may instruct, stinging adders become all too real.

The Hoop Snake Story

When a small boy I remember distinctly of reading of the hoop snake, a large reptile with the habit of seizing its tail in its mouth and thus rolling rapidly over ground of any and all conditions of surface. With the article were pictures showing the reptile rolling down hill with the speed of an express train, finally releasing its hold on its tail and plunging that sharp, horny member entirely through the trunk of a tree. The lurid description affirmed that the skewered tree would promptly shrivel and die. There is hardly a possibility of this story's having originated anywhere except in someone's delirium tremens, yet the account of such a creature's existence was published in a magazine held in high regard and recommended to juveniles. The same story has had other publicity and at the present time is given credence by many adults. I once had a college professor of physics ask me in all seriousness if I did not think it possible that such a snake might exist.

Snake Tails That Live Until
The Sun Goes Down

From our earliest childhood we have been told by parents and companions that snakes of all species, in spite of the worst of mauling and pounding, will cease to live only after the sun goes down. It is true that the tail muscles and nerves of a decapitated snake will continue to twitch and respond to stimulation long after the death blow has been struck. This retention of vitality probably has lead to the popular superstition that darkness and death are related.

The Joint Snake

Probably most of us, sometime or other, have been won by another snake story, that of the fracturable joint snake. The slightest attack upon this remarkable reptile will cause it to be shattered into fragments. Scatter the pieces as you will, they will in time creep together, find their proper places, and rejoin to form a perfectly healthy serpent. Snake-like lizards are found both in America

(Continued on Page 23)

A REMARKABLE BIRD VOCABULARY

By D.D.McLean
Assistant Park Naturalist, Yosemite National Park

CAMPERS in the Yosemite region sometimes are mystified at the barking calls that they may hear of an evening. The dog-like barking may vary and become a laugh or a cat-call. To anyone who hears this for the first time it seems that it could have its origin in nothing less than a deep-lunged four-footed beast. However, the producer is none other than the Spotted Owl.

In the daytime he sits quietly in some tree with heavy foliage, as a cedar or a fir, or perhaps in a hollow in the trunk of some deciduous tree.

The first one I ever saw was near Bowers Cave. I had heard this barking note for some time one evening and finally, becoming curious, I started up the hill toward the spot where the sound came from. I did not know what I should expect to see, but thought I was prepared for anything.

Finally I stopped under a large black oak for a few moments and was surprised to see a large owl fly in from farther up the hill and perch on a dead limb perhaps twenty feet above me.

It sat there and turned its head first one way and then the other, apparently listening. I moved a little and it immediately turned its attention toward me. It leaned forward and gave forth the series of barks I had heard previously. It sounded like hoo. hoo hoo. hoo. hooo, being rapid at first and dying in tone, as well as being more drawn out toward the end. This was continued two or three times. Suddenly the bird fluffed up to enormous size, leaned forward and gave a hiss not unlike the loud spitting of a cat.

Another bird then came and both of them performed, spitting and barking most of the time. Occasionally they would give a long drawn h-o-o, o-o-o and a queer sort of scream such as one might expect of a cat whose tail has been stepped on. It seemed that I must have been near the nest but I could not see it because of the darkness.

Another evening at the same place gave similar results but only one of the birds appeared. One seen in the daytime had a large number of smaller birds pestering him out of some good sleep. The group consisted of Vireos, Warblers, Jays, Woodpeckers, Fly Catchers, and Nuthatches all screeching at the top of their voices and making short sallies at the owl. I found one owl that had eaten three June Bugs, a white-footed mouse and a frog for his night's meal. Quite a combination—but probably delicious from his point of view.

SOUTHERN SPOTTED OWL

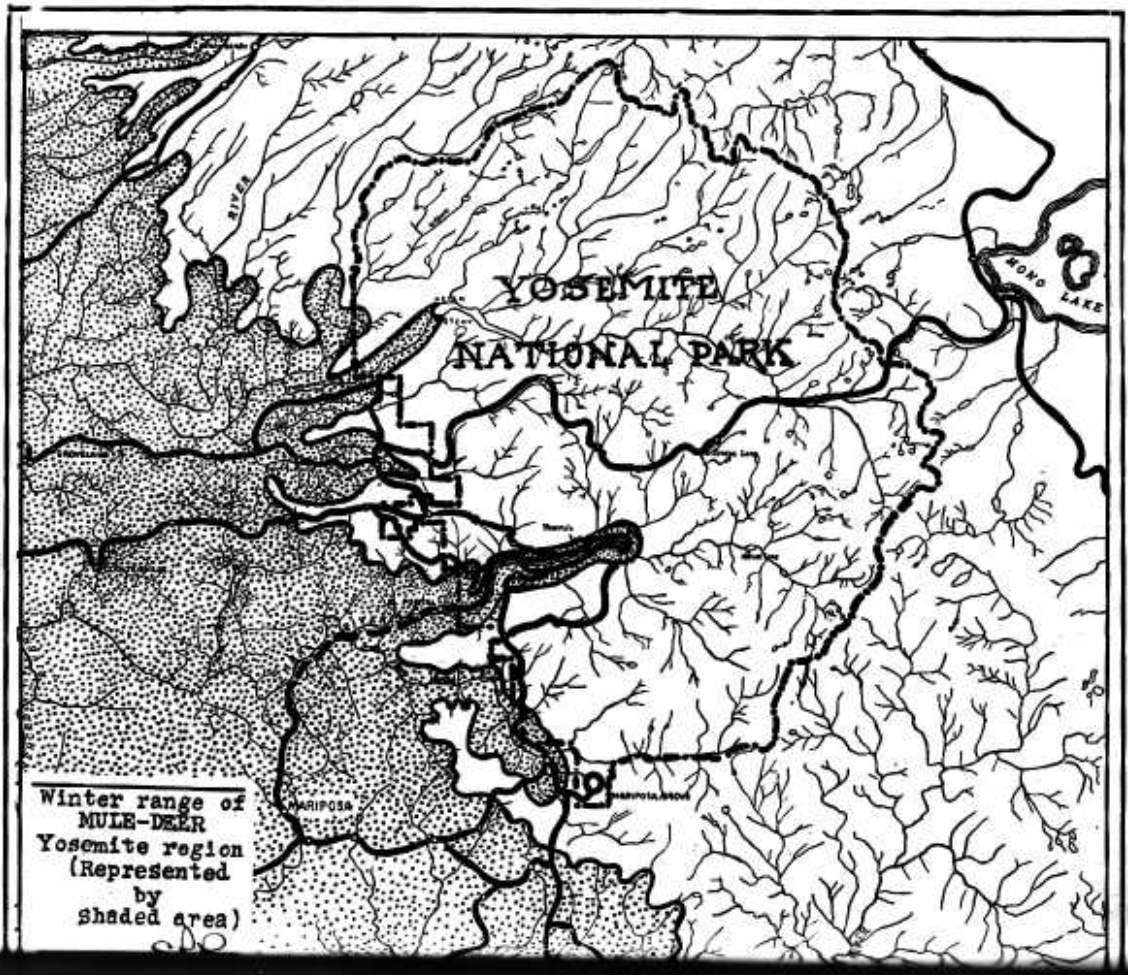
"Suddenly the bird fluffed up to enormous size, leaned forward and gave a hiss not unlike the loud spitting of a cat."

I once found one in a steel trap and tried to free him without killing him, but he fought so viciously with his one free foot and with his beak that I had to give it up. The trap bait was a small piece of liver and I doubt if he was bent on eating that when he got into the trap. I think more likely he saw a mouse feeding on the meat or near it and dropped down for it and put his foot in the trap.

Apparently they do not move far for I have seldom heard them far away from their particular north facing slope near Bowers Cave.

They show very little fear at any time. In fact they seem rather phlegmatic and dull, but they are interesting because of their unusual vocabulary if for no other reason.

To most people Yosemite appears to be an efficient refuge for all wild life native to the region. The map reveals a defect so far as deer are concerned. It is physically impossible for the herds of deer to remain in the park after snow falls.



DEER MIGRATIONS

By C.P.Russell
Park Naturalist, Yosemite National Park

Several years ago a resident of the Yosemite region who makes his home at Cascades, just below Yosemite valley, placed a collar on one of the tame deer that spend the larger part of each year near his barns. To the collar he attached a small melodious bell.

This belled deer has given naturalists opportunity to record the first observations made on the seasonal movements of a deer acting uninfluenced by unnatural conditions. Each winter the doe, with numerous others of her kind, remains on the small flat in the Merced canyon known as Cascades or Cascada. Mr. Skelton, with a kindliness displayed by most Yosemite residents, scatters an abundance of hay about the barns and, when snow covers the ground, it is no uncommon thing to see a dozen deer taking advantage of the meals provided.

When the snow and ice of the red fir and Jeffrey pine forests, 4000 feet above, begin to melt, the deer respond to the urge they may feel to reach the sunny heights. They start on what the mountaineers term their "upward drift." Mr. Skelton's belled doe in her trek to summer ranges follows the gigantic roadway carved deep in the solid granite by the Merced river and the ancient Merced glacier. She has adopted "little Yosemite valley" as the spot in which to browse summer herbage and to rear her family. Each summer she is seen here with her fawns by tourists, who sometimes return to the Yosemite Museum to ask, "What is the idea of putting a bell on that doe?"

Little Yosemite valley is 6200 feet above sea level and 3000 feet above Cascades. In making her annual journeys between winter and summer ranges this doe travels fifteen miles and climbs 3000 feet. In years that she has been watched, she has been as constant as the seasons. Her path has never varied and her destinations at its either end are always the same.

Through all the warm summer months she feeds here in this abundance of Canadian zone browse. Few tourists go far from trails in Little Yosemite, and so it is quite possible for the doe to keep her fawns well removed from human beings even in this much frequented spot, when the family is come upon by a hiker, the unsophisticated youngsters bound madly away with all the wildness and timidity handed down to them in their inheritance from generations that knew no national parks. The doe stands her ground calmly, secure in a confidence bred of Yosemite protection.

Deer Band Together in Retreating Before Storms

Little Yosemite by no means marks the upper limit of the deer's summer range. The animals are to be found as high as timber grows, and a few venture above the timber line. In all probability each individual, like the belled doe from Cascade, has its chosen area over which it ranges. And, like her too, each deer of the 30,000 or so that have found Yosemite a summer range, turn before the first September blizzards that visit the high-country and pick their ways downward over definite trails followed by countless deer generations. In making this downward migration they are very apt to band together. It was my privilege not long ago to be in the high country of Yosemite when the first heavy snow storm of the winter arrived. That day I saw more

MABLE DOE DISTINGUISHED

Upper—How far will a deer travel in a season? To answer this question scientists point to Mabel, the famous bell deer of Yosemite National Park. Three years ago a miniature Liberty bell was placed around her neck by Mr. Skelton at Cascades, just below Yosemite Valley. It was found that Mabel in her trek to summer ranges follows the gigantic roadway carved deep in the solid granite by the Merced river and the ancient Merced glacier. She has adopted "little Yosemite valley" as the spot in which to browse summer herbage and to rear her family. Each summer she is seen here with her fawns by tourists, who sometimes return to the Yosemite Museum to ask, "What is the idea of putting a bell on that doe?"

—Photos by James V. Lloyd
Cut by courtesy of The Stockton Record.

deer than I had ever before seen in the upper levels of the park. Every canyon fairly spewed forth bucks, does and fawns, all bent on descending to a region less wintry. Traveling in single file the little bands left well defined trails in the four inches of fresh snow. Little trails converged to form larger trails, and these in turn united with others until, in its entirety, the many-branched system of trails resembled the ramifications of stream courses as represented on a map.

As each succeeding storm brings the snow cover farther down the mountain sides, the deer move before it until they have been driven from the park.

The little Cascade herd and the somewhat larger herds in the Merced canyon above are the only deer of the Merced system that remain within the protecting limits of Yosemite National Park during the winter. On the Tuolumne there is even less territory within the park upon which deer may find conditions suitable for winter occupation.

All of that Ceanothus-covered and extremely rough region just west of Yosemite constitutes the deers' winter range. The Forest Service has designated this territory the Stanislaus and the Sierra National Forests. Feed conditions are ideal here, and in general we must acknowledge that although Yosemite loses her deer each winter, they have in the past been well cared for by the United States National Forest. The deer population of Yosemite National Park has increased amazingly in recent years.

But how much greater would be our sense of security if we could know that at least a part of Yosemite's deer herds might at all times be free from persecution? Let us accept the fact that there is a great recreational value in the sport of hunting deer. Let us accept, too, the fact that one of the functions of a wild-life preserve such as Yosemite is supposed to be, is to provide an overflow of game that there may be hunting in adjacent territory. But is Yosemite a dependable sanctuary if deer can remain within its protection only a small fraction of each year? It is apparent that the boundary lines of Yosemite were not drawn with an idea of giving mule-deer protection.

"UNNATURAL" HISTORY. [*Cont. from Page 18*]

and in the old world, that are possessed of an extremely brittle tail, which will snap into several pieces upon slight abuse. Needless to say, these pieces do not reassemble, but there is here, perhaps, the beginning of the joint snake myth.

The Mountain Lion And the Novelist

Among the mammal superstitions there are even more weird stories. One of the renowned writers on California attractions has contributed to the belief that the mountain lion preys upon man and will attack without provocation. In a perfectly serious book this man relates how he once was preparing to take a photograph in a wild canyon of the Coast Range. A mountain lion had stalked him and crawled out on the limb of an oak directly over him. With a blood-curdling scream the big cat leaped and the photographer had just time enough to turn his heavy steel tripod upside down and impale the beast upon one of its sharp legs. It will be difficult to convince many that the mountain lion, cougar, puma, or panther, by which names the cat is known, is harmless to man. Such tales as the one told are too numerous and widespread.

There is an authentic case on record of a mountain lion attacking a human being without provocation. But the animal was suffering from hydrophobia. The attack took place in 1909 in Santa Clara county, California. A Miss Kennedy and three small boys were picnicking in a much frequented spot when one of the boys was leaped upon by a lion. Miss Kennedy coming to the rescue was attacked by the animal and suffered severe lacerations from the lion's teeth and claws. When she was knocked to the ground, she attempted to stab the animal with a hat pin, but because of its tough skin she was unable to kill it. Help came, and the animal was killed only after the young lady had been seriously injured. Her wounds healed, however, and she was supposed recovered until seven weeks after her injury when she developed hydrophobia and died. The boy who had also received a scratch on the scalp suffered a similar fate. I believe there are no authentic cases of a normal lion committing an unprovoked attack on man.

Our childhood stories are replete with tales of encounters with wild cats and the Canadian lynx. Actually these animals are much smaller than the mountain lion and just as harmless.

"UNNATURAL" HISTORY

[Cont. from Page 23]

A LARGE number of Yosemite Museum visitors who examine the porcupine specimens and the card of explanation with them discover for the first time that porcupines do not "shoot their quills." This supposed propensity of the harmless "porky" has become firmly fixed in the minds of most people, and they cling to it as though changing their views might be indicative of weakness. A porcupine is the most peace loving of animals. When attacked, it seeks a crevice in which it may protect its underparts and present its heavy tail and spiny back to the foe. The needle-like spines are finely barbed and loosely attached to the animal they adorn. Should any unwary enemy attempt to seize the bristly "quill pig" his mouth is at once filled with scores of the punishing barbs. Every twitch of the tortured muscles serves but to work them deeper and nearer a vital spot. To add to the effectiveness of the weapons every harassed porcupine will thresh his tail about with vigorous thumps, which if fairly landed will put most enemies to rout with wounds which weeks later may prove fatal.

There is also a belief that porcupines curl up and roll down hill, thus spearing enough dry leaves with which to make a nest. I can conceive of no foundation whatever for this fallacy.

Probably no more firmly seated and harmless belief in a legend is to be found than that of the ground-hob and "ground-hog day." The ground-hog is the woodchuck of the East. In the West we have closely related species which we call marmots. In the autumn the woodchuck takes on great quantities of fat and in November goes to sleep in his burrow and does not awaken until February 2, "Ground-Hog Day." Then, according to popular belief, he comes to the surface and looks about. If he sees his shadow, he again retires to his burrow, and sleeps six weeks longer, which betokens a cold wintry spring.

To these could be added many more misconceptions that are popular with adults as well as with children. Just why such a wealth of fables should have become fixed in American lore is difficult to understand. What, in our racial inheritance, prompts us to cherish such misinformation? Can it be the responsibility lies with our European forebears with their love for the mysterious and unreal?

Note. - Broadcasted from KLX Oakland by U.S.N.P.S.

YOSEMITE NATURE NOTES

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Communications should be addressed to C.P.Russell, Park Naturalist, Yosemite National Park.

THE PURPOSES OF THE YOSEMITE NATURAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION

1. *To gather and disseminate information on the wild-life of the Sierras.*
2. *To aid the Yosemite Museum in telling Yosemite's story.*
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.*

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.*

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.

KEEP IN TOUCH WITH YOUR YOSEMITE.