

YOSEMITE NATURE NOTES



The Yosemite Museum

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OLD SHOOTING BLINDS

By John H. Wegner

It obviously would be difficult for the present-day visitor to Yosemite, observing the abundance of deer and other wild animals in this region, to realize that at one time, owing to an actual scarcity of game, it called for a considerable amount of ingenuity and hunters' skill to go forth and be fortunate enough to bring home some subsistence for the family larder.

Under the present codes of sportsmanship, some of the methods used in those days might be questioned. Who among us at present, however, surrounded by all modern conveniences, and served by rapid transportation from large supply centers, being charged with the duty of furnishing the table with fresh meat several generations ago, would not have taken every advantage known to accomplish it?

Picture then, the interesting thoughts and studies placed before one, when by chance he comes upon an old hunting blind in some remote section of the mountains. The knowledge of conditions, shown by the builder in the section of the site is plainly evident, for the situation of the blind shows

that careful thought was given to every detail of difficulties to be overcome.

The particular blind of which I speak may be found today, about a mile and a half back of Glacier Point, and just over the crown of the ridge overlooking the Illilouette canyon. Here we find an aerial seat, built among the branches of an old Jeffrey pine, which has a badly battered and flattened crown caused by the many heavy snows that it has supported in times past. Although the tree has never attained any mentionable height, great age can be recognized, by the heavy well-matured branches at the top, which afforded a secure foundation for a platform built of small poles. Ascension to this seat was accomplished by climbing up on a series of cross bars spiked to the trunk, forming a very serviceable ladder.

Looking about for the reason for the selection of this particular location, it is readily recognized that it is a choice feeding ground for deer as a large wild cherry thicket is almost at the base of the pine.

In his position high in the tree,

the hunter was above the ground air currents that otherwise would betray his presence to any wild thing approaching from the down wind side. He also had the advantage of an unobstructed view of all the surroundings.

All that was needed was patience in waiting for some game to an-



A relic of the days when Yosemite deer were wary. This shooting blind exists near Glacier Point and from it deer were killed for tourists tables.

swer the urge of a large and healthy appetite.

Recalling to mind a person who might know some of the history of this blind the opportunity finally presented itself to me to ask him concerning it. His answer was "You bet I know all about it. It was first built by my father and later used and kept in repair by an older brother and myself. All I

can add is that many a fine deer and an occasional bear was shot in that old cherry patch."

Still another of these blinds of far more interesting but unknown history is to be found in the south-east portion of the park not far from the headwaters of the South Fork of the Merced river.

This is undoubtedly of Indian origin as when it was first located by white men, sometime in the late sixties, "it was evident even then that it had been erected many years before. It is made of rocks. A wall has been built with a slight curve and it ends against a natural niche in the granite on the side of a small water course. This tiny valley immediately spreads itself into a beautiful little pine-studded meadow. At the time of discovery this wall had in it two or three port holes through which the shooting was done, but has since fallen into a state of ruins scarcely recognizable as a wall.

Some thirty or forty feet upstream from the blind was the attraction, a wonderful mineral spring, containing no doubt salt in some form.

Two well-known facts were shown to have been considered in the selection of this location: First, that a deer will venture into any sort of a place to satisfy its craving for salt and, second, that the wind invariably blows up hill in such a draw, very much as it would in a chimney. One can readily recognize, then, the ideal local conditions taken advantage of and there is but small doubt that many a deer has fallen at this spot to the swift but silent arrows, discharged from the heavy bows of the hidden hunters.

THE SKY BATTLE

By Enid Michael

Adjoining the zoo is a graveyard for old machines, odd implements, pipes, wire and the like. It was a bright morning and would have been warm had there not been a north wind. I was seated on the ground in the graveyard, my back against an old boiler, enjoying the heat from the old iron, which, even on this chill morning, had absorbed warmth from the sunshine. The birds that frequent Bob Selby's feeding station were working the suet lumps and scratching for hidden treasure, either in the sand, where Bob scatters crumbs, or in likely places under the bushes, where coffee berries or manzanita fruits might have fallen. Engaged in a wild game of tag, seven chipmunks scampered hither and yon over and under the debris.

Of a sudden a strange roar from the usually silent occupants of the mountain lions' cage startled me. Glancing about to discover the cause of the lions' alarm, my eyes encountered two large hawks soaring just above the tree tops. One was a huge, dark bird, and, while the other was of no mean size, beside the great, dark hawk he appeared dwarfed. From the high heavens, in graceful, swallow-like flight, dashed a pair of sparrow hawks. By darting attacks from above, they at once commenced to harry the avian kings. The broad wings of the red-tail, the lesser hawk, quickly carried him away from the tormentors.

Even an Eagle Will Turn

The other, the golden eagle, was not to be so hastily routed, and continued his dignified soaring. From moment to moment the sparrow hawks became more zealous in

their abuse, until at length the great bird lost patience and yelped with rage. Of a sudden he turned completely over and, with the same movement, righted his body; in other words, the eagle tipped suddenly upward, as if to execute a "loop the loop," but at the top of the loop he did a roll which threw him into a normal flying position. The clever maneuver brought him right about face, and face to face, though slightly above, his tormentor who was attacking from behind. With open beak and raised talons, the eagle lunged at the sparrow hawk and, for an instant, it seemed that he would grasp him in his powerful talons or strike him down. The agility of the sparrow hawk saved him, however, and lightly he rose beyond the eagle's reach. Not in the least dismayed, the sparrow hawk renewed the attack, and a second time the eagle executed that marvelous turn and, a figure of violent wrath, bore down upon the sparrow hawk. His remarkable maneuver was to no purpose; he could not grasp the airy hawk, who laughed in his face; and, panting from his prodigious exertion, he took refuge in a tall pine. Here, huddled close against the trunk, he howled with rage. After a short rest, he again took to wing.

Round Two

The sparrow hawks were waiting and launched a fresh attack. The harassed eagle let loose once more his yelps of rage, and this time sought to escape. He passed directly over me, not thirty feet away, and I could see each individual feather of his spread tail and the delicate tips of the wing quills

working as sensitive fingers. On swept the eagle over the tree tops and was soon hidden by the intervening forest; yet for some minutes his angry voice came back to me.

One remarkable feature of this episode was the unconcern of the smaller birds. With four hawks in the sky, they continued their normal activities. The jays squawked, juncos sang their winter songs, towhees scratched under the

bushes, chickadees came for suet, varied thrushes went on with their weird intercourse, and a flock of band-tailed pigeons crossed the sky. To man, all hawks are alike, suitable targets for his gun. But to the wee feathered folk a discriminating sense has come with centuries of sudden death: to them there are harmless hawks and killer hawks, and from short-tailed hawks, such as these, the birds knew well they have nothing to fear.

SIERRA CROSSBILLS

By Enid Michael

When out for our daily walk on the morning of February 7 we had a surprise; one of those pleasant



The Sierra Crossbill

surprises that come now and then and add so much in the way of interest to the study of birds. Out of the shadow of Indian canyon came a babble of strange voices, strange voices that we had not heard for years. Then swirling into view came a flock of thirty birds. In flight maneuver they swung about and settled in the top of a tall yellow pine. Soon every bird was busy at a cone. Hanging chickadee fashion, they pried open the scales to get at the nuts, and fluttering down came the seed-wings. Busy as the birds were, they managed to keep up their chatter, like a band of garrulous English sparrows. As they worked among the cones in the sunlight there came flashes of ruby color. After perhaps ten minutes of eager feeding, apparently a signal was given and the birds poured out of the tree-top like autumn leaves ripped free by a sudden gust of wind. Now they sparkled and scintillated against the bluest sky. Dancing through the air, they settled in the next tall pine to once more take up their feeding. They were Sierra crossbills (*Loxia curvirostra bendirei*), rare visitors from the high mountains, driven, perhaps, from their mountain fastness by the heavy snows of winter. The last time we were blessed in the Yosemite with a visit from the crossbills was in March, 1923.

ACORN STORING HABITS OF THE
CALIFORNIA WOODPECKER

By Enid Michael

The California woodpeckers (*Melanerpes formicivorus bairdi*) have more leisure than most birds. In the fall of the year they gather and tuck safely away a store of acorns to tide them over the winter. When the harvest days are over, they have time to play or simply to loaf in the sunshine, which they frequently do. Here in Yosemite Valley these wise and thrifty woodpeckers have more leisure than ever, now that they have adopted up-to-date storing methods. In times past, before the valley was made bigger and better by the promoters of the tourist trade, the California woodpeckers had certain "cupboard trees" where holes were drilled to receive snugly each a single acorn. To drill a hole for each individual acorn that was to be stored was a prodigious task—a task that is no longer necessary under the present storing method.

All of the buildings of the valley are either roofed with shakes or shingles. Where the shingles of shakes lap together along the edges of the roofs and at the eaves where there are crevices, the woodpeckers now do their storing. It would be difficult to store a full, round acorn in the cracks between the shingles, but the woodpeckers obviate the difficulty by hulling the acorns and poking them away a half at a time. Man moved into the valley and cut down the woodpecker's storage trees; the woodpecker retaliated by pounding acorns between the shingles of man's dwellings.

Show Their Ingenuity

That the California woodpeckers possess initiative was clearly demonstrated when, owing to the encroachment of civilization, they were forced to change their storing methods. In order to utilize the cracks between the shingles for storage bins, it was necessary either to enlarge the cracks or to hull and split acorns. It was easier to split

the acorns, and so this became the method of procedure. However, they were not bound to this procedure. They were wise enough to store to advantage under the varying conditions which the situation offered. For instance, the following example illustrates the wisdom of the California woodpecker. In one of the old buildings at the end of "Soapsuds Row" the shingles are so weathered and so curled at the eaves that the crack is wide enough to permit the storing of whole acorns. It being quicker to store whole acorns than to hull and store, the woodpeckers took advantage of the situation and stuffed the wide crack full of whole acorns. An interesting thing about this case is that birds of the same colony, and likely the same individual birds, stuffed hulled and broken acorns in the narrow cracks.

Another case where the California woodpeckers took advantage of a new situation came to our attention this fall. A line of new lighting poles was put up in the new village last spring, and in the process of weathering long, perpendicular seams opened up, as is often the case with unseasoned poles. When the acorn crop came along in the fall, the California woodpeckers living in the neighborhood took advantage of the opportunity and utilized the cracks as storing places for the winter food supply. The cracks were narrow and every acorn stored had to be cracked and hulled before being put away. The halved acorns were wedged snugly side by side, and in some cases they were stored in a double depth. In the pole that was specially examined we estimated the store to equal in amount to 500 whole acorns.

This winter (1928-29) the California woodpeckers are particularly prosperous. There was a bountiful crop of acorns, the storage bins are full and the snowfall has been sufficiently light so that the birds were not forced to draw on the food stores so early as in stormy years.

RECENT MUSEUM ACCESSIONS

(From Park Naturalists April Report)

Mrs Helen Williams of San Francisco presented a pair of felt-trimmed Alaskan Indian moccasins. This gift is available for exchange purposes.

"La Reina—Los Angeles in Three Centuries," by L. L. Hill, 1929, was donated by Ranger Charles Adair.

Mrs Virginia Darby of Murphys, Calif. has presented the following:

"Southern History—First Year of the War," by E. A. Pollard, 1862; "Southern History—Second Year of the War," by E. A. Pollard, 1864; a specimen of peacock ore from a mine at Copperopolis, Calif.; hand-made shot-pouch used by a pioneer of Calaveras county; ox shoe found on route used by early emigrants in Alpine county; "Mineral Productions, County Maps and Mining Laws of California," by L. E. Aubury, 1903; two arrow points, a spear point and two strings of Miwok beads from Calaveras county.

The Yosemite Natural History Association purchased "A Pacific Coast Vacation," by J. E. Morris, 1901.

Mrs. Maria Octavia Walkington, London, England, who is a sister of the late Mrs. J. M. Hutchings of Yosemite fame, has presented the following interesting historical articles:

"Hutchings' Tourist Guide to Yosemite Valley," by J. M. Hutchings, 1877 (two copies); papers in the matter of ownership of the Butterfly mine on the Fresno river; agreement between J. M. Hutchings, J. L. Sperry and John T. McLean, dated, letters, undated, from J. M. Hutchings to the Hon J. W. Noble, regarding Yosemite; certificate of honorary membership, J. M. Hutch-

ings, in Western Association of California Pioneers, 1890; topographical map of Yosemite valley and vicinity, by G. M. Wheeler, 1878-79, memorial of J. M. Hutchings praying a grant of lands in Yosemite valley, United States Senate, 1871; 1887 edition of "Miner's Ten Commandments," by J. M. Hutchings (first edition was in 1853); three portraits of J. M. Hutchings; a Jacobs photo of road construction in the Sierras; San Francisco Chronicle feature article on death of J. M. Hutchings, November 30, 1902; letter sheets—"Hutchings' Tables of Distances," California, 1855; "Articles in a Miner's Creed," J. M. Hutchings, 1855; "Life Among the Miners," Hutchings and Rosenfield; "Hutchings' California Scenes—the Mammoth Trees," 1854; "Der Riesenbaum der Welt—Die Mammoth Baume," Hutchings and Rosenfield; "Hutchings' California Scenes—the California Indians," Excelsior print; "Long Wharf, San Francisco," C. P. Kimball, Noisy Carriers Publishing Company; "Mr. Gringo's Experiences as a Ranchoero," Wide West Office; "Ballot Box Stuffers," Noisy Carriers Publishing Company; manuscript, "What Is Going On in Yosemite," by Emily Ann Hutchings; manuscript, "Public Lectures Given by J. M. Hutchings," by J. M. Hutchings; manuscript, "Best Guide to the Gold Mines—816 Miles," by Ira J. Willis, G. S. L. City (Great Salt Lake City), was carried by J. M. Hutchings on his journey from Jacksonville to Sacramento in 1849; published verse, memorial to Emily Ann Edmunds, widow of J. M. Hutchings; personal card, Mrs. J. M. Hutchings; Taber photo, Overhanging Rock, Glacier Point.

BOOKS FOR CALIFORNIA NATURE LOVERS

By Mabel Hibbard

In response to repeated requests regarding books to own for leisure hours of nature study at home and on vacation trips in California, we hope a few simple suggestions may be helpful.

It is not at all necessary to have many books. Rather, one should possess such books as will answer authoritatively any questions which may arise in doing field work. For detailed research work, use may be made of the public library usually near at hand.

It is best that the single copies be of convenient size to carry in a knapsack and, by the way, it adds to the life of field books to cover them with oil-cloth, and the whole library should be small enough to take up but a small space in the automobile. It thus becomes a necessary but not cumbersome part of the vacation equipment.

So much advertising of books which deal with natural history subjects is done these days, that the purchaser left to make selections, without knowing their exact scope and contents, is quite apt to have spent the sum set aside for the purpose and own a number of books well nigh useless. The flora and fauna of the Pacific Coast are so very different from those of the middle and eastern parts of the United States that the books to be helpful here must be written with the Western viewpoint.

The following list is in three sections: First, good field work books; second, books helpful in getting better acquainted with many living things encountered in general study; and third, some books which are a fine addition to the

nature library, if one has the means. These last are the most complete works in their respective fields to date.

SECTION I

Trees

Trees of California by Willis Linn Jepson; Students' Co-operative store, Berkeley. Price \$2.50. Is a working manual for the field and has 125 illustrations—lightweight.

Forest Trees of the Pacific Slope by Sudworth; pamphlet of United States Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Forestry. Price 60c. Complete for trees and shrubs. Good illustrations of each twig, leaf and seed. Accurate descriptions.

The Elfin Forest by Francis M. Fuhr; 1923, Times-Mirror Press, Los Angeles. Excellent account of the shrubs and dwarf trees composing the great, extended stands of chaparral in California. Contains 123 illustrations and fine expose of the great value of the chaparral.

Birds

Birds of the Pacific States by Ralph Hoffmann; Houghton Mifflin Company, \$5; teachers, \$4; 1927 edition. Ten colored plates, over 200 illustrations. Especially designed to serve in field identification. Convenient and valuable for purpose. Best to date for field work.

Handbook of Birds of the Western United States by Florence Merriam Bailey. Edition 1902, revised 1921; Houghton Mifflin Company. Accurate descriptions for birds in hand. Of use in checking doubtful cases. Field identification marks for most part not given, so not as valuable as Hoffmann for field work.

Birds of Western Canada by P. A. Taverner; Victoria Memorial Museum, Ottawa, Canada. Price \$1.25. Fine and worth many times the price. Most of the birds of Western Canada are also found in California, and this work is carefully designed for field identification for which it is excellent.

Flowers

A Yosemite Flora by Harvey Monroe Hall; Paul Elder & Co., San Francisco.

\$2.50. A descriptive account of the ferns and flowering plants, including trees of the Yosemite National park; with simple keys for their identification; designed to be useful throughout the Sierra Nevada mountains. Is just what it claims to be. Is for flowers of the Sierra Nevada mountains what Hoffmann's birds is in its field.

Manual of the Flowering Plants of California by Louis Lian Jepson. Price \$7.50. Students' Co-operative store, Berkeley. A more complete work than the Yosemite Flora and as such the best to date for general field work, although for field work in the Sierra Region Hall's Yosemite Flora is more convenient, simpler, and complete enough for the purpose.

Insects

Insects of Western North America by E. O. Essig. Price \$10. The MacMillan Company. Most complete, accurate and usable book for field insect identification in California.

SECTION II

Handbook of Nature Study by A. B. Comstock, \$5. Comstock Publishing Company, Ithaca, N. Y. Can be purchased at Students' Co-operative store, Berkeley. Covers the general field of nature study in an interesting manner, giving accurate and not too technical information in each subject. Its author is a widely known authority on natural history. Is itself the result of studies afield.

The American Natural History by Hornaday. Scribners. Price \$5. Fine general information upon the vertebrates of America. Good in showing the inter-relationships between the different orders and families and their distinctive characteristics.

Animal Life in Yosemite by Grinnell and Storer. University of California Press Price \$7.50. An account of mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians in a cross-section of the Sierra Nevada. Written for field identification purposes and each study given is itself field study observations. Excellent to give conception of life zones and the mammal and bird indicators of each.

Handbook of Yosemite National Park by Ansel F. Hall. Covers the whole field of the history, geology, flora and fauna, together with explanation of life zones of the Yosemite National park, but the brief accurate accounts of the subjects treated are very helpful in nature study.

Yosemite Nature Notes. Price \$2 per

year. The Yosemite Notes is the official organ of the Yosemite National History Association. Two dollars entitles to membership and the receipt of the monthly magazine. This little publication, only four years before the public, has attracted favorable notice for its excellent notes by trained naturalists. It is impossible to find such studies of western subjects elsewhere.

SECTION III

The books listed in this section are not necessary as a part of the field library, but are given for those with the desire and the means to possess as a part of a personal library, the finest books yet written in their particular fields.

The following are distinctive:

Butterflies of California by John Adams Comstock; Comstock Publishing Company; \$12.50. 501 Edwards & Wiley Bldg., L. A. "Popular guide to the butterflies of California. Includes all the 477 species and varieties at present recorded in the State, with sixty-three full page color plates showing all the species known to inhabit the State, and the majority of those occurring in the Southwest, together with half-tone and line illustrations depicting the life histories of Western butterflies." Excellent in field identification because besides the description of the adult butterflies, there are accurate descriptions of the egg, larvae, and pupal stages, together with illustrations of each carefully drawn. This has been carefully done by no other author for Western butterflies.

Illustrated Flora of the Pacific States by Leroy Abrams, Ph.D., three volumes; Stanford University Press; \$10 volume. Only the first volume, Ferns to Birthworts, has yet been published, but the work is thorough and carefully illustrated. When completed, will be the best to date in this field.

The Birds of California by William Leon Dawson. A complete scientific account and popular account of the 580 species and subspecies of birds found in the State, illustrated by thirty photo-gravures, 120 full-page cutouts plates, and more than 1100 full page color plates, chiefly by Major Allan Brooks. Sold only by subscription by South Moulton Company, Santa Barbara. A more ideal work from every standpoint scientific and artistic is not to be conceived. The price is, however, almost prohibitive to many.



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Dan Anderson