

YOSEMITE NATURE NOTES



The Yosemite Museum

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AN OLD NATURE TRAIL IS FOUND NEAR WAWONA

By J. N. Morris, Ranger

Much interest is being shown in the new nature trails of Yosemite National Park, but few people realize that what is possibly the first nature trail in the United States that we have any record of was established in this park more than 25 years ago.

I had noted in the 1929 Yosemite Ranger Naturalist Manual, part 11, page 19, and in the report of the acting superintendent of the Yosemite National Park for 1904, that an arboretum and the beginning of a museum and library had been made at Camp A. E. Wood, near Wawona, by Major John Bigelow, the park superintendent, in 1904.

Superintendent Bigelow reports that "the first and present officer in charge of the arboretum in First Lieutenant and Assistant Surgeon Henry F. Pipes, the surgeon of my command, a young officer of no particular training as a botanist, but interested in his work, and doing it in the most efficient and satisfactory manner.

"The arboretum covers 75 to 100 acres of hilly timbered land, and has one main trail and several branch trails crossing it. Thirty-six trees and plants have already been labeled, 20 more have been identified and will be labeled soon, and plans have been made to transplant and plant many of the more familiar trees and plants of the park that are not already found there. The labels and signs are of one-inch plank, double coated on all sides with light-brown paint, and bearing names (English and Latin) in letters of dark brown. The labels are nailed to trees, the heads of the nails being well driven in and put-tied over to prevent staining with rust. Small metal tags are used for flowers. Comfortable seats have been built, more paths opened up, deadwood and debris have been removed, and the arboretum brought to a condition in which it may be considered as worthy and susceptible of development into a prominent feature of the park."

At the time of reading, this information made little impression on my mind, as I supposed that all traces of Major Bigelow's work had disappeared.

The afternoon of November 2, 1929, while strolling from Wawona down the South Fork of the Merced, enjoying the beautiful autumnal coloring of the trees of the mountain sides, I arrived at the Wawona fish hatchery. Crossing the creek which runs by the hatchery I noticed a sign nailed to a tree on the bank lettered "Big Creek." Noticing a well-beaten trail leading on down the river, I walked on, not knowing what I might find, but in a very expectant mood. Soon I saw a large yellow pine beside the trail with a sign on it giving the English name of the tree, with the Latin below, "Yellow Pine," "pinus ponderosa." Hurrying on down the trail, I found some 20 trees carefully labeled in the same manner. One of the signs was so weathered that it was hardly readable, but most of them were in excellent condition, considering the fact that they had been lying exposed to the elements for over 25 years.

At first I was at a loss to know who had so carefully constructed this charming nature trail with its neatly signed trees. I first thought of Galen Clark, the venerable old custodian of the Yosemite Valley, whom I had known when I was very young. He had formerly owned the hotel at Wawona, and as he was a great lover of nature, I thought that he might have signed this trail for the enlightenment of his guests. Then I noticed that the trail led to a point opposite the present Camp Hoyle formerly Camp A. E. Wood, the former site of the park superintendent's office in the early days, when the park was administered by federal troops. Realizing that this must be the arboretum of Major Bigelow's report, I inquired of Fred Slaughterter and A. C. Washburn, old residents of Wawona, who verified my supposition and related how Major Bigelow and his officers lived on the west bank of the Merced, while the soldiers camped on the eastern bank, and how the superintendent saw to the construction of the trail in the year 1904.

A BAT BANQUET

By Ranger J. B. Herschler

Twilight was quietly settling in the Big Trees of the Mariposa Grove of Yosemite on an early August evening. I was passing through the upper end of the public camp ground and but a short distance from the Fallen Monarch when I noticed a congregation of some 12 or 15 bats, hovering and flying near an opening which had been burned many years ago in the base of a large sugar pine.

From the outside, this opening appears as though it might extend quite some distance up into the tree. My first thought was that the bats were using it as a roosting place and were just coming out for their nightly flight. Yet at the same time I wondered why I had not seen them on previous evenings for many times had I passed that way while making the round through the camp grounds to sign

up the visitors who were staying for the night.

For some time I stood watching them passing to and fro but at no time did I see a single individual enter the opening. I wondered still more why they would fly near the entrance, hover, then dart away. Evidently the drawing attraction was strong for at times so many bats would fly to the opening at once that one could hear the brushing of their wings together. The darkness, however, kept me from determining the reason.

After standing very still for some time I decided to get nearer and see if my actions disturbed them but apparently they were too busy to be bothered by the intrusion of man. Something else was far more interesting. Slowly I advanced toward the tree, and noticing no difference in their manner or actions I at last leaned against the tree with my face just a few inches from the opening and at about the same spot where they seemed to be fluttering most closely together. Still they were not disturbed. They would fly to within two or three inches of my face, hover a moment then dart away, returning again to repeat their actions and antics. Having a flashlight, I examined the ground inside the tree to see if droppings were present or other tell-tale evidence of a roosting place, but found none. Turning the light upward into the tree I noticed holes eaten into the wood by in-

sects and in a moment saw large-winged ants emerging from a narrow crack—so very small it was hard for them to gain their freedom. After watching their struggles for some time I made the opening larger with my pocket knife then watched them come out in hords.

This seemed to be the answer for the action of the bats. They were feeding on the ants. An ant would emerge from the hole and I would follow it with the flashlight beam. By the time it had passed outside of the tree a bat would dart in to get it and another bat in trying to get the same ant would brush wings with the first. By holding the light at the lower part of the opening with the ray shooting upwards, the ants could be seen to emerge in small groups and sally forth into the air. Their freedom was short-lived as few of them got more than a foot or two away from the entrance before they were captured. For some minutes I watched, then continued on my evening rounds.

It was possibly ten minutes later when I returned over this same route but the bats had disappeared and also the ants had stopped their evening flight. A few were still crawling around the opening or only protruding their heads from the inside but they did not come entirely out. This, no doubt, explains why the bats had gone on to new territory.

A Snowstorm in Yosemite

By Assistant Park-Naturalist H. E. Perry

Because of the valley's unusual formation, a snow fall in Yosemite is exceedingly attractive and many visitors to the park plan their vaca-

tions so as to include Yosemite in winter.

As a harbinger of the approaching storm, the higher points around

the rim become misty and indistinct. Gradually the clouds close down around the sides of the valley until, with the coming of the first lazy flakes, the walls recede from view and one finds himself in a new Yosemite, where the granite cliffs have no part to play.

As the storm gathers momentum, the ground begins to whiten if not previously covered with snow and before long familiar landmarks commence to assume softer and more beautiful shapes. The boughs of the incense cedars gather a bountiful supply of the flakes and soon they droop wearily with their heavy load. The great bare oaks from their trunks to their tiniest twigs emerge from the storm as though bedecked with cotton and the alders become masterpieces of art, for their array of fine branchlets give rise to the most delicate tracery imaginable.

Perhaps the most attractive phase of a snow storm in Yosemite occurs when the storm is over and the clouds begin to disperse. An endless variety of fascinating effects is produced when the clouds play "hide-and-seek" with the encircling walls of the valley. Great curtains of mist mask out entire sections of the side walls, only to break quickly in numerous places and expose interesting designs in snow-covered granite. Delightful changes follow each other rapidly in the region of Half Dome as restless billows pile up in the background or as filmy wisps drape themselves across the mountain's face.

Finally when all the clouds have rolled beyond the horizon, and the sun again holds sway in dazzling splendor, one is aware that the old familiar Yosemite has been trans-

formed into a land of mystery, a veritable fairyland of ice and snow.

During the progress of a storm, most of the birds and animals remain in secluded shelters. However an occasional blue-fronted jay may be seen speeding from tree to tree and hopping among the branches as he tirelessly pursues his work of either concealing food or hunting some which has been previously stored away. Small bands of mule deer venture into the storm once in a while and wander hopefully among the houses of the permanent residents of the park in quest of food from the kitchens, for some of them have found in so doing an easier means of livelihood than can be obtained by scraping away the snow from their natural foods. The bears of the valley are undisturbed by the fury of these winter storms, for they are sleeping peacefully in their snug dens. Under ordinary conditions, no pangs of hunger drive them out inasmuch as their endless craving for food last fall resulted in an accumulation of fat sufficient for their needs until spring.

When the storm is over and the ground is completely covered with snow even in the deepest woods, much pleasure may be had by the outdoor enthusiast in following the trails of animals, both large and small, as they again go forth on their own little highways. Each kind of animal writes his story of adventure in the snow wherever he goes. For the person who has the time, the inclination and an ability to interpret that which he observes, every fresh fall of snow in Yosemite offers an opportunity for a type of nature study which is unusually fascinating.

WESTERN BLUEBIRDS

By Enid Michael

For ten years we have been taking daily bird walks in the Yosemite Valley. At the end of each month a bird report is turned in at the Yosemite Museum. On these bird walks we try each day to add a new name to the monthly list. The new bird for the day of October 10, 1929, was recorded when we noted a flock of 12 Western bluebirds flying high over the meadow. The birds had the flock formation and the general appearance of bluebirds, but bluebirds usually chatter when on the wing and these birds were strangely silent. Seeing the flock drop into the crown of an oak tree not far away we followed the birds across the meadow and made sure of their identity.

Western bluebirds are winter visitors to Yosemite valley and they arrive here about the time the cedar mistletoe berries are beginning to ripen. In other words, our records show that over a period of 10 years the average date of arrival of the western blue birds is October 18. The earliest date of arrival was October 4, 1924, and the latest date of arrival was October 25, 1927. The abundance or lack of abundance of their favorite food seems to determine the number of bluebirds that shall winter in the valley. In normal years several flocks are present, and while here the birds feed extensively on mistletoe berries.

There are occasional years when the mistletoes almost completely fail to bear fruit. This was the case during the winter of 1928, when the berry-bearing bunches of mistletoe were few and far between. However, a flock of western bluebirds did come into the valley. When the

meager crop of berries became exhausted, the bluebirds began to feed on the open ground in the meadows. And not only did they feed on the open ground on the frozen snow fields on the south side of the valley, they actually hopped about picking up cold-storage insects in the manner of the rosy finches above timberline.

When mistletoe berries are abundant the western bluebirds keep to the oaks. They are restless, however, and their day's wanderings take them from one end of the valley to the other, but always their trail leads through the oaks. At times they leave the Kellogg oak groves of the valley floor to climb the talus slopes and feed among the *Chrysolepis* oaks, where mistletoe is also abundant. The Townsend solitaire is also very fond of mistletoe berries, but these birds are not given to wandering. They pre-empt a bit of territory on an oak-covered slope and if food is plentiful there they will spend their winter days. In such a district their diet may be augmented by a certain amount of dry manzanita berries.

Occasionally the wandering bluebirds will encroach upon territory which a solitaire claims as his very own, and then there is a battle for possession. The lone solitaire says mean things in a mean voice and darts at first one bluebird and then at another. The one against the many always wins out in the end, perhaps, not so much on account of his warlike demonstrations but because of the wandering habits of the invaders. The bluebirds cannot be held to a long-drawn-out battle.

for they must be on their way to new fields of adventure.

And speaking of bluebirds and mistletoes, there is a close relationship between them which works to their mutual benefit. The mistletoe feeds the bluebirds and tides them over the lean winter months. The bluebirds in turn help the mistletoes to increase their territory. The pulpy mistletoe berry contains a hard seed which is coated with a mucilaginous substance. The bluebird swallows the berry whole, the pulpy part of the fruit is digested, the seed, with its sticky coating, is voided. The seed sticks wherever it happens to fall, and as the bluebirds move about from tree to tree the voided seeds are likely to fall on fertile soil—that is to say, they fall and adhere to some thin-barked oak tree, the seed germinates, the roots bore in and take hold and eventually there is a flourishing mistletoe which will fruit and re-

pay the agent of dissemination.

The mistletoe is a parasite. It lives on the life blood of its host. From man's point of view this is very bad for, like God, man, too, holds jealously to what he considers his prerogative. To the bluebird, however, the parasitic activities of the mistletoe are quite all right. What if it does sap the juices of the oak? In the eyes of the bluebird the oak is only important in its function as host to the mistletoe. The mistletoe fruit is to the liking of the bluebird, while the oak only bears acorns, for which fruit the bluebird has no taste. The host branch to which the mistletoe has become attached finally dies for lack of nourishment and, of course, the parasite, faithful to the last, must also die. But what matters this to the bluebird? Is he not continually sowing so that he may reap? A fresh crop of mistletoe is ever on the way.

EAGLES AT GLACIER POINT

By R. P. Hays, Ranger

From the Glacier Point Hotel porch and from the government lookout house, it has not been an uncommon thing to observe eagles soaring down in the canyon below and towards Panorama Cliff trail through the summer season of 1929. At times these great kings of the air, which are of the golden eagle species, could be seen from a very close range. On several occasions while climbing Sentinel Dome on my daily fire patrol I came upon the pair in the act of forging. A great many times these birds have been seen from the hotel porch, flying high in the air covering the vast expanses of the side walls of the Illioullette canyon in search of

their prey. Twice I was able to watch them at very close range.

One of these times I happened to have a good pair of binoculars along, and as I watched the birds through the glasses searching over the north flank of Sentinel Dome, I could make out distinctly every move of the head and tail feathers. The wings were set, and with the exception of bending slightly at the tip to aid the bird in skimming low over the rocky wall, there were no wing beats for considerably long intervals. I did not see them strike any place as they were very likely frightened from a closer search over the mountain wall by my presence.

Another time I watched an eagle trying to get a very small fawn while the mother was doing her best to ward off the foe. The rapid movements of a doe down below Glacier Point on the ledge was first noticed by Miss Margery Pittman and several guests at the hotel, who soon discovered a golden eagle soaring close to the granite wall. Their eyes were suddenly attracted to a spotted fawn by the frantic parent. They watched the doe work up along a ledge of rock and finally hide her young under a large slab of granite which was leaning against the wall. Here the doe stood guard when my attention was directed toward her, and the eagle was seen perched on a rock about twenty feet above. Occasionally the mother deer would be seen coming out from under the rock shelter and running back and forth through the brush, but all the time keeping very near the slab of rock which protected her fawn. After some watching and trying to get a good opportunity to strike but failing, the eagle finally gave up the effort and sailed off the rock where it had perched and disappeared around the slope toward Vernal Falls. Miss Pittman and the other people watching declared they heard very distinctly the startled cry of the doe or the screaming of the giant bird which attracted their attention.

Some time later Mr. Oneal, while on duty at the lookout, with the government binoculars was able to see three golden eagles through the

glasses at one time, just above Panorama Cliff, and it was only a few days later that Mr. Nichols and I watched four eagles in the air at one time. We were able to make out two young with their juvenile plumage and the two parent birds with their shining golden patches of feathers on the upper surface of their wings, shoulders and head.

Later the same day guests at the hotel were able to watch these two young birds on one of their initial practice flights being encouraged by their parents, who were constantly calling out in eagle language. On the heads and in the middle of the wings were patches of white downy feathers, showing that the young birds' plumage was not quite ready for long flights. These young birds could be seen lighting first on one dead pine top and then on another. Once Mr. Nichols was able to watch one young bird through the glasses, while perched on a dead tree, for some time.

There have been golden eagles observed in this vicinity each summer for several years and these eagles have certainly selected a good nesting site for they have reared their young successfully here for some time

It would be very interesting to know just where these birds spend the winter and how many years they have been coming back to the canyon below Glacier Point, their domain as true lords of the upper air.

RECENT MUSEUM ACCESSIONS

A valuable framed engraving, "San Francisco in 1849," drawn on the spot by Henry Firks, was presented by Mrs. Charles Mortimer

French of Merced. This found an immediate place in our history room. It was brought to the museum by Ranger "Billy" Nelson.

The Yosemite Park and Curry Company, through Mr. Black's office, presented eight Yosemite photographs made in 1870. They are: "Cathedral Spires," "Mirror Lake," "Cathedral Rocks," "Washington Column," "Three Brothers," and three views of Half Dome.

They are 16x22 inches and in fine condition.

Mrs. M. O. Walkington of London, England, a relative of J. M. Hutchings family, added ten items formerly belonging to Mr Hutchings to her previous gifts of early Yosemite and California history material:

Marshall's Gold Discovery, a lecture by John S. Hittell, January 24, 1895.

Hutchings' California Magazine for February, 1857

Ceremony of Unveiling of the Lick Bronze Statuary, San Francisco, November 29, 1894.

Three biennial reports of commissioners to manage Yosemite Valley, 1874-75, 1879, 1880.

Map of portion of Sierra Nevada adjacent to Yosemite and Hetch Hetchy by J. N. Le Conte, 1893.

Yosemite Souvenir and Guide by D. J. Foley, 1901.

Tourists' Guide by Hutchings, 1877.

In the Matter of Investigation of the Yosemite Valley Commissioners, 1889.

Map of Baja California by G. Eisen and F. H. Vasilin.

Cecilia Crocker Thompson presented a pair of gold scales which belonged to Thomas H. Beals, who came from Boston to Tuolumne County, California, 1856, and mined around Crocker Station.

A framed photograph of Albert B. Fall and Stephen T. Mather taken at Glacier Point, August 9, 1921, was presented to the museum by Horace Albright.

Mr. Albright also presented the American flag used in ceremony at the dedication of the Tioga road and a cartoon of the ceremony.

"Denizens of the Mountains" by Edmund C. Jaeger was presented by the Yosemite Natural History Association.

Stephen T. Mather presented two early photographs taken by C. R. Savage of Salt Lake—one of Vernal Falls and one of the Grizzly Giant

A Colt's 36-caliber cap and ball revolver was given by Maj. Crittenden Van Wyck.

The Yosemite Park and Curry Company presented a photograph of old Lucy and Lena Wilson, the latter of whom is a present valley Indian.

Two paintings, one "Morning in Yosemite Valley," and the other the "Three Brothers," were given by Ranger E. L. Smith.

From the Biological Survey we received two books—"Educational Bird Leaflets" and "Field, Forest and Stream."

A powder horn from Mariposa was received.

W. B. Campbell made available five obsidian knives found by George Joffery under the roots of an old oak near Bridal Veil falls.

Mrs. Mary Branstion presented us with two one-foot strings of Russian trade beads found in an Indian grave near El Portal in 1892.

A Modoc basket and cover was loaned to us by Mrs. Wilbur Clark

A Thomas Hill painting of "Nevada Falls" was presented to us by Stephen T. Mather.

Ox shoes used in the early days at Bodie were the gift of Theodore J. Hoover.

Herbert Maier gave two Underwood photos of Roosevelt and Muir in Yosemite.

George Warren presented a soapstone bowl dug up at Clark Bridge in Yosemite valley.

A book, "American Pictures," by Samuel Manning, was given by the Yosemite Natural History Association.

Ten volumes of Harper's Magazine were presented by Mrs. Helen Rowan.

Mrs. Emily N. Loew presented a manzanita vase that was bought in Yosemite valley in 1882

Three books—"Deric in Mesa Verde," by Deric Nusbaum; "Deric With the Indians," also by Deric Nusbaum, and "Zuni Indian Tales," by Aileen Nusbaum, were gifts from Mrs. Aileen Nusbaum.

The record of tolls collected at Elwell ranch in 1878-1883, Big Oak Flat Road, was presented by Mrs. J. E. Traxler. She also gave us a map of public surveys in California and Nevada in 1866.



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Dan Anderson