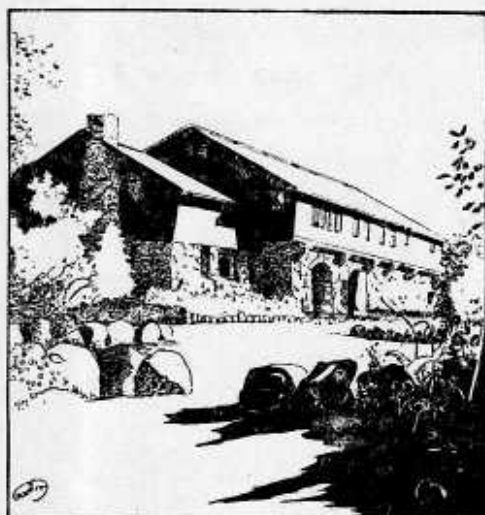


YOSEMITE NATURE NOTES



The Yosemite Museum

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YOSEMITE NATURE NOTES

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THE LIFE OF ALBERT BIERSTADT

By **MRS. H. J. TAYLOR**

Librarian Yosemite National Park

The Yosemite Museum considers itself fortunate in possessing works of many of the early artists of this vicinity. The pencil drawings of Thomas Ayres, made while he was in the valley in 1855-6, gave to the world the first glimpse of the valley's grandeur. Practically all of those exquisite drawings are in this museum. Many other early artists are represented here. The object of this sketch is the author of our recent gift, "Looking Up Yosemite Valley" by Albert Bierstadt, presented to the museum by the Charlotte Bowditch estate through Sophie Baylor.

Albert Bierstadt (1830-1902) was born in Dusseldorf, Germany. He came to America as a babe. As a young man he studied art in Dusseldorf for four years and in Rome for a year. He returned to America in 1857. The following year he took a trip overland by wagon. He made sketches and laid the foundation for a score of large canvases. In

his time Bierstadt ranked as "... one of the foremost landscape painters in this country." (Cur. Lit. Vol. 32 p. 394). He was a pioneer in portraying the lofty grandeur of the Rockies and the Sierra. His pictures became famous. His canvases attracted international attention. On one of his western trips "... Idaho Springs (Colorado) was visited in 1863 by Albert Bierstadt, the greatest American landscape painter. (He made many sketches) ... Mr. Bierstadt soon went home to New York and in a little over two years had finished his great pictures of "A Storm in the Rocky Mountains, ... in the winter of 1855-6 the picture was placed on exhibition in New York ... and the proceeds from admission were donated to the relief of destitute soldiers' orphans. It attracted great attention and endless criticism. Its only rival in public estimation was Church's "Heart of the Andes," then in a private gal-

lery in New York. . . . Soon after the picture ("A Storm in the Rocky Mountains") went to Paris to a world's exposition, where it was almost immediately sold for \$20,000. Mr. Bierstadt had recently completed another great picture "The Last Buffalo." (Mag. of W. History Vol. II P. 237).

Near Lady Franklin Rock is Register Rock. In the early days tolls were collected here from all tourists taking the trail to Glacier Point. ". . . . There is one entry upon a sloping side of rock that is perhaps worthy of notice, as it reads, 'Camped here August 21, 1863, A. Bierstadt, Virgil Williams, E. W. Perry, Fitzhugh Ludlow.' It was during this visit to the valley that Mr. Bierstadt made the sketch from which his famous picture 'The Domes of the Yosemite' was afterwards painted.' ("Heart of the Sierra" by J. M. Hutchings, p. 441).

Albert Bierstadt received honors both at home and abroad. Austria, Bavaria, Belgium, and Germany awarded him medals. In 1860 he became a member of the National Academy. In 1867 he was decorated with the Cross of the Legion of Honor. Among the canvases of Albert Bierstadt are the following, with their time and location:

1861—Laramie Peak (In Buffalo Academy of Fine Arts).

1863—Lander's Peak (In London).

1864—North Fork Platte River (Bought by Judge Henry Hilton, New York).

1864—Looking Up Yosemite Valley (Given to Yosemite Museum by Charlotte Bowditch Estate).

1866—El Capitan and Merced River (Bought by Lucien Tuckerman).

1866—Valley of Yosemite (In New York Library); The Burning Ship (Bought by August Belmont).

1875—Valley of Kern River

(Hermitage, St. Petersburg, Russia).

1877—Estes Park (Earl of Devonshire).

1877—Domes of Yosemite.

1878—Mountain Lake (Corcoran Art Gallery, Washington, D. C.).

For the Capitol at Washington, Bierstadt painted "Discovery of Hudson River" and "Settlement of California."



Albert Bierstadt

About the time of Bierstadt's death in 1902, the tendency in landscape art was toward the small, quiet, more intimate canvases. As a pioneer of magnificent scenery on large canvases, Albert Bierstadt stands secure.

"Looking Up Yosemite Valley" hangs in the foyer of the Yosemite Museum. Annually thousands of tourists enjoy this picture. The museum is proud to possess a canvas by Bierstadt and is ever grateful to its donor.

Pentstemon, Hawkweed, Stonecrop, Gilia Thrive on High Perch

By C. E. GRAVES

YOSEMITE, Aug. 16.—One does not ordinarily think of climbing Half Dome to see a wild flower garden. The trip is commonly considered a stunt, with the thrill of scaling the steep, solid granite walls by means of a hand cable as the main motive. On August 5, such a trip was made. After a delightful climb through the Jeffrey pine forest on the lower slopes, lunch was eaten on the "quarter dome," where magnificent views of the ranges to the east and north were enjoyed. After lunch the climb was made to the top of Half Dome. Expecting merely to find bare granite rock and more distant views, I was pleasantly disappointed to discover that the entire top of the dome, covering an area of about 13 acres, is composed of disintegrating granite that has filled up the cracks with excellent soil for alpine plants.

The pentstemon menziesii (Pride of the Mountains) is the most showy of these plants. At this season of the year only a few of them were still in blossom, but enough to splash the rocks with rosy red in many places. A yellow hawkweed (*Hieraceum horridum*) about 7 or 8 inches high, was fairly common and the mouse-tail (*Stellaropsis santolinoides*), though its delicate white flowers are not especially showy, adds interest with its peculiar worm-like leaves in a basal rosette. Other plants were the Yo-

osemite stone-crop (*Sedum yosemitense*), the prickly gilia (*Gilia pungens*), so closely resembling the alpine phlox; the yarrow or milfoil (*Achillea millefolium*) and quantities of small sedge. By far the most interesting part of the floral display was provided by several species of eriogonum, a member of the wild buckwheat family. *Eriogonum lobbil*, sometimes called butterballs, is particularly showy with its delicate rosy flower clusters and white, wooly leaves. A dwarf form of "ovalifolium" presents thick cushion-like clusters of white wooly leaves and short yellow flowers. Other species were the common "nudum" and the "wrightii" and "marifolium," the latter two in delicate dwarf forms. The ocean spray (*Holodiscus discolor*) was very abundant, but the whitish flower clusters were mostly faded. Dwarf specimens of lodge-pole, Jeffrey and white-barked pine were also found, fighting for their lives in the narrow soil pockets. Though the profusion of color is not so great as in the well-watered alpine meadows yet the very restraint of these rocky flower gardens in their inhospitable surroundings gives them a beauty that can hardly be surpassed elsewhere. For the genuine flower lover, they very nearly steal the show from the glorious vistas of the distant peaks.



An Apple Tree Apartment House

By **B. A. THAXTER**

While it is a common occurrence in certain places to see many birds nesting together in large community groups, here in the Yosemite valley one finds only the swifts and the swallows and occasionally the kingfishers nesting in close proximity to others of the same species.

Among birds like the thrushes and sparrows, this community nesting is not found. Two pairs of the same species almost never nest in the same bush or the same tree. A pair of birds may select a nesting site and then proclaim to all the feathered world, "This is the place we have chosen for a home. Let all trespassers beware!" and then they will proceed to drive away any others of their kind that are rash enough to come upon their staked out claim.

Such is not always the case, however, among birds of different species. A notable example of this was seen in mid July by the field school of natural history as they were taking a bird walk through lower Sentinel Meadows. In an old apple tree

was first discovered a robin's nest on a limb about seven feet from the ground. This contained three eggs. On another branch about ten feet above the robin's home, there was the nest of a Western chipping sparrow with four newly hatched young. The old bird was so reluctant to leave that she had almost to be lifted from the nest before she took flight.

About fifteen feet from the chipping sparrow's nest, on the other side of the tree, was the nest of a black-headed grosbeak whose brood had evidently just gone.

These three families, we hope, got along peaceably in their apartment house. Such a find in one medium sized apple tree was quite unusual.

On the same trip another chipping sparrow's nest was found, containing four young. This one is worth chronicling because it was placed in a bunch of sneezeweed, only six inches from the ground. It is most unusual to find a nest of this bird placed so low down, but in bird life, as in human life, one is continually meeting with the unexpected.

Notelets

Dragonflies are numerous about the meadows.

Fish planted in the Park this year totaled 1,141,800.

Near Wawona Road a Sharp-shinned Hawk was seen in flight, carrying a dead flicker.

Grasshoppers are quite plentiful about the Valley.

The Bears are showing up in goodly numbers every night at the Bear Pits, fat, slick, and saucy.

Most of the Mule Deer bucks have rubbed the velvet from their horns during the past two weeks. With the does and fawns they are feeding in the meadows.



AFIELD WITH RANGER NATURALISTS

SIERRA MARMOT AGAIN

INCREASING IN NUMBERS

By Ranger-Naturalist Paul J. White

The Sierra marmot, often called woodchuck and ground hog, again seems to be increasing in numbers after a period of years during which few were seen. The 11 members of the High Sierra hiking party which I conducted through the six hikers' camps during the first week in July, noted 14 marmots.

Dr. Harold C. Bryant's articles in Yosemite Nature Notes for October, 1929, mentioned the practical disappearance in Yosemite of this very interesting mammal, and suggested that the condition was perhaps due to the cycles of scarcity and abundance known for almost all rodents.

While only six were reported as seen by our guides all last summer, this year at least that many were seen on the rock slide at Glen Aulin High Sierra camp at one time by my party. The members of the party found them rather tame and approached to within a few feet in order better to observe them.

When not moving about deliberately on its short legs, the marmot spent much of its time sprawled out on a flat rock in the sunshine near its burrow. When startled, it would come to attention by gathering its legs beneath, ready to move off quickly. At times it would stand erect on its hind legs in the manner of the Belding ground squirrel, the "picket pin" so often seen in Tuolumne Meadows. Its general coloration is yellowish brown with a dull yellow chest. The white cross band over the nose and beneath the eyes gives the animal a

SUNRISE AT COLUMBIA POINT

By Ranger-Naturalist C. C. Presnell

The narrow vault of sky above was warm and glowing. The canyon was still cold and gloomy. The zig-zag trail, coiling itself around huge boulders, would have seemed cool to man and beast were it not for the violent exertion of ascending the steep canyon side. Overheated bodies, laboring in the chill atmosphere, produced an aura of vapor that softened the uncouth appearance of the heavily burdened pack mules. The shuffling of hoofs on the sandy trail and the creak of saddles and packs accentuated a hush prophetic of sunrise.

Suddenly, like a trout leaping from a dark pool, the pack train moved up from shadow to sunlight. The vaquero in the lead shaded his eyes against the glare of the sun, already well above the horizon. The mules shook themselves and groaned with relief when permitted to stop, then stood drowsing in the unexpected warmth while their master gazed in wonder at what he had often seen before: an array of sun-bathed peaks forming a golden setting for the shaded green gem which is called Yosemite.

rather comical appearance.

The food of the marmot consists of green vegetation, which it eats in large quantities during the summer season, getting ready for its winter hibernation.

The park superintendent has seen nine marmots on his various trail trips, and rangers are each reporting several.

It is to be hoped that this year marks the beginning of a cycle of abundance for this interesting and harmless rodent.

Yosemite Bird Report for July, 1930

By Ranger-Naturalist Enid Michael

The month of July in Yosemite Valley was quite rainless and the great majority of the days were entirely cloudless. The days were hot and the nights balmy. The unbroken stretch of summer days was probably favorable to most nesting birds, albeit during the heat of the day parent birds often perched panting on the rim of the nest to shade their hot nestlings. On the other hand, the hot weather was apparently favorable to insect life and as a result there was an abundance of food and parent birds had never far to forage. There were days when the sandpiper with her nest out on the hot sands had to turn her eggs frequently to keep them from scorching.

Fifty-six species of birds were noted by Mr Michael and I during the month, which number brought our July average for the last 10 years up to 53.5. Of the 56 species noted only the redbreasted sapsucker and the Western gnatcatcher were unexpected birds on the July list. The sapsucker was never before seen on the floor of the valley during July and the gnatcatcher was only once before noted during July.

Ornithologically the outstanding feature of the month was the nesting of a pair of Gambel white-crowned sparrows in Yosemite Valley. Hudsonian white-crowns have been known to nest in the Yosemite Valley, but so far as is known the Gambel sparrow has never before been reported as nesting here. The family of young sharp-shinned hawks was also interesting as was the nest of the Western gnatcatcher.

The moving of a number of our valley deer to the Tuolumne watershed that took place last spring has given the flowering plants a much needed chance to blossom forth. In spite of the drouth, gardens of wild flowers are making a brave show in many sections of the valley. In spite of the fact that many deer are still present on the floor of the valley, one may see

in the early evening the fair blossoms of the evening primrose. But one must go early in the evening to see these flowers as before morning every blossom will be snipped off by wandering deer. To realize what over-grazing will do to the flowering plants of the valley, one has but to wander along the Ahwahnee fence and compare the wild meadow inside of the fence. Move more deer and the flower gardens may come once more to the valley floor.

JULY BIRD REPORT

Great Blue Heron—A lone bird noted July 22 and 23.

Spotted Sandpiper—Perhaps four nesting pairs along the mile and a half of river between the Swinging bridge and the Stoneman bridge.

Band-Tailed P'geon—A few pairs present throughout the month. Nest discovered July 19 and it was a surprise to find the male bird incubating the lone egg.

Sharp-Shinned Hawk—A pair nested and reared a family in the pine wood near the mouth of Yosemite Creek. The family group of four young birds and two parents was seen July 25 and 26.

Sparrow Hawk—Three nesting pairs. Young still in one of the nests on the last day of the month.

Horned Owl—A lone bird noted July 8.

Pigmy Owl—On July 3 a young Pigmy was seen being mobbed by the small birds of the neighborhood, and on the following day this same young owl, or another, was noted.

Belted Kingfisher—The young are abroad and consequently kingfishers are common along placid stretches of the river.

Hairy Woodpecker—Present daily. Family groups or lone birds are to be found in all the cottonwood groves.

Willow Woodpecker—No doubt present daily, but there were days when we failed to note a single bird.

White Headed Woodpecker—Rarely noted after the first week of the month. Family groups probably went to the higher mountains for a vacation.

Red-Breasted Sapsucker—A handsome male noted July 21.

Pileated Woodpecker—A lone bird noted July 13.

California Woodpecker—Common in all the Kellogg Oak groves. Young birds still in the nest on the last day of the month.

Red-Shafted Flicker—Present daily. Family groups frequently noted during the last half of the month.

Black Swift—Rare. Noted on three occasions. On July 21 a flock of 12 was seen.

White-Throated Swift—Common the first week of the month and present daily until July 20 when they were last noted.

Anna Hummingbird—A lone male noted on three occasions.

Calliope Hummingbird—Rare this month. Individuals occasionally noted.

Black Phoebe—First noted July 16. A lone bird noted on three occasions thereafter.

Wood Pewee—Common birds found in all sections of the Valley. On July 30 the young birds were seen leaving the last occupied nest that we had under observation.

Trail Flycatcher—Not numerous. Of the four nests under observation the young deserted the last nest July 30.

Western Flycatcher—Six birds noted along Tenaya Creek between Mirror Lake and the Merced river on July 4.

Blue-Fronted Jay—Considering all sections of the Valley the jay was the most common bird of the month.

Red-Winged Blackbird—Family groups present in the Sentinel meadow until July 30, but on the next day we failed to see a single bird.

Brewer Blackbird—In point of numbers the most common bird of the month. Our nesting birds probably moved on into the higher mountain meadows, but an up-mountain movement brought flocks

from the lower country to take their places.

Evening Grosbeak—Present throughout the month. During the last ten days of the month small flocks came each morning to feed on the ripening coffee berries at the mouth of Indian Canyon.

California Purple Finch—Not numerous, but scattered pairs always to be found in the district just below the old village.

Green-Backed Goldfinch—Occasionally noted during the month and on each occasion there were always three birds in the company.

White-Crowned Sparrow—On July 9 a nesting pair of White-crowns was discovered in a thicket at the edge of the Stoneman meadow. If no mistake was made in identification these birds were *Zonotrichia leucophrys gambell*, and in this case we have a new record for Yosemite Valley.

Chipping Sparrow—Not numerous, but likely to be found in any section of the valley.

Sierra Junco—Not numerous, but likely to be seen a half dozen times on a two-mile walk.

Lincoln Sparrow—A singing male was noted July 22.

Sacramento Towhee—No change in the status. Family groups to be found in all the usual haunts.

Black-Headed Grosbeak—One of the most common birds during the first three weeks of the month, becoming less and less numerous the last week of the month.

Lazuli Bunting—A singing male was noted daily in the oak paddock from July 13 to July 24.

Western Tanager—Rather common during the first half of the month, but becoming scarce during the last week of the month.

Violet-Green Swallow—Occasionally seen during the first week of the month. Last noted July 13.

Rough-Winged Swallow—July 9 five young just fresh from the nest were being attended by their parents. Last seen July 10.

Warbling Vireo—Present daily, but almost silent during the last half of the month. July 26 a nest containing four well grown young was observed.

Cassin Vireo—Present throughout the month. Rasping voice of the young often heard, but parents almost silent during the last half of the month.

Calaveras Warbler—A lone bird noted July 4 and 6.

Yellow Warbler—The most common warbler and the most consistent singer during the month.

Black-Throated Gray Warbler—A family group noted July 3 and 6.

Hermit Warbler—Family groups twice noted during the month. On July 26 young birds apparently just out of the nest were being fed by the parents.

Water Ouzel—Seldom noted along the main river, but on July 28 small young were being fed in the nest located about 100 yards upstream from Happy Isles.

Canyon Wren—Not numerous but birds always to be found at three different sections of the valley.

Sierra Creeper—Likely to be seen in any section of the valley. On July 19 there was still one occupied nest. A late nesting record for this creeper.

Red Breasted Nuthatch—Not common, but individuals likely to be come upon in most any section of the valley.

Mountain Chickadee—Rare. Present daily, but possibly not more than two family groups.

California Bushtit—A family group of seven birds seen at the mouth of Indian Canyon July 15 and 16.

Gold-Crowned Kinglet—A family group noted July 4.

Western Gnatcatcher—On July 4 the nest of a pair of these birds was found. On July 20, 1924 young Gnatcatchers were seen being fed by their parents, but it was not until this month that we actually discovered a nest of Western Gnatcatchers on the floor of the valley.

Townsend Solitaire—A lone bird seen July 4.

Russet-Backed Thrush—Noted occasionally. Probably four nesting pairs at the upper end of the valley.

Western Robin—Common, but not nearly so numerous as in other years. Two nests still contained young on the last day of the month.

FATHER TOWHEE ADOPTS FAMILY

By B. A. Thaxter

On Saturday, Aug. 2, while the members of the Field School of Natural History were at their lunch in Camp 19, a Sierra junco with a brood of four little ones was observed in a clump of azaleas just in front of our tents. The young evidently had been out of the nest for a week or more, for they had little difficulty in making short flights after their mother.

The next day, Sunday, found a change in this happy family. The old bird and two of the young ones had disappeared—where and how we know not. Two youngsters were left behind, however, and as we were at home nearly all day, we had a good opportunity to observe them. Our attention was attracted to them at first by their chirping and hungry cry. Soon our neighbor, the Sacramento spurred tow

hee, who has made the azalea thicket his home all summer, discovered their plight and took them under his wing. All day Sunday he was kept busy trying to fill up those hungry babies. They both trailed him all day, and when he came out for the crumbs we spread for him they were always with him with their mouths open, crying to be fed. Never once did their foster father falter. All day he fed them, and when the dawn came on Monday he was again on the job. At sunset he was still trying to satisfy the voracious appetites of his adopted children.

One interesting feature of this strange relationship was the fact that frequently the female towhee would appear on the scene and become interested in the family; but every time the male would at once attack her and drive her away, as much as to say, "Let me alone, I can take care of my own family."

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