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CLOSE STUDIES OF THE GROUSE IN YOSEMITE

Male Bird Is a Friendly Soul, but He'll Chase Off Intruding Buck

By Ranger-Naturalist C. H. Oneal

Boomp! Boomp! Boomp! Came the wooing call of the Sierra cock grouse to his mate as the sun started to ascend the eastern sky. We slipped on our bathrobes and carefully searched the Jeffrey pine in front of our tent at Glacier Point. No grouse could be seen. Again the call. But the most diligent search failed. Slipping back to bed, we waited. Boomp! This time the call sounded closer. There on the ground not 10 feet away was our friend. But how changed! For two years we had been calling him "Hen." Here he was displaying all his masculine glory. What an injustice we had done him! He was straightway christened "Henry." Masculine-like, a few crumbs soon caused the ardor of his wooing to subside and he was once again "hen"-like.

Each morning Henry appears for breakfast. Civilization has perverted his appetite. Bread and cracker crumbs, peanuts and peevings of tomatoes and peaches are especially relished. After eating crackers, he usually hops upon the wash stand, places one foot on the

rim of the basin in a true pre-Volstead manner and drinks his fill of soapy water. If the pan is empty he rattles it until it is filled with water. His meal is usually topped off by a large number of nice, savory flies, insects or ants.

Only on one occasion have we seen him eating pine needles. Then he flew up into the Jeffrey pine and walked straight out to the very end of the branch. Here, swaying up and down with each movement, he picked the ends off the needles. While a heavy bird, he was a super-acrobat at balancing. He had no difficulty in turning around in his precarious position and walking directly to the trunk of the tree.

Henry is jealous of his prestige at our tent. No other male grouse dare appear. One day an intruder stole some crumbs. He was warned by a series of low ut! ut! ut! (which shook the whole of Henry's body) and was politely but firmly escorted to a rock below. Here he was watched until he took flight. But the next day he was back. This time moral suasion was forgotten. Henry darted toward him in fierce

anger. The stranger beat a hasty retreat to a branch in a friendly tree. Here his crestfallen appearance indicated his defeat. Though Henry will not tolerate a male, he will share his crumbs generously with his lady friends.

ROUTES A BUCK

Usually the most docile of birds, when necessity demands he can become a worthy adversary. The other day as he lay in the warm sun enjoying a dust bath, a young buck ventured too close. The feathers on top of Henry's head stood erect, almost like a top-knot. He bristled all over. His warning hisses were ignored. Suddenly there was a flurry of feathers and a cloud of dust. Straight into the face of the buck flew the irate cock. The enemy was routed with one attack and bounded away in hasty retreat.

We have been awakened more than once by the grouse flying upon the tent. Here they will walk the length of the tent, slipping and sliding like a drunken sailor at each step. Or it may be the tipping over of the wash basin that arouses us. At other times Henry will walk up into our bedroom and stand looking at us first out of one eye and then the other, as if to say, "Get up, sleepy heads!"

THE GROUSE FAMILY

We had a fine display of the domestic life of the grouse one Sunday afternoon. A quiet musical clucking caused us to investigate. A short distance away a hen was calling to her chick. Seeing us she flew to the ground and walked nearer, hopeful of a few choice morsels. Her chick had flown up to a young fir tree not 20 feet away. It was clearly outlined when in flight, but when perched it was almost invisible. After a careful search we saw dimly outlined against the nearer side of the tree an object

that appeared to be a piece of bark or a clod of dirt. However, it moved its head and we recognized the chick. The hen, falling in her quest for crumbs, walked to a warm, dusty spot in search of bugs and ants. Then appeared with dramatic suddenness Henry in all his splendor. The resonators in his throat were distended almost to bursting. They formed great light yellow, feather-bordered pouches that, at a distance, looked almost like Sunburst roses. His tail was raised and extended fan-like, while his wings scraped the ground. Over his eyes were pouches which in the heat of his emotion were a brilliant orange red. So great was the engorgement of these sacs they appeared fringed like the gills of a fish. In all the blaze of his masculine adornment he strutted bantam-like but with much more animation. Every few minutes he would emit his wooing call. Boomp! Boomp! But his mate accepted his advances coolly. She was more interested in insects. Finally, his ardor diminished by his interest in food, his resonators disappeared, his tail dropped and he was once again our quiet, unobtrusive friend. Only his larger size and darker coloration distinguished him from the hen.

Of all the pets at Glacier Point, the grouse are most interesting. Quiet, patient, faithful, they seem to enjoy human companionship.

Winter has come to Yosemite three weeks earlier this year than last. During the recent three-day snow (November 15-17) the precipitation was 4.53 inches. Three feet of snow fell at Tuolumne meadows.

Arriving with the snowflakes, hundreds of juncos are appearing in Yosemite valley. Kinglets are also numerous.

Unusual Rock Basins in Yosemite

C. G. PRESNALL Assistant Park Naturalist

An interesting discovery was made this summer while studying the remains of Indian rancherias in Yosemite National Park. At every rancheria several mortar holes have been found, but in one location there were also several large basins hollowed out of granite bed-rock similar to those described by George W. Stewart (The American Anthropologist, Vol. 31, No. 3) from the Kaweah river region.

The basins found in Yosemite are located near the Mariposa Grove. John Wegner, assistant chief ranger, had told me about a rancheria near the grove, and I supposed it contained only the usual collection of mortar holes, but upon arriving at the ranger station I was told that at the site in question there were also some larger "cooking holes."

This particular rancheria is located three-fourths of a mile southwest of the Mariposa Grove ranger station and lies on a slight elevation between two forks of Little Easter creek. On level, sandy soil near the creek I found many obsidian chips and one perfect arrowhead. The location is an ideal one for an Indian camp. Just off of the campsite is a roughly rounded knob of granite on which I counted 25 mortar holes closely grouped within an area of 100 square feet. About eight feet to one side of these mortar holes I found a circular basin 4 feet 4 inches across the top, filled level full with sand and debris. Twenty feet away, on the opposite side of the mortar holes, was another basin, oblong 6½ feet by 5½ feet. A third sand-filled depression nearby proved to be only a natural hole in the granite.

The contents of the two basins were practically identical. An mesh of fir needles and a leaf mold form-

ed the top layer, beneath which was five to seven inches of granite sand mixed and blackened with fine charcoal. Several small obsidian flakes were found in this layer. The bottom layer in the round basin consisted of pure charcoal lumps and powder. There were many small cylindrical pieces such as would be expected in the remains of a camp fire. This layer was an inch deep over most of the basin, but was filled to a depth of four inches on one side. The oblong basin contained only a thin layer of sand and coarse charcoal in equal proportions.

The depth of the round basin was 10 inches, that of the oblong basin 9½ inches. The sides sloped smoothly and uniformly to the bottoms, reminding one of huge gull pans. The bottoms of the basins, although smooth, were not level, but bulged upwards slightly in the centers, so the center of each basin was nearly an inch shallower than the circle at the junction of the sides and bottom.

The origin and purpose of such basins has apparently not been learned. The smooth interior surfaces resemble those of the small mortar holes, and might possibly have been fashioned in the same way—by centuries of abrasion with a pestle or similar implement. It is conceivable that natural depressions in the granite could have been thus smoothed and shaped without the vast amount of labor which would be necessary if the entire basin had been man-made.

It is possible that the location of the basins may have some significance. All that have been thus far recorded have been found in the vicinity of Sequoia gigantea groves. The antiquity of the basins studied by Stewart is shown by the depos-

its of volcanic ash found in them. To quote Stewart, "The deposits of volcanic ash found at the bottom of the basins at Redwood meadow and in some of those in the Giant Forest were notably undisturbed, and unmixed, or only slightly mixed, with other materials. There was, moreover, no other loose material under the layer of ash. Evidently, then, the basins were empty and clean when the volcanic shower fell, and this would show that they had been used only a short time before the eruption took place. Furthermore, the fact that this material has not been removed is proof that the people have never returned to the mountains, though they must have lived there for a long period. It may be reasonably presumed, however, that a heavy fall of suffocating volcanic dust would have driven the inhabitants of the region in haste from their homes. From which volcanoes the ash may be derived is as yet uncertain. The

volcanic cones nearest the Redwood meadows are those situated in the basin of Golden Trout creek, east of the Kern River canyon. They lie about 22 miles to the southeast. These cones have in the past discharged large flows of lava, but volcanoes of this type are explosive at times, and it is not improbable, therefore, that they have emitted great volumes of ash, the finer particles of which were carried to great distances by the wind. As the winds in this part of the Sierra Nevada blow frequently from the south or southeast, the ash from these volcanoes would naturally have been carried in the direction of Redwood meadow and other portions of Sequoia National Park."

No such deposits occurred in the two found in Yosemite. This would not necessarily indicate a more recent origin, since there is no record of volcanic activity in this vicinity within recent geologic time.

TWO NEW PUBLICATIONS

Two books of unusual interest are now available at the Yosemite Museum and they would be a valuable addition to the library of any nature-lover. Address your orders to C. A. Harwell, Park Naturalist, Yosemite, California.

Geologic History of the Yosemite Valley - Geological Survey Professional Paper 160, by Francois E. Matthes. Price \$ 1.10.

This remarkable volume is the culmination of years of intensive field-work and study, on the part of Dr. Matthes and his associates. It is profusely illustrated with photographs, sketches, maps. The edition is limited in number and will be in demand by those interested in the Sierra Region, so send in your order at once.

Outdoor Heritage - by Harold C. Bryant, Assistant Director, National Park Service. Price \$ 5.00.

Wild life of the mountains, valleys, shores and deserts of California. Intimate glimpses of the birds and beasts the traveler in California is likely to meet. Glimpses of the scenic wonders of California together with the habits of the wild. Big trees; lakes; game; fishes; climate.

A Rare Display of Waterfalls

By C. C. PRESNALL
Assistant Park Naturalist

The waterfalls of the Yosemite valley have often been described so extravagantly that one wonders whether such splendor can really exist, but as if to vindicate herself, the valley occasionally puts on a display of waterworks so marvelous as to defy description.

All who have seen Yosemite have been impressed by the wonderful falls, but few of the millions who have enjoyed the beautiful valley realize how magnificent the falls can be at certain rare intervals. It is only during long, hard storms that the falls show their supreme beauty, and only a few hardy nature lovers are willing to venture out into the cold and wet to feast their eyes on canyon walls that are literally covered with cascades.

Spring rains, aided by melting snow, swell the falls until their roar fills the valley. Severe autumn storms seldom cause such floods, though they do revive dozens of springs in the surrounding mountains, starting streams that drop over the valley walls in most unexpected places.

Recently, during a protracted storm in mid-November, while going from Mirror lake to Pohono bridge, I counted 26 of these storm-born falls, exclusive of six other named falls that had commenced flowing after being dry for several months. Adding Bridal Veil and the two Yosemite falls to these made a total of 35 falls, or five to the mile. Any one of them would have been the equal of Yosemite fall in midsummer so far as volume of water goes. No doubt there were others that I did not see ow-



NEVADA FALLS

ing to the clouds and mist which constantly swept the valley, often obscuring one or both sides.

The most spectacular exhibit seen on these seven miles of water-draped canyon walls was an array of six streams foaming down into the Mirror lake basin from the northwest face of Half Dome. From a height of over 1000 feet these streams came shooting down in an unbroken succession of falls, running races with each other so furiously that they seemed in danger of quickly draining themselves dry. And so they would have were it not for the constant flood pouring down from the smooth dome above. Half Dome seemed like a great roof with the chaparral below forming an imperfect gutter that leaked badly in six places.



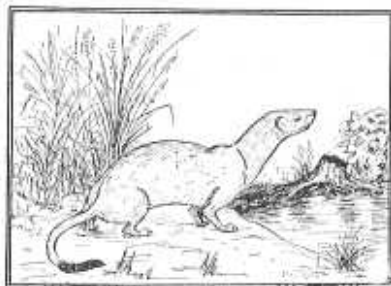
The Weasel at Sentinel Bridge

By B. A. THANTER

As the writer was driving across Sentinel Bridge about 8 o'clock in the morning of July 30, a mountain weasel (*Mustela arizonensis*) ran across the road in front of his car. Two days later at the same time in the morning, apparently the same weasel, at the same place in the road at the north end of the bridge, was seen to cross again from the west to the east side. The next morning, August 2, as some of us stood on the bridge waiting for a group of bird students to gather, he was seen again at the base of a large black oak tree, in a very playful mood. He would run around and around the tree, through a hollow root and out at the other side. Then he would spring onto the trunk and run up it six or eight feet, and then repeat the whole performance. He seemed to be doing it for the sheer joy of playing.

We watched him for several minutes, when he suddenly bounded away a hundred feet or more down the river bank and disappeared into a hole in the bank under a mass of roots. We cautiously followed down below him to the edge of the water and waited a few minutes. Suddenly the black appearing head with its big, round ears and beady

eyes popped out of another hole nearby. The slightest movement on our part and he would disappear again. A squeak would bring him back. Then two or three nearly grown young appeared and peeked at us from among the roots.



We observed this curious, happy family for some time and went away feeling more kindly towards weasels in general than we had ever been before, for the weasel is a fearless, bloodthirsty animal with a well deserved reputation as a killer. Rabbits, squirrels, gophers, mice and other small rodents all easily fall prey to his thirst for blood. So it is refreshing to get another, more kindly picture of this little beast and to see him even for a few moments happily at play with the other members of his family.

Only five thin bears were seen at the bear feeding platforms on No-

vember 17. Apparently all the fat ones have gone into hibernation

Good Interference

BAYLOR BROOKS Ranger-Naturalist

These days when we are hearing so much about "interference" in connection with the great American game of football, I am reminded of a bit of "good interference" of an entirely different sort that was called to my attention during the past summer in Yosemite.

Stopping for a brief visit at Glen Aulin High Sierra Camp with a group of trial enthusiasts, our hostess there, Mrs. Silverlocke, told me of an incident that happened shortly before our arrival. It seems that this year the marmots are beginning once again to assume their proper balance in the scheme of things, and at Glen Aulin were more numerous than in past years. One fellow in particular was the favorite of our hostess, and although by no means tame he had acquired a certain degree of acceptance of the human invasion of his domain, aided quite materially perhaps by the choice morsels of food to be had by a partial relinquishment of his own exclusiveness.

Strolling one day in a near by open spot that was the favorite haunt of this friendly little beast, our hostess had seen an eagle, a Golden no doubt, winging his way back and forth across the enclosure and at no very great height. Little did she suspect his purpose there until the appearance of the friendly marmot set the stage and brought the situation rapidly to a climax. The great bird paused momentarily in his gliding, and then assuming an almost vertical course, began descending upon the unsuspecting marmot with an alacrity bred of an empty stomach.

The case of the poor marmot was becoming rapidly alarming and sensing the danger Mrs. Silverlocke acted very quickly and in an interesting way. She realized that a

stick or stone tossed at the marmot might save his life yet it would ruin his confidence in her as a friend. Furthermore a stick or stone at the fast falling bird might not serve to scare and might just accidentally injure the great fellow who, after all, was only following a

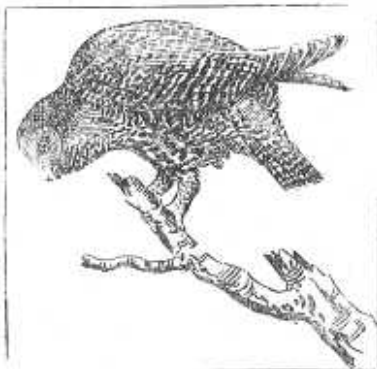


very natural procedure. Taking a police whistle from her pocket she blew upon it with all her might. Strangely enough the noise was sufficiently commanding to so scare the eagle that his abrupt change of mind in mid air was described as even funny. Doubtless he was not in the habit of heeding a policeman's whistle, yet he must have instinctively realized in time, as some of us fortunately do, that such is immediately demanding of respect and gracious compliance. At any rate he departed, perhaps angrily, from the scene.

The marmot was also scared and hastened to his home fearing no doubt that the doomsday for marmots was actually at hand, as well it might have been for this fellow in particular had not a bit of "good interference" saved his life.

OCTOBER'S FEATHERED FRIENDS:

Ranger-Naturalist Eald Michael.



The month of October in Yosemite valley, as usual, was the most delightful of all the year. It is true that at this season of the year the falls are either lacking or at a very low ebb, but there is more than mere compensation for the lack of water, in the valley of peace and quiet that is filled with a glory of autumn color. October is the month of Indian summer; cloudless days of the bluest blue, cool nights, and warm sunny days. After the mad rush of summer the October days bring serene beauty that soothes the soul of him who lingers on in the Yosemite. The rumble of tumbling waters belong with the hurry-harried souls who race about the valley during the height of the tourist season. The leisurely folk who know the Yosemite at her best are to be found on the deserted October trails.

The only stormy days of the month were the ninth, tenth and the eleventh, and the rain that these days brought settled the dust and added charm to the days that followed. There were a few frosty mornings and just one morning, October 26, when ice appeared on the quiet pools.

Sixty species of birds were listed during the month, which number is well above the average for the

last 11 years. Of the 60 species noted there was not a single species that had not been seen during October in some previous year, except the green-winged teal, which is an entirely new record for the valley.

Apparently gray squirrels are coming back to the valley. Besides the three gray squirrels that I saw during the month there came to me reports from six different persons who had seen gray squirrels during the month.

In the broad light of day, on the morning of October 5, a gray fox was seen to trot across the gravel bar and swim the river.

On the afternoon of October 12 a large and handsome coyote was seen hunting meadow mice in the lower end of the Leidig meadow.

Several times during the month daylight trips were made to the feeding platforms at the "bear pits." The greatest number of bears to be seen on any one day was the 13 seen on October 20. No cubs of the year were seen nor were any of the great old fellows present. October 21 a year ago we estimated the number of bears seen as not less than 40. During the last day of the month a lone bear was seen at the "pits;" a year ago there were often a dozen in sight at one time.

BIRD REPORT FOR OCTOBER

Western Bluebird—First noted October 17, when a flock of 15 was seen. Several flocks present the last few days of the month.

Mountain Bluebird—A lone bird noted October 2, and on October 12 three birds were seen.

Ruby-crowned Kinglet—First noted October 5. Present daily the last half of the month, but not numerous and never in flocks.

Golden-crowned Kinglet—Common. Flocks of 10 or 12 birds likely to be found in any section of the valley.

Western Robin—Present daily. In varying numbers, however, sometimes one or two birds on a morning's walk; some mornings 20 or 40. Rather more numerous the last few days of the month.

Sierra Creeper—Present daily and likely to be found in any section of the valley.

Red-breasted Nuthatch—Not numerous. Lone birds noted occasionally. Probably a few individuals present throughout the month.

Mountain Chickadee—Probably a few individuals present throughout the month. One day they would be common and the next day they might be entirely missing.

California Bush-tit—Only noted once during the month. A flock containing 16 birds was seen October 25.

California Purple Finch—Rare. Lone birds noted on few occasions.

Yellowthroat—Had a fine view of one of these birds on the morning of October 11.

Belted Kingfisher—No apparent change in status. A bird to be found along most any mile of river.

Great Blue Heron—A lone individual frequently noted. Probably present throughout the month.

Mountain Quail—Rare. A flock of five noted on three occasions.

Band-Tailed Pigeon—Not numerous this month. A flock containing four or five birds occasionally noted. The largest flock comprised 50 birds, noted October 3. October 22, 40 birds seen.

Mourning Dove—October 2, two birds seen, and on October 24 and 26, a lone bird was seen.

Sharp-Shinned Hawk—A lone individual noted on three occasions.

Cooper Hawk—A single bird noted October 26.

Red-Tailed Hawk—A lone individual noted October 8.

Sparrow Hawk—A lone bird noted on several occasions.

Golden Eagle—On October 3, two birds were seen. One was apparently a young bird.

Canyon Wren—Still rare, but birds are usually to be found in certain talus slopes on the north side of the valley.

Winter Wren—A lone individual

noted on two occasions. find a single bird.

Audobon Warbler—Present daily in varying numbers. On the last day of the month hundreds were present in the oaks about the new village.

Red-shafted Flicker—Present daily. Four or five birds likely to be seen on a morning's walk.

Anna Hummingbird—October 8 a handsome male came to feed on the flowers that were blooming in a window box.

Calliope Hummingbird—Five or six birds were present in the primrose garden the first three days of the month.

Black Phoebe—A lone bird noted October 21.

Blue-fronted Jay—The most common bird of the month.

Western Crow—A lone bird seen October 6.

Red-winged Blackbird—A lone bird was on three occasions found feeding on the seeds of the wild sunflower.

Meadowlark—A lone bird noted October 8.

Brewer Blackbird—Flocks noted during the first week of the month. A lone straggler was frequently seen until October 23.



PIGYMY OWL

Pinyon Owl—First heard October 8. After this date the birds became garrulous and the song was frequently heard during morning hours. Never heard at night.

Spotted Owl—The bird we believe to be the Spotted Owl was heard barking on the night of October 15.

Evening Grosbeak—A lone individual was noted October 23 and 27.

Black-Headed Grosbeak—The only Black-Headed Grosbeak that was noted during the month was a handsome male that came frequently to the feeding station.

Green-backed Goldfinch. A flock of perhaps 25 birds was present daily in the evening primrose garden in the Ahwahnee grounds.

Fox Sparrow—Twice during the month a lone bird was seen.

Savannah Sparrow—Birds that we believe were Savannah Sparrows were present in the meadows the first three days of the month.



Western
Chipping Sparrow -

Chipping Sparrow—A flock of 20 birds noted October 5. Later a lone straggler was noted on two occasions.

Colden-Crowned Sparrow—Rare. A lone bird present in a certain thicket the last eight days of the month.

English Sparrow—A pair of birds seen October 24.

White-Crowned Sparrow—Not numerous, but seen almost daily. A few birds probably present throughout the month.

Sierra Junco—Present throughout the month, but not numerous and no large flocks.

Song Sparrow—A lone individual noted on three occasions.

Lincoln Sparrow—Pairs noted on three occasions and last seen October 11.

White-throated Swift—October 8 and 9 three birds were seen, and on the morning of October 12 a flock of 25 was noted.

Sacramento Towhee—A pair of birds always to be found in a certain ceanothus thicket near the zoo. Not noted elsewhere during the month.

Green-Winged Teal—A lone bird was seen on the river October 6. Strange to say, this is our first record for this bird.

Hutton Vireo—A lone bird was noted on three different occasions.

Gray Woodpecker—Not numerous, but probably present daily, as one or two were always to be found in the cottonwoods.

Willow Woodpecker—A few individuals probably present throughout the month, although there were days when we failed to find a single bird.

Nuttall Woodpecker—A lone individual noted October 12.

White-Headed Woodpecker—Rare.

California Woodpecker—Colonies of five or six birds in the several Kellogg Oak groves on the warm north side of the valley, but owing to the scarcity of acorns in other sections of the valley many birds have left.



LEWIS WOODPECKER

Lewis Woodpecker—On October 5 a flock of five was seen flying up the valley.

Pileated Woodpecker—The lone male bird was seen October 18.

Water Ouzel—These birds are back on the main river. A pair or a lone bird likely to be seen every mile or so along the river.

Red-breasted Sapsucker—Until October 16 a lone bird could usually be found working in the apple orchard. October 10 three birds were found working in an apple tree in the Ahwahnee grounds.



NOTE: We are in need of a dozen or more copies of the August number of Nature Notes 1930, that various public files may be completed. The cooperation of our readers in this matter will be greatly appreciated.



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Dan Anderson