

Nature Notes
of
Grand Canyon



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Fern-bush

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GRAND CANYON NATURE NOTES

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This bulletin is issued monthly for the purpose of giving information to those interested in the natural history and scientific features of the Grand Canyon National Park. Additional copies of these bulletins may be obtained free of charge by those who can make use of them, by addressing the Superintendent, Grand Canyon National Park, Grand Canyon, Arizona.

M. R. TILLOTSON, Superintendent. By - G. E. Sturdevant, Park Naturalist.

CATS AND POLECATS

Mr. Dario Travaini, charged with the task of maintaining sanitary conditions within the Grand Canyon National Park, is facing a serious problem in or rather beneath his home. On several occasions he has caught fleeting glimpses of scurrying black and white animals retreating to safety under his house. Wild life in its native haunt is one thing and wild life trying to occupy the dwelling of men is another; at least that is the opinion of the sanitary engineer after discovering the wild life in this case to consist of skunks. Few animals are cleaner about their home than this one; still if something should disturb him to such an extent as to leave behind a strong reminder, what a shadow would be cast on the efficiency of the sanitary engineer. Even though mice had disappeared entirely, who would not prefer a mouse to a skunk. In spite of the fact that national park is ordinarily a sanctuary for all wild life, permission was granted in this case to remove the objectional animals.

A box trap was devised and baited with sardines. The following morning the sardines were missing but the trap was not even sprung. Bacon was then used to bait the trap. The ensuing morning disclosed the trap sprung and the weight indicated the presence of either one large skunk or several small ones. No one likes to peer at his catch through a trigger hole about one-half inch in diameter to see how many he has caught, especially when the animal in question is scarcely a foot away. Resolving to remain sanitary by not having a nauseating, burning liquid poured into his eyes at close range, the engineer decided to drown the animal or animals before inspection. After the preliminaries of drowning, the lid was raised and out rolled a large house cat - all nine lives destroyed.

Two days later the trap was sprung - this time by a skunk - but he had wrecked the trap while making his escape. The succeeding morning revealed the trap sprung again. This time a half-grown skunk proved to be the victim.

During the night that followed, a noise was heard in the trap. The engineer hurried out and placed a heavy stone on the lid to prevent escape. Morning disclosed the trap intact so without any preliminaries, the trap was held beneath water for about ten minutes. The lid was carefully raised but nothing rolled out; the skunk having made his escape during the night, leaving behind only traces of his fur. The trap was again sprung a few mornings later. An animal could be heard scratching around inside. The trap as usual was submerged in water and the lid raised. Out tumbled another house cat.

To date the heavy toll exacted by the sanitary engineer numbers two house cats and one half-grown skunk. Competent wild life observers believe at this rate that house cats will become exceedingly rare within the park by the time all the skunks have been removed from beneath this one house.

BIRDS OF THE HAVASUPAI CANYON

By - Edwin D. McKee.

In the extreme western part of the park is a side canyon of the Grand Canyon known as Havasupai - the home of the Supai Indians and the region about which was written "In the Land of the Sky Blue Waters." This country is replete with beautiful scenery, fascinating Indian exhibits, and interesting geological features, and in true keeping with such wonders is its ornithology. Perhaps not so noticeable because of the greatness of the many other features - nevertheless the birds are there in great numbers and in extremely interesting variety.

In a recent visit to this region some twenty species were noted in the course of a single day. Among these were three species of hawks, two of flycatchers, two of jays, and both cliff-dwelling wrens. As in all parts of the Grand Canyon proper, these birds varied quite materially from top to bottom - that is, as one passes from the Transition to the Upper Sonoran and more tropical life zones. Here, however, were found several species which, according to all available information, have not yet been seen within the walls of the main canyon.

Probably the most interesting individual bird observed was that very original, tropical species - Road Runner. He was seen strutting about vainly among the rock ledges of the Supai formation with his tail high in the air and his stomach, more than likely, all keyed up for a big meal of rattlesnake. It is also of interest to note that the Gambel's Quail were everywhere very abundant in the lower valley and that the Desert Sparrows, collecting in flocks, quite took the place of the common English Sparrows around the Supai village and in the Indian orchards.

These few species, undoubtedly, form but a small part of the total bird population dwelling within the mighty walls and many hidden recesses of the Havasupai Canyon, so for the ambitious and enterprising ornithologist here is to be found a veritable wealth of extremely interesting material.

CANYON RIM ROSES.

By - G. E. Sturdevant.

Although it may appear late in the season for one to find many species of flowers in bloom at an elevation of 7000 feet, nevertheless, more than thirty species may be seen in bloom along the foot path leading to Yavapai Point. As is to be expected several families are represented in the thirty odd species. Unquestionably the most attractive family is the rose - represented by five species.

In spite of the old adage, "Roses are red, ---", in this case they are yellow and white. Perhaps the most conspicuous, as well as the most fragrant, is the Cliff Rose (*Cowania mexicana*). This shrub - the tallest of the five roses - resembles a young cedar in bloom rather than a rose. It averages five or six feet in height although a few specimens have been observed towering fully twelve feet above the ground. The exceedingly fragrant, pale yellow flowers, followed by the long plume-like attachment to the seed, never fail to attract attention. The seeds are very bitter, in fact so bitter that the local name of "Quinine-bush" is quite appropriate.

Another rose, closely resembling the former, is the Apache Plume (*Fallugia paradoxa*). This rose reaches a height of about four feet. The smaller size and the more scattered arrangement of the white flowers makes the Apache Plume inconspicuous beside the Cliff Rose. Like the Cliff Rose, to each seed is attached a plume-like tail as an assurance of wide distribution by the wind.

The Fern-bush (*Chamaebatiaria millefolium*) is covered with clusters of small white flowers not unlike strawberry blossoms. The numerous fern-like leaves and bushy appearance of this three-foot shrub, quite conceals the cherry-like stems.

The small yellow rose - Cinquefoil (*Potentilla crinita* Gray) - is often mistaken for a buttercup. The petals are deep yellow but lack the oily luster so characteristic of buttercups. The under surface of its leaves are covered with silvery gray silken hairs. Reaching a height of about ten or twelve inches, this rose appears quite inconspicuous among the yellow clumps of Brown Weed (*Gutierrezia sarothrae*).

Perhaps the most interesting as well as the smallest of the five roses in bloom, is the lime-loving Rock Rose (*Petrophytum caespitosum*). This one resembles a moss until the flowers appear in August. Growing as it does, with very little moisture and without appreciable soil, this fragrant rose is found occupying small patches and spreading over the bare limestone like so many mats of moss. The Rock Rose is a prolific bloomer. More than 140 flowers have been observed on a single eight inch spike. Although the bud appears pink, the petals take on an unmistakable white color when in bloom.

"PAL"

When Ranger A. L. Brown on the north rim of the Grand Canyon picked up a struggling two weeks old fawn, near the middle of June, and carried it to the Bright Angel Ranger Station, he little realized that the little parcel of wild life would soon become his most intimate chum. Such is the version of Ranger Brown, however, some two months since he adopted the little waif which for a while appeared all legs and all ears.

Soon after its capture, near the saddle connecting Walhalla Plateau to the Kaibab, Ranger Brown and his fawn have been inseparable pals. Although he was originally named "Pot" in honor of the famous lion dog of "Uncle" Jim Owens, the close friendship that soon developed resulted in the more familiar name of "Pal".

Pal took to milk, corn meal, oatmeal, and mushrooms as any hungry being might take to appetizing food. Mushrooms were his favorite dish. Fruit was also acceptable - a peach tempting him to leave other varieties. Candy and other sweets were never included on Pal's menu for he failed to develop a sweet tooth. Regardless of the tempting quality of the food, it is a curious fact that it is acceptable only from the hands of Ranger Brown.

With a small bell tied to his neck as a protection from predatory animals, Pal has enjoyed a life of freedom except for two days following his capture. During the first two weeks of his life when the brain registered impressions in a greater way, perhaps no fence appeared in Pal's life. At any rate he saw no good in a fence and revealed his animosity by jumping against it.

Pal takes an active part in the registration of cars at the Bright Angel Ranger Station. He poses for the camera while the occupants of the automobile are questioned. Indeed Pal is quite popular with tourists. Whether at the checking station or "rimming", covetous eyes are constantly cast in his direction.