

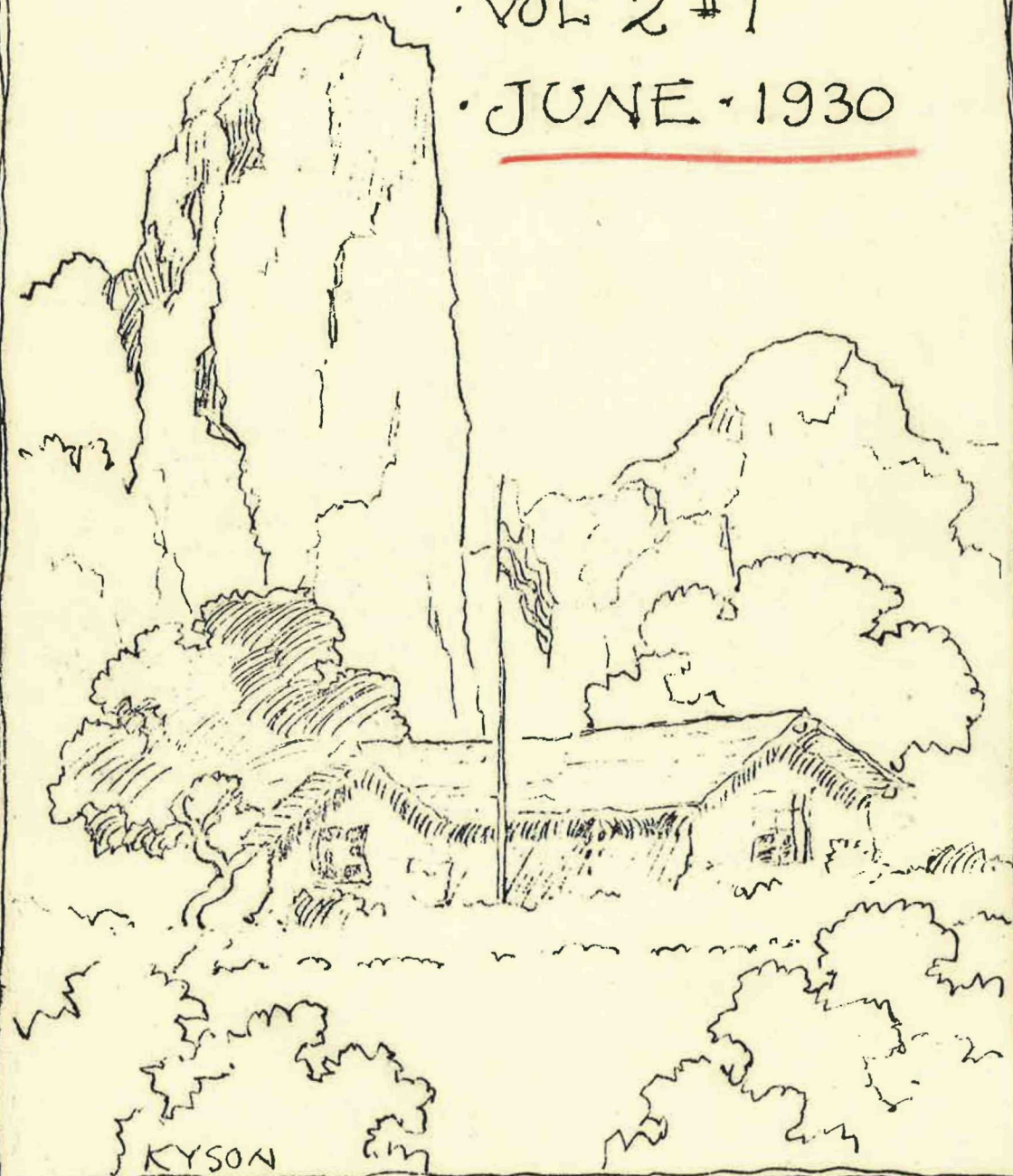
Vol. 2

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ZION ~ BRYCE NATURE NOTES

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ZION AND BRYCE CANYON NATURE NOTES

June, 1930.

Volume II, No. 1.

This is the first number of the second volume of a series of bulletins issued from time to time during the summer for the information of those interested in the educational opportunities, the natural history, the scientific features or the scenic beauties of the region. Publications using these notes should give credit to Zion-Bryce Canyon Nature Notes and author.

E. T. Scoyen,
Superintendent.

A. M. Woodbury,
Park Naturalist.

GREETINGS

By J. W. Thornton, Ranger-Naturalist.

The tourist season of 1929 in Zion and Bryce Canyon National Parks was a splendid one. The tourists enjoyed the canyons and the canyons themselves, seemingly in anticipation of their coming, became more beautiful. But Old Man Time, passing with measured tread, cast all our Park activities of 1929 into the past, and among them went Zion-Bryce Nature Notes.

Like the maiden hair whose dried leaves remind us of last year's beauty and whose new growth holds promise of a new beauty just as glorious, Zion-Bryce Nature Notes are coming out in full leaf. The first creation is here. It will again grow and blossom in our 1930 season. If it can in the smallest way reflect the wonders of our natural life and the beauty of our gorgeously colored natural phenomena, it will have done that which will make it worth while in the service of natural beauty and the understanding of nature's secrets.

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LANGUAGE AMONG BIRDS
By A. M. Woodbury, Park Naturalist.

I sat cautiously down one day among the willows at the edge of a marsh to watch the operations of a pair of redwing blackbirds trying to instruct their uninitiated offspring in the art of flying. Through my carelessness the mother espied me and gave the note of alarm as she came and perched her vigilant self in a small tree almost overhead. This procedure was a common occurrence, but the sequel to follow was rather unusual.

The marsh was in an abandoned ox-bow loop of the river, and was flanked on both sides by shady groves of ashes, boxelders and wide spreading cottonwoods. As the female settled in the tree near me, the male joined her and the two of them kept up a continuous warning chatter. I sat very still and watched.

The young birds immediately disappeared among the succulent green cattails and rushes. The other blackbirds in the vicinity joined in the general alarm. One or two of them flew over to the tree to survey the cause of the disturbance and then went back to their own particular domain among the cattails.

Their example was followed in quick succession by a dozen other birds of at least seven different species. They came from the woods and bushes in every direction. A pair of black-headed grosbeaks were conspicuous with their brilliant black and yellow plumage. They were followed by a pair of flycatchers, a "say phoebe", a pair of humming birds, a chipping sparrow, a couple of western warbling vireos and a couple of song-sparrows.

They came and perched in the tree, surveying the situation. Not finding anything alarming after having apparently satisfied their curiosity, they went on their way in various directions. A few minutes more and the tree was deserted save for the vigilant blackbirds.

The question might be asked if there is a common language among birds. There is no doubt that all birds do not use the same sounds to express ideas, but this incident seems to indicate that many birds may understand the warning notes of others.

Further corroboration of such a deduction was observed by the writer several years ago. My attention was attracted, one morning, by a great commotion among the birds in the trees and brush just outside my window. Looking out, I noticed many birds of several species, perched around in the trees uttering warning cries, and apparently regarding something in one of the small trees close by. I rushed out to ascertain the cause of the disturbance and found a western striped racer (*M. t. taeniatus*), crawling around among the limbs of the tree. As soon as I reached up and took the snake down, the commotion subsided, and the birds went their normal ways in peace.

DEFOLIATION IN ASH TREES AGAIN
By Donald J. Jolley, Chief Ranger

Small gray caterpillars with light-colored underparts have given us some worry in Zion National Park for several years. They feed upon the leaves of the ash trees; when very numerous they sometimes strip all the foliage from the trees.

Last year (1929), as reported in these Nature Notes, they were so numerous that they completely defoliated nearly all of the ash trees in Zion Canyon. The previous year (1928), the caterpillars were abundant in certain areas. A few clumps of trees were damaged. Evidently they were on the increase. The devastation reached its climax last year; this season they did less damage.

On May 1 of this year, I gathered from twenty to thirty specimens of these caterpillars and placed them in a glass jar with perforated lid. Ranger Russell fed them fresh ash leaves daily for thirty days. Out of the group, one only reached maturity and went into pupation. It is doing well and looks as if it would transform into an adult moth. If so, we may be able to determine what it is. It is being turned over to the Park Naturalist for further investigation.

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AUTO DEATH TOLL
By A. M. Woodbury, Park Naturalist.

The destructiveness of the auto to animal life has oft been remarked, but the writer had it brought forcefully to his attention lately. Driving from Salt Lake to Zion, a census was taken of certain dead forms that were plainly visible along a part of the way, about 200 miles in length.

An animal that is run down by an auto on a main highway, is soon crushed beyond recognition, so that in all probability most of the forms that could be identified were not more than a few hours old.

Rabbits were most numerous of all and were encountered so frequently that they were not counted. They adorned the desert stretches between settlements nearly all the way, but were seldom found in the vicinity of the towns. Eight prairie dogs were found between Lovan and Gunnison, a distance of about thirty miles, a desert area where they abound. It was noted that although they were very common, they were not run over nearly so often as rabbits. The reason probably lies in their habits, the rabbit often becoming confused and uncertain what to do or which way to go, but the little prairie dog starts for its hole with a definite objective in mind, and is only prevented from reaching it by being run down. It was also noted that these small short-legged mammals begin the race for the hole much farther in advance of a car than a rabbit takes notice.

Coming through the Sevier Valley where settlements and cultivated areas were nearly continuous, seven small brown birds, probably sparrows were scattered along the highway.

Reaching the mountains, where the gray rock squirrel abounds, five of these had fallen victims. In Zion Canyon, it is no uncommon thing to have these interesting forms victimized.

Even the long slender weasel was struck and run down. Various other forms that could not be identified were not counted.

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AUTOS DEATH ON SNAKES

By Donal J. Jolley, Chief Ranger.

On June 21, coming back after dark from Cedar City to Zion Park the bright lights of the car illuminated a long slender object lying across the roadway. Stopping to investigate, I found it to be a large gopher snake that had been run over by several autos. During the rest of the trip, I counted four other snakes making a total of five killed by autos along that sixty mile driver.

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SAND CRICKET CANNIBAL

By A. M. Woodbury, Park Naturalist.

Turning over a stone one day while out collecting, I surprised one of those vicious-looking Sand Crickets (*Stenopelmatus*) in his sandy burrow. His banded brown and white abdomen, his beady eyes standing out on his smooth bald head, together with his powerful mandibles, no doubt all helped to create the erroneous public impression that the ungainly thing was poisonous.

However, knowing it to be harmless, except for the action of the well-muscled mandibles, which I knew could on occasion clip the skin on a tender spot, I gathered him up and placed him in a glass container for observation. Soon after, I brought in another one and dropped in the container with the first.

Then next I looked at the two, a half-hour later, a ghastly situation met my gaze. The first one's head appeared to be completely telescoped in the abdomen of the other. Upon close investigation, it appeared that the one had eaten off the rear end of the abdomen of the other and was then proceeding to eat up the soft pulpy contents of the interior, leaving only the harder chitinous covering on the outside. The victim was still alive, but was so feeble, that it was making no resistance to the foraging of the victor. It is still a mystery to me how the one made the other stand still long enough to start such a process of cannibalism.

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THE HANGING GARDENS OF ZION
By J. W. Thornton, Ranger Naturalist.

Tradition tells us of the wonderful hanging gardens of Babylon long ago buried in the ruins of that great city. Had the ancient globe trotters visited the spot now called the Zion National Park he would have found nature planting on the gaily colored walls of Zion Canyon a ravishing hanging garden. The man-built gardens of Babylon have been for centuries a ruin, but those glories of Zion, planted and nurtured by Nature in the long dead centuries, are today a beauty spot that sinks deep into the soul and memory of all natures lovers who visit Zion.

Natures landscape gardener planned everything. He led the waters from the melting snows on the high plateaus down through fissures in the sandstone walls. He saw that it kept the vermilion cliff wet for two or three hundred feet up the side. Then he chose well the vegetation that should grow there. He planted the brilliant cardinal flower--*Lebelia splendens*--so red that the prismatic colors of the rainbow have nothing to boast of in its presence; the shooting star--*Dodecatheon pauciflorum*--with its five points daintily dressed in purple and yellow; the monkey flower, robed in scarlet; the maiden hair ferns whose flowing tresses cover much of the canyon wall. As you gaze at the wall it looks like a great chromatic curtain. The many shades of green, brown, red, yellow, pink, lavender, blue, the fancy colored moss, the decorative grasses, everything, adds to the beauty of it all. That mass of waving glory, all yellow and green that bows to you as you enter and waves goodbye when you leave, is the never-to-be-forgotten columbine of Zion.

We feel with the poet that "a thing of beauty is a joy forever".

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