

Shelby Stanger:

The presenting sponsor of this season of Wild Ideas Worth Living is Subaru. One thing I just learned that I thought was very cool is Subaru is donating 50 million meals to help feed people in need during the COVID-19 crisis. They know this pandemic is devastating our country, and has left hundreds of thousands out of work, and unable to feed themselves or their families. Through the Subaru Love Promise, a commitment to support their communities, Subaru and their retailers across the country are making a donation to provide 50 million meals to Feeding America. This action called Subaru Loves to Help will make meals available at 199 local food banks across the country. In addition, Subaru retailers will be doing other things to help these local food banks, including food deliveries, donations, and volunteer events. Subaru knows their ongoing support will be necessary as local communities work to get back on their feet. Subaru Loves to Help. Just one part of the Subaru Love Promise. One more reason that makes Subaru more than a car company.

Shelby Stanger:

While we've all been staying inside more, the wildlife seems to be enjoying the space. We've seen stories about a family of foxes in Toronto, dolphins playing in normally busy waters in Istanbul, Turkey, even pandas finally getting it on after 10 years of keeping zookeepers waiting in Hong Kong. Smog is cleared in LA and in the Himalayas, leaving residents with views they haven't been able to see in years. One of my favorite stories though has been the appearance of more wildlife in our national parks. For this episode, I wanted to go straight to the source and talk to a park ranger about what she's seeing in Yosemite National Park. I'm Shelby Stanger, and this is Wild Ideas Worth Living. Jamie Richards has been a park ranger with the National Park Service for 10 years. She's worked with Yosemite National Park for the past three years. But in the last two months while the park has been closed, Jamie and the other rangers are seeing animal activity like they've never seen before. I'll let Jamie tell you more about what kinds of animals they're seeing, and how you can get a taste for yourself. Note that this interview was recorded in early May 2020, when Yosemite was 100% closed. However, as of last week, the park has partially reopened for those with certain permits and all others will need a day-use reservation, which you can find a link for in our show notes. Check nps.gov/yose or call the park for updates before you plan a visit. The best thing we can do right now is to recreate responsibly.

Shelby Stanger:

Jamie Richards, welcome to Wild Ideas Worth Living from near Yosemite, California. We're excited to have you.

Jamie Richards:

Hi, Shelby. Thank you so much for the invitation to join you. It's a pleasure to be here today.

Shelby Stanger:

Right now with the park being closed, we've heard that there's been some really great wildlife some people are seeing. Can you just share a little bit about that?

Jamie Richards:

Yeah. Yosemite National Park is closed right now to the public. We do have essential personnel. So, rangers performing essential functions that are still living and working inside Yosemite. We are seeing some wildlife coming out, and going into places, and being active times of the day that we typically

haven't seen them very frequently. The important thing that I want everyone to remember, the animals that we're seeing in the park ... if you're following our Facebook page, Instagram, Twitter - you're seeing Yosemite National Park put out stories of we're seeing coyotes coming out into parking areas that normally are filled with cars, or we're seeing bears utilizing hiking trails or roadways to get from where they are to where they want to be - the animals are always there. Yosemite National Park is home to over 400 species of vertebrates. The animals have become really good at living and navigating around us humans to get to where they want to go. With less human activity, the animals are using the things that are convenient for them. If the easiest way to get to where you want to go forage for food is the hiking trail, the animals are using the hiking trail. They're using the roadways, the bike paths, the river corridor. We're seeing animals active in the middle of the day.

Shelby Stanger:

What specifically are you seeing? You said coyotes, bears. Anything that when there's more people there you don't normally see a lot of?

Jamie Richards:

Yeah. Yosemite National Park is known for the big vistas and landscapes. But we are home to a rich, diverse variety of wildlife. Black bears are ones that are very exciting. We all know there are black bears in Yosemite. It's one of the iconic images that's associated with the Sierra Nevada and Yosemite National Park. But to see a black bear is actually a very rare and treasured opportunity. It's pretty rare to see a black bear out and about in Yosemite. The bears are always there. They're really good at avoiding and hiding from us. In Yosemite, we estimate between 300 to 500 individuals that are black bears. We have seen bears coming out into the open meadow areas where normally there'd be a lot of human activity. We've seen bears coming out climbing trees, pulling apart logs, looking ... they're foraging for food is what they're doing. Rangers have seen a lot of bear sightings in the last several weeks.

Shelby Stanger:

So, bears have been the primary animal you guys are seeing.

Jamie Richards:

We're also seeing coyote, bobcat ... the mule deer are pretty frequent to be spotted in Yosemite Valley. Other species that we're seeing, the California red-legged frog. If you know where to look, you can go out and find the frog species in the wetlands and the meadow areas. The California ground squirrel, the western gray squirrel. In the higher elevations, animals will come out like the pika. But the things that are really exciting right now are seeing more of the bear, bobcat, and coyote sightings.

Shelby Stanger:

That's got to be so cool. I mean, just watching any animal in the wild in nature interact without human interaction has always been special to me. Have any of the rangers shared stories of something that just totally fascinated them?

Jamie Richards:

Everyone is taking away their own stories at this time from things that they're seeing when they're out on the job performing their duties. Certainly, the wildlife sightings are some of the most exciting ... to be out working in Cook's Meadow, and to have a black bear walk across your work area. We had recently a

park volunteer that was in the park that witnessed ... and we shared this video on Facebook for everyone to enjoy. You had a bear come out across the meadow area. It was a juvenile black bear. He climbed up to the top of the tree. He was looking for food. As the bear got up there, he watched the bear work its way back down and try to figure out how to get back to the ground. It took a few minutes for the bear to figure out where to put his little foot. The bear got back on the ground and scurried out across the meadow. That was actually one of the exciting sightings that we've had. Another ranger was out patrolling and saw this coyote laying in the middle of a parking area. That parking area would normally be full of traffic, and people, and cars. This coyote was just enjoying laying in the middle of the parking lot that's right in front of Yosemite Falls. We are certainly seeing animals going in places that you don't normally see them.

Shelby Stanger:

It's such a wild time for everybody, but this sort of seems like one of the nice things that's happened during this wild time is just to be able to have these sightings that you normally wouldn't see ... because there would be normally people there. I think you guys have done a lot of things to engage with the public even though it's not open. Can you just chat with some of the things the park is doing to engage with people, even though it's not open right now?

Jamie Richards:

Absolutely. While Yosemite National Park itself is not open to the public ... in fact, most rangers are working from home and are not going into the park itself either. We are trying to continue to find how do we continue to bring the public into their national park and make sure that the public has opportunities to interact with rangers, has opportunities to interact with park resources, and continue to learn and be inspired by their national parks. Some of our rangers have come up with some really creative programs. Two of our rangers, Anastasia and Adam, have started Kids Ask Rangers, which is a Facebook live program that's airing Thursdays at 10:30 AM. Earlier in the week, a question is posed on Facebook asking kids to submit their questions about nature, and history, and science, and anything that you're wondering about in Yosemite. You can submit your questions into the Yosemite National Park Education Office, and our education rangers are then working to put together the programs Thursday mornings where we broadcast the kids' questions in their own writing or their own voice, and then we talk about it. One of the fun ones that came up had to do with, "Do owls kiss?" You had a child submit this question, and then we actually went and did some research, and answered the question that ... sort of. Owls do express courtship by rubbing beaks. That could be a form of kissing. By doing these programs, it allows the rangers to continue to do what we love, which is interact with the public, and continue to share our passion and love for the parks and the park resources. We continue to learn every single day. Before we had that question asked, I did not know the answer to, "Do owls kiss."

Shelby Stanger:

I just learned something new too. That's great.

Jamie Richards:

It's always a pleasure to work with the public, to have these questions that, "I've never thought of asking that before." And to go, and talk with our peers, and to come up with the right answers. This is what we love is asking questions, exploring ideas, and really learning more about the world around us.

Shelby Stanger:

That sounds like a great program. Looks like you guys are also doing videos, tours, all sorts of things on the website.

Jamie Richards:

We are. Wednesday afternoons at three o'clock, we've started this Rangers Behind the Scenes series where we're doing interviews with rangers that you might not get to see every day. When you come to your national park, you're likely to interact with a ranger like myself, or a ranger in a visitor center, a ranger doing interpretive educational programs. But you're not always likely to get a one-on-one interaction with the rangers in charge of the horse patrol or our wildlife biologist team. We recently featured our park curator talking about the museum collection. We really are diving into highlighting all the different types of jobs, and things that park rangers do behind the scenes, and working to highlight some of the work that continues to happen in Yosemite National Park.

Shelby Stanger:

I'm curious to know what some of the jobs are that we normally wouldn't think of at the park.

Jamie Richards:

When you think of national parks, particularly parks like Yosemite, Yosemite's like a small city. There really is almost a job for everyone. A lot of the jobs that you may not think of ... some of the most important ones are our custodial team. I'm hoping we'll get a conversation with someone about roads and trails. How do we maintain and keep things functional for you, the public, to come and enjoy. We have a whole museum team. We recently featured our park archivist and curator, but there's a lot of jobs that go into keeping the museum up and running, keeping all of our wildlife research up and running. We have a lot of wildlife biologists that work in the park that specialize in different areas. Recently, we had our park geologist, Dr. Greg Stock, highlighted. But we had some technical difficulties with his program and had to reschedule. So, stay tuned. We're hoping to get Dr. Greg Stock sometime in the near future. But there's a lot of great science that happens in national parks. You have a lot of us that are doing both history and cultural resource work, and then natural resource work. Yosemite is a really rich place to work, and I'm very proud of my colleagues.

Shelby Stanger:

We all know what it's like to be inspired by the landscape around us. Few trails stand out in North America like the Pacific Crest Trail. With 2,650 miles, the Pacific Crest Trail provides a wide variety of terrain over its epic expanse. When we're in front of ever-changing trails, you need your shoes to be able to step up to the challenge. It's that need for versatility that inspired Danner's new hiking shoe, the Trail 2650. Built to move quickly and confidently through the terrain of your choosing, the Trail 2650 can easily fill the role of a lightweight hiker or a trainer. For Danner, this meant looking to a lightweight materials that could withstand the demands of the trail while still keeping comfort and stability in mind. Whether you're out for a day hike, going on a backpacking trip, or simply navigating some technical terrain. Feeling stable when you're hiking allows you to focus on the world around you. Whenever the timing's right to get back out there, you'll want to be ready to say yes to adventure. The Trail 2650 keeps shifting weather conditions in mind, which is why it comes with a lightweight mesh lining, or a waterproof breathable GORE-TEX option. Keep your eyes focused on that next trek ahead of you knowing that the foundation you need to get out there can be found on your own two feet. The rest is up to you. To find out more and see the Trail 2650 series, visit danner.com or rei.com.

Shelby Stanger:

I'm really curious how you started to work at Yosemite. I mean, first of all, how does one become a park ranger? Because that seems like a wild idea of a job that a lot of listeners listening to this show might want to have one day.

Jamie Richards:

There's not one way to become a park ranger. In fact, there's many different types of parks that you could become a ranger in. There's local parks, state parks have park ranger jobs. Then in the United States, of course, we have the National Park Service for our national parks. When I was in college, I was inspired to try to get a job as a park ranger. I got an internship right out of my first year of undergrad. I started at a place called Fort Sumter National Monument, which is a historical site in South Carolina, the site of the first battle of the Civil War. My passion and interest in national parks really comes to I love to explore things. I love to learn about places, and people, and the stories behind the resource, behind the place that we're standing in today. For me, I love learning about plants, animals, places, people, and how it all connects together. Being someone interested in history and political science, I was really driven into the historical side of the National Park Service. Many people forget ... you think about your big parks. You have Yellowstone, Yosemite, your Grand Teton, but you forget there are over 400 national parks in our national park system. Many of them are historical sites that really make up the foundation of who we are as a people. Going into Washington D.C., all the monuments on the national wall, those are units of your National Park Service. Going into New York City, the story of Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty ... going into the Civil War sites, going to Gettysburg and Fort Sumter. These are places that really tell who we are as a people, where we came from. That's what I love is diving into the stories. But I also love the natural history. My first experience with a national park was one of my first memories. I was probably two or three years-old. I grew up in Colorado, and my dad taking me and my brother on a hiking trip, and hiking up to the headwaters of the Colorado River in Rocky Mountain National Park. And understanding that the Colorado River starts as this little trickle that comes out of the mountain here, and becomes the big river that trickles through Colorado into the west. Going out with my dad and going out with my parents as a young person hiking in the Colorado Rockies was really one of my first connections to national parks. It just continues to inspire me today.

Shelby Stanger:

I mean, as a female ranger, are there a lot of female park rangers out there?

Jamie Richards:

There are. In the past, there have not been as many. But today I'd say there's a pretty good balance of men and women in the park service. When you talk about being a park ranger, there's lots of different ways that you could become a park ranger. Like I said, there's not one set path. Part of it is to do some research, and to figure out yourself, and what you like to do. Do you want to be a back country ranger, and focus more on the wilderness and working with people who want to go and explore the wilderness? Are you someone who wants to consider law enforcement? Are you someone who likes to work with people and kids, and want to do education or interpretation? Are you a scientist? Do you have skills that you'd want to be working in a particular area, focusing on a particular research subject, whether it's area cultural history research, or natural history research? There's so many different paths that are open in the National Park Service. That's really one of the things that drew me to it. Not only the fact that there's many different opportunities. But like I said, there's over 400 places in the National Park Service that you could work. There really is a place and a job for almost everyone.

Shelby Stanger:

Yeah. I didn't realize how big our national park system was until I started traveling to New Zealand and around the United States just a few years ago. It's wild.

Jamie Richards:

Yeah. We are really blessed to have so many really diverse and exciting places that are part of our national park system. There's one in every state. You have some smaller sites that are historical sites, and then you have sites like Yosemite National Park, which span over 1,200 square miles and are approximately the size of the state of Rhode Island. There is really something for everyone.

Shelby Stanger:

What are the challenges of the job? Any difficult parts or hard parts?

Jamie Richards:

For me some of the challenges are some of the personal challenges. Learning to live, particularly if you want to work in some of the western parks that are farther away from urban areas/ learning to live without a lot of conveniences. And just to learn to go with the flow, and accept the internet connection may not be as fast as you'd like, and your cell connection may not be as good as you'd like. You may have to time how you connect with friends and family back home around when you can get to a place with good cell signal. So, learning just to balance your life between your job and keeping the things that you love in your personal life. Understanding that it may be a two hour commute to go shopping, and just learning how to schedule your days off to get those things done.

Shelby Stanger:

I can totally appreciate that and understand that. I've really enjoyed living in more rural areas, but it's very nice to have a grocery store within five minutes of your house that has everything you want.

Jamie Richards:

There are plenty of challenges that are associated with the job. But when I think about, "Okay, what are one of the challenges that people don't think about about being a park ranger?" For me personally, it's making your plans. You're only going to do one big shopping trip a month, or every other month. So, making sure that you know where you're going to go and you need, and you make a plan, because you can't just go five minutes down the road to the store. But the benefits that come with it are getting to interact with people from all over the world. Getting to interact with people from all over California. Having the opportunity to take a walk in the middle of my lunch break and connect with someone in the middle of a meadow that's never seen Yosemite Falls before. And having the opportunity to talk with someone about what they're experiencing, and share some of my own perspectives. Those are the connections that I really love that really drew me to the park service.

Shelby Stanger:

Any advice on how people could become a ranger?

Jamie Richards:

The first thing to do ... All jobs for the National Park Service are posted on a website, usajobs.gov. First, I'd recommend take some time to do some research on the different parks or different types of jobs that

you might be interested in. Do some research on what those jobs look like, and what the different skill sets that are required for those jobs. And take a look at USA Jobs to see what different opportunities might be available right now.

Shelby Stanger:

Awesome. Well, Jamie, I really appreciate your time today. I hope you get to see some bears and all sorts of cool critters roaming. Before I let you go, any advice on just how to really get the most out of visiting a national park? Because pretty soon, we're all going to get to visit our national parks again. I imagine with people being a little skeptical about air travel, more people than ever are going to visit our national parks, especially because we just want to be back in nature.

Jamie Richards:

Planning before you go on your national park trip is really key. Take time to research the park that you want to go to. Go to the park's website. That's the first place to start. Become immersed in at least the layout of the park, have a basic understanding of the different resources and things that you'd like to do while you're there. Have a game plan before you hit the entrance gate, and figure out what are some of the better days of the week to hit that park. Like Yosemite, I would say if you can try to come mid-week. Saturdays and Sundays are very busy. If you have the flexibility in your schedule, try to come Monday to Friday. The national parks are here, and we look forward to welcoming all the visitors back to our national parks. Until then, there's a lot of great ways to interact with your national park online right now. Please visit Yosemite National Park through our webcams, engage with us in our Facebook live programs. A great program that we've started is Draw With a Ranger. If you're someone who likes to bring out your artistic side, we're posting a lot of different prompts to draw different animals with a ranger. We have got some new face masks that you can print and share with your family, with your kids, and celebrate the different animals that are in your park right from your own front yard. Yosemite National Park is here for you, and we look forward to welcoming you back.

Shelby Stanger:

I personally can't wait to go adventuring to a national park near me, especially to Yosemite when I can. Before I do, I'll plan on researching the best times to visit, and what to do when I'm there. In the meantime, I'm loving following various national parks on social media to get my fix. You can follow Yosemite on the web at nps.gov/YOSE. Follow the park on both Instagram and Facebook at - YosemiteNPS. That's at Y-O-S-E-M-I-T-E N-P-S for pictures, videos, and activities to hold you over until you can go visit. Thank you all for listening to this show. As restrictions are being lifted in the COVID-19 pandemic, I wanted to thank all of you who are just hanging in there, and doing your part and your best to stay safe and stay home. Wild Ideas Worth Living is part of the REI Podcast Network. It's hosted by me, Shelby Stanger, written and edited by Annie Fassler, and produced by Chelsea Davis. Our executive producers are Paolo Mottola and Joe Crosby, and our presenting sponsor is Subaru. As always, I love it and we all love it when you subscribe, rate, and review the show wherever you can. We also read every single review, and we personally love the ones that make us laugh. It just means even more. Sending you all giant hugs ... virtually, of course. Remember, right now the best way to live wildly is by staying safe.