



The Fresh Waters of Marin

by Dick O'Donnell



White's Hill curls up in the sunshine

From the sunny ridges of southern Marin's rugged hill country are bright long views into the vine-covered country north and Mt. Diablo to the east. The cold ocean stretches gleaming away to the west, endless and terrible. At the foot of the ridges are damp forested canyons where it is always evening and where the fresh waters of Marin drop to the ocean.

The Winter

The type specimen for winter is northeastern and includes snow: snow wandering down in light flurries, piled deep on dipping fir branches, drifting in sharp wind; a period of sepulchral repose when life is suspended like an icicle from a birch twig. The Marin variety is a period of life rebounding, the rainy season when the grass greens up through last year's pale culms. In December the tidal flats are apoke with shorebirds, the dark dripping firs are fluttering with varied thrushes, timid and soft-spoken; bright-eyed kinglets and Audubon's warblers intently pick grubs off the oaks and cypress. Salmon, far fewer now, find their way to gravel nests to lay

their thousand eggs. But let's call it winter anyway, the time when the fresh waters of Marin, swirling east in thick gray clouds, accumulate. And if the rain falls sufficiently, it will keep the creek beds wet with sweet clear water year round.

By March all the hills are brilliant green with healthy new grass, and here and there fly the marbled-wings, orangetips, and a few other early butterflies. The mustard family is blossoming, birds are nesting, the sky is often clear and cool. Life is abundant during the wet months, and subdued, not as if stunned by extremes, but rather restrained, waiting patiently for the rain to finally stop. On clear days, if the sun remains low in the sky, its light weak and its warmth tepid, it is to protect the tender new life from its intense and desiccating glare. Soon enough, in June, the dry time will start and life will begin its retreat, and by August, wither and die.

The Serpentine

The area I've sketched here stretches from High Marsh on the back side of Mt. Tam to White's Hill. Most of it is serpentine chaparral except for White's