

BIRDS BATHING

By AUSTIN L. RAND
CURATOR OF BIRDS

THE toilet of most birds includes wetting their feathers in water and shaking the feathers and preening them with the bill. This bathing probably helps remove foreign matter from the birds' plumage and helps them keep it in good condition. In addition, it is probable that in summer the birds derive enjoyment from the coolness resulting from bathing. But birds bathe in cold weather as well as warm and have been recorded doing so when the temperature was only 10 or so degrees above zero.

The sparrows and robins that come about a bird bath usually hop right into the water. They squat down, fluttering their wings, and duck their heads into the water, splashing and rolling it over their backs. They may become quite drenched. Then they fly to some perch to sit and preen and dry their soaked feathers.

But some birds take shower baths. During a shower in late summer, marsh hawks can be seen sitting in the rain with wings spread, apparently enjoying the wetting the shower gives them, and a buzzard has been recorded as deliberately flying to an open perch in a rainstorm and sitting there with its wings spread, sometimes shaking its wings until the shower was over, when it flew to a sheltered place.

SPRINKLERS A BOON

The artificial showers of lawn sprinklers provide an opportunity to birds about our



Cartoon by Emily Rosenheim

gardens to take a shower bath in fine weather. A robin or a flicker may hop into the shower and squat there and indulge in bathing antics on the wet grass. Hummingbirds have been seen to fly into the dense spray of a lawn sprinkler and hover there for a moment, gradually assuming a vertical position and spreading the tail, then slowly settling to the ground, and finally "sitting" on the grass, body erect and tail spread out

fanwise, the wings continuing to vibrate slowly. In a few moments the bird rises into the air and then repeats the whole performance.

In wet tropical forest it is probable that many of the tree-top birds bathe in the water that collects on the surface of the leaves, pushing their way through clusters of wet leaves and over wet surfaces of others until they are as wet as if they had actually been bathing in water. This is not restricted to tropical birds, for even in our latitudes towhees have been recorded as bathing thus, and thrushes and flickers have been seen to rub themselves over the wet grass and then go through the actions of bathing followed by preening.

BATHING WHILE FLYING

Watching swifts or swallows coursing low over the surface of a lake and occasionally touching it leaves one with the impression sometimes that the birds are perhaps bathing rather than picking up insect food or drinking. With some other birds the habit of bathing from the wing is more definite. Sometimes drongo-shrikes that are sitting up on a perch near the edge of a pool will fly out over the water, drop directly into it with a little splash, and then rise and fly back to their perch, where they either repeat the performance or sit and preen their feathers.

POST-PRANDIAL ABLUTIONS

Ospreys have been recorded as bathing while on the wing in a rather striking manner. They have been seen flying along just above the surface of the water, then descending into it, adopting a sort of vertical American eagle attitude while flapping the wings, then rising a little, flying on, and repeating the process. It has been suggested that the osprey is washing its feet in this manner after finishing its meal. One observer makes this still more definite. He says that the osprey finishes its meal of fish on a perch in a tree and then flies low over the lake. Dropping both its legs, the osprey drags them through the water, flapping its wings all the time. Then it immerses its beak and head into the water while still flying along, apparently washing off the scales and slime that it had gotten on itself while making its meal of fish.

STAFF NOTES

Staff Taxidermist Leon L. Pray resigned from the staff of the Museum, effective November 19, to take a position with the Natural History Museum in Balboa Park, San Diego, California. For the present, the west-coast museum will use his services especially to reinstall disrupted zoological exhibits that were removed from the halls to facilitate use of the building as a naval hospital during the war. Mr. Pray had been a member of the



LEON L. PRAY

Chicago Museum staff since 1907 and was the inaugurator of several new taxidermic and exhibition techniques. His Museum exhibits include habitat groups of fishes, mammals, birds, and many individual mounts or reproductions. Most of the extensive exhibits in the Hall of Fishes (Hall O) are his work, and these include several outstanding undersea scenes, most spectacular of which is the Bahama coral reef and shark group. . . . Dr. Fritz Haas, Curator of Lower Invertebrates, recently was elected vice-president for 1949 of The American Malacological Union at its meeting in Pittsburgh. . . . Mr. Karl P. Schmidt, Chief Curator of Zoology, attended the meeting of the Society for the Study of Evolution in New York City. He presented the treasurer's annual report and made an address, "Modes of Evolution Discernible in the Classification of Snakes," at a symposium with the paleontological societies, which met jointly with the meetings of the Geological Society of America. . . . Mr. D. Dwight Davis, Curator of Vertebrate Anatomy, attended the same meeting, presenting an address under the title "Evolution Without Selection in the Dentition of Bears." . . . Dr. Rainer Zangerl, Curator of Fossil Reptiles, Dr. Robert H. Denison, Curator of Fossil Fishes, Mr. Robert Kriss Wyant, Curator of Economic Geology, and Mr. Bryan Patterson, Curator of Fossil Mammals, attended the meetings of the Geological Society of America in New York City last month. . . . Dr. Paul S. Martin, Chief Curator of Anthropology, and Mr. Donald Collier, Curator of South American Ethnology and Archaeology, will leave for Mexico City late in December to inspect archaeological material offered for possible exchange by the National Museum of Mexico. Expenses of the project, which will require three to five weeks, have been generously contributed by the Viking Fund of New York City. Mexican representatives have already inspected material here.

MERRY CHRISTMAS and HAPPY NEW YEAR

The Museum will be closed both Christmas and New Year's Day so Museum employees may spend the holidays with their families. These are the only days in the year when the Museum is not open.



Rand, Austin Loomer. 1948. "Birds Bathing." *Bulletin* 19(12), 5–5.

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