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Of the larger domestic animals, horses and cattle not only clean their own coats, but often assist each other in the case of "difficult" places, such as the neck. The cat, with others of her kind, has no such difficult places. She contrives to wash every part of her body, beginning by licking her coat upwards and backwards, as far as her tongue will reach, and finishing, as has been described, by rubbing the back of her neck and the parts behind her ears with carefully moistened paw. Horses and cattle, of course, cannot do this, so they wash for each other such parts as they cannot reach themselves, the horse, however, using his teeth where the cow employs her tongue for this purpose.

But the birds, after all, perform the most careful toilets of any creatures, and, curiously enough, they carry on their own dainty little persons "aids to beauty" which few of us would suspect them of possessing. Cold cream and vaseline, fuller's earth and pearl-powder, brilliantine and pomatum—all of these are in daily use among the birds, though few enjoy all of them at once. True, mud serves for cold cream and vaseline, and, mostly, common dust for pearl-powder and fuller's earth, but the brilliantine is actually carried by the birds that use it in a small and handy reservoir on the upper surface of the tail.

The brilliantine is used by the birds for anointing their plumage, and is really an oily secretion which is yielded by a tiny gland, shaped something like a heart and often tufted with feathers.

Many birds are provided with still another useful toilet accessory—a fine tooth-comb. And here we are presented with one of those paradoxes which Nature apparently delights in serving up for the puzzlement of inquiring students. The comb is really the serrated claw of the bird's third toe, and the puzzle lies in the seemingly haphazard way in which it has been given to some birds who could manage very well without it, while it is withheld from others to whom it would really be most useful. Herons and bitterns have it: so have cormorants and grebes, and barn-owls and night-jars, and it is present in other birds of species which differ even more widely.

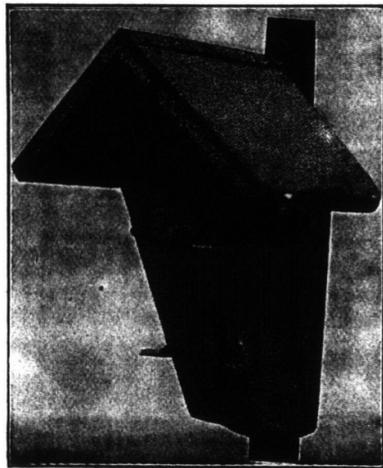
In the case of the night-jar the comb is particularly well formed, and naturalists have offered many ingenious suggestions to explain its extraordinary development. Some affirm that the bird uses it as a moustache-comb, for removing the tiny insects which, as he flies through the air, become entangled in the long straggling hairs about his mouth. This may indeed be the case, but if so, it is difficult to explain why other birds of the same family—the American night-hawk, for example—should have perfect combs, and yet at the same time be innocent of beard. The heron also is a beardless bird, but it has a comb little inferior to that of the night-jar; and, to complicate matters still further, the barn-owl is not only beardless, but is the only one of his kind that has a comb. All things considered, it is probable that the comb is intended for scratching purposes; at all events, the comb-claw is the one that birds always use for that unpleasing feature of their toilet.

The birds have, of course, other toilet accessories besides those which they carry with them. Water, as with us, is the most important necessary, though many birds prefer dust instead. A few only use both dust and water, and one of this minority is the sparrow, who, by the way, is rather particular as to the quality of the dust he chooses. He generally selects the driest and finest possible, such as is found on the surface of a sun-baked country road. Larks, pheasants and partridges are other familiar "dusting" birds, but whereas the lark shares with the sparrow a partiality for the dust of the road, the partridge prefers to scratch about among the roots of dry meadow grass, ruffling his plumage until the feathers are full of the cleansing earth.

Birds that bathe are equally fastidious, and, as a rule, nothing but newly fallen rain water thoroughly pleases them. Sparrows, chaffinches, robins, swallows, and martins are inveterate "wet-bobs;" rooks and wood-pigeons, too, bathe often, but always in the early morning, and so do the wild ducks, who, though they feed and live by the salt water, prefer to wash in running brooks or ponds, and will fly long distances inland in search of these freshwater pools and streams.

Goats, whose good qualities are being discovered by many people who only discredited them with "butting" propensities, are careful of themselves and spend time daily in their toilet. Their domestic utility is of proved value, and lately such writers as "Home Counties" have sung their praises. Squirrels are scrupulous in cleaning themselves, and it is one of the pretty spectacles of a wood to see a squirrel, high up in a tree, busily engaged in clearing himself of any brushwood which has adhered to his lithe little body. The coy look on his face when discovered adds to the charm of the situation. Rabbits kept in captivity are conscious of the need of cleaning their fur. A rabbit's foot, however, is not quite so adaptable as the hare's foot, to which allusion has been already made in this article.

From what has been said it will be seen that to bird and beast alike the question of toilet is a matter of immense importance. To some, indeed, it is of vital importance, for on its successful accomplishment depends, not only the comfort which helps to make their lives enduring, but, in many cases, the very fact of existence itself. Every student of animals and birds is surprised with the marvellous way in which Nature has anticipated their needs. And this is specially evident in the means provided for making their toilet.



Type of Bird House

In the case of water-fowl this oil-gland is exceedingly well developed, and the bird draws very freely on its supply of natural pomade when making its toilet; so, when we see a duck burrowing industriously among the feathers of her tail, we may be quite sure that she is engaged in "tapping" her supply of natural oil for titivating purposes.

But the use of brilliantine is not confined to water-fowl; a select coterie of land-birds indulges in it also, among them being the hoopoe and the great hornbill. In the case of the hornbill the secretion acts as a staining pigment, and the yellow color of the neck and wings is entirely due to frequent applications of this natural pomade. This use of a "hair-dye" on the part of a bird is a toilet secret which, so far as is known, is shared by no other creature that flies or creeps.

The powder-puff is another toilet appurtenance widely used by birds, and it is responsible for the delicate bloom which may be seen on the plumage of many species. The powder is produced from certain feathers which decay or crumble away as they grow, and among the birds which carry it are the cockatoos, grey parrots, and most of the herons. Pigeons, too, are powdery birds, as any one knows who is in the habit of handling them much. The function of powder and oil in birds is obviously one and the same—to throw off the wet. At all events, it is a matter of common observation that among land-birds the powder-bearing species do not get nearly so wet in a downpour as others less fortunately equipped. Many of them, indeed, especially the pigeons, appear to enjoy a good shower quite as heartily as do ducks and other water-fowl.