

An Interesting Peep at Nature's "Beauty Shop"

By G. M. Mackness.

IN an interesting little study of bird life, published a year or two ago, one of our most observant naturalists said that birds deserve to rank as the most refined class of living beings, if only for the attention they bestow on their toilet.

"They are the only creatures," he observes, "which bathe for cleanliness' sake; beasts may lick themselves, or wallow luxuriously for pleasure—in mud as readily as in water—but deliberate washing in water is purely a bird custom."

Now, while the toilet is undoubtedly a more elaborate affair with the birds than the beasts, it is hardly fair to assume that the lickings and the wallowings of our four-footed friends are indulged in for no other purpose than that of mere enjoyment. The mud bath of the elephant is an excellent case in point. It serves a very practical purpose indeed, and is carried out in so thoroughly sensible a fashion that we can hardly doubt its importance, from the elephant's point of view, as a toilet accessory. The elephant, as we know, has one of the thickest skins imaginable, but in spite of this, in his wild state he frequently

graceful creatures carry, fixed to their front flippers, a sort of little comb, which ordinarily they use for smoothing the fur on their faces. But in warm weather they use this comb-tipped flipper as a fan, waving it to and fro in the most natural manner possible. Thousands of them have been seen at once on a hot day in the "rookeries" of the Pribilof Islands and elsewhere, all lying on their sides and busily plying these natural fans. Showmen have taken advantage of this habit to organize "seals' orchestras," and have taught their seals to beat tambourines and cymbals—a task less difficult than it appears, if we bear in mind that the movements are practically those which the creatures make when fanning themselves on their native rocks.

Among the commoner animals the palm for careful grooming must be awarded to the opossums. They are wonderfully particular about their personal appearance, or perhaps it would be more correct to say their bodily comfort, and are models of animal cleanliness. Indeed, their ablutions seem to occupy most of their waking hours, and the attention they bestow on their



Meadowlark

suffers great annoyance from a species of tick, whose unwelcome attentions at length become more than even his tough hide can endure. To rid himself of his tormentors he therefore takes a mud bath, and this is how he does it.

Seeking some half-dried pool, the mud of which is still soft, the elephant lies down and rolls about in it, wallowing after the manner of a pig in similar surroundings. Having plastered himself with mud, he comes out, and taking up his position in the full glare of the sun, stands motionless for hours, until his slimy covering becomes dry and hard. Then, by sudden muscular efforts, he breaks up this coating of mud, which falls to the ground in great flakes, carrying with it all the parasites that were on his body, and which had become imbedded in the hardened earth. And so the sagacious creature moves off, freed for a time from his minute tormentors.

Ordinarily, however, the elephant takes his bath at night, and it is only on an exceptionally hot day that he will bathe, when the sun is high. On such occasions he either submerges himself entirely, or else stands in the water and spurts it through his trunk over his head and shoulders, after which he retires to the foot of some shady tree, where, if we may believe what travellers tell us, he will sometimes industriously fan himself with a branch in order to keep off the flies.

This use of the fan as a toilet aid may or may not be true in the case of the elephant; it is certainly in force among the fur-bearing seals of the north. By a beautiful provision of Nature these

hands and feet in particular is really quite remarkable, for they wash them, on an average, every two or three minutes throughout the day.

Lions and tigers wash themselves just as a cat does. With the tongue they first moisten thoroughly the soft, india-rubber-like ball of the front paw, and then pass it daintily over the face and behind the ears. In this way the foot serves both as a sponge and a brush, the rough tongue acting as a comb for smoothing the rest of the body. Rats and hares also use their feet as sponges and brushes: in fact, there is no more perfect natural brush in the world than the hare's foot, and for that reason it is always employed by the actor when making-up for the stage.

Dogs are remarkably quick and clever in performing their toilet. Most of the work is done with the tongue, but sporting dogs after a heavy day with the guns through mud and rain, have a natty way of using a thick bush, or the side of a haystack, as a kind of rough towel for preliminary cleaning purposes. On reaching home they lose no time in completing their toilet, and every sportsman knows that mud or dirt on a dog's coat on the morning following a day's shoot is a pretty sure sign that the animal has been over-tired the day before: nothing but excessive fatigue would account for such slovenly scamping of his toilet. Indeed, so pronounced is the instinct of cleanliness in every kind of sporting dog that some of them will even strike work before the shooting is over in order to give themselves a good "clean-up" before they become utterly exhausted.



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