

## FROM FIELD AND STUDY

**A California Pigmy Owl Bathes.**—A most interesting exhibition of a California Pigmy Owl bathing took place at Altadena, Los Angeles County, California, on the morning of November 16, 1925, under conditions that seem worth recording.

The afternoon of Saturday, November 14, had been set for the biennial meeting in Southern California of the Board of Governors of the Cooper Ornithological Club. Several members had gone from the San Francisco Bay region to attend the meeting and to pass a day or two among our very hospitable friends of the south country. On Sunday night three of us, Joseph Grinnell, Tracy I. Storer and myself, enjoyed the genial hospitality of Mr. and Mrs. J. Eugene Law at their charming place in the outskirts of Altadena. This home has been made a very attractive spot for humans to foregather in, and it has also been made equally alluring to a large number of avian guests, most of which carry around a gift from Mr. Law's hands, in the form of a numbered anklet, as a constant memento of their first visit.

On Monday morning, November 16, Mrs. Law was astir betimes, and the rest of us were in various stages of arisement, when Storer and I heard her call out to her husband that there was a pigmy owl at a drinking fountain by the living room window. We made a dash for the living room and found Messrs. Law and Grinnell gazing on the scene with rapt attention.

A few feet below us and some ten feet away was the bath—a shallow Indian mortar—beneath a bush. The pigmy owl (*Glaucidium gnoma*, subspecies *californicum* in all probability) was thoroughly enjoying itself, unconscious of the group of fascinated watchers. The owl was wading about in the water, which was not over an inch and a half deep, sometimes ducking its head and then shaking off the water that rolled down its back, then again dipping forward so as to bathe its abdomen and breast. At times it would slowly turn around, seemingly not quite decided just what to do next, or it would stand still for a few seconds and then switch its tail sideways in the water with a remarkably quick action. Once it stood still with its back toward us for some little time, now turning its head on one side until looking directly backwards, then snapping its head around anteriorly to the other side until the posterior limit of action was reached, all with such rapidity that our eyes could scarcely follow the movement. During this time, some five or six minutes, the owl kept its feathers so fluffed out as to make it appear to be much larger than it actually was.

Meanwhile, in timid wonder, there was gathered around the bather another group of spectators—Valley Quail, Anna Hummingbirds, Gambel Sparrows, Golden-crowned Sparrows, Spurred Towhees, Anthony Brown Towhees, Audubon Warblers, Pallid Wren-tits and possibly other birds, all in characteristic attitudes watching the proceedings with suppressed excitement, with the hummingbirds poised on wing in front of the bath.

Finally, apparently deciding that it had done its duty in the ablutionary line, the little owl flew up to a bare branch three or four feet above the water and perched there, wagging its tail from side to side, possibly to shake off any remaining water. In about half a minute it flew into the upper part of a large oak tree near by, where it remained for some minutes before finally flying over and pitching down the edge of the bluff behind the house, followed by some twenty of the avian observers of its recent bathing activities.

Connected with this happening were some rather singular coincidences. One was that this was the first observed appearance on the place of this species of owl. Mr. Law had noticed occasional disturbances among the bird population there, accompanied by notes of a remonstrative nature, which he could not at the time account for. He now entertains the belief that these disturbances were caused by the presence, unknown to him, of this individual owl that so nonchalantly made itself at home on his premises that Monday morning. Another coincidence was the fact that the only previous record in *The Condor* touching upon the bathing of a pygmy owl (Mailliard, *Condor*, xxiv, 1922, p. 31) was published by one of the party present on this occasion. If there are any other published records of similar performances by members of this genus they must be few and far between, for it is a performance probably rarely seen by human observers.—JOSEPH MAILLIARD, *California Academy of Sciences, San Francisco, March 29, 1926.*