

Sun-bathing in the Blackbird (*Turdus merula*)

by Margaret Offen, Southgate, England*

The Blackbird (*Turdus merula*) is much given to sun-bathing. I noticed this behaviour first in the garden last summer, and thought the bird was injured or ill, for it lay over on its side, wings outstretched and drooping, head sagging, beak open. When I went out to investigate, it quickly flew off, uttering its typical loud protesting call.

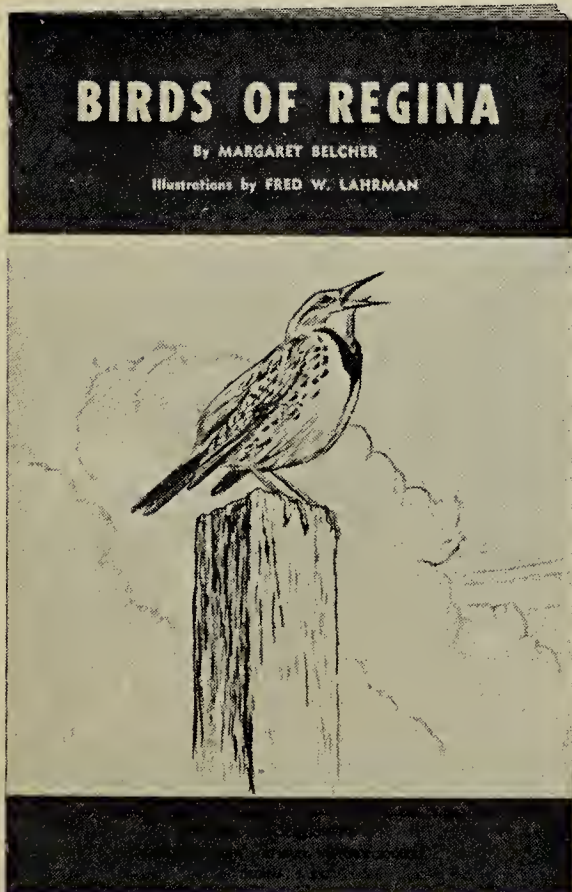
Since that day I have watched many Blackbirds sunning themselves. There are several very slight hollows in the lawn in the lee of two small fruit trees which seem to be the favored spots, although occasionally the cement walk is also used. As Mrs. Hauser observes in her article, the feathers are raised, wings spread, tail fanned out, beak open. The position is altered frequently, though the hotter the day the less the bather seems to move. I noticed that the birds indulged in prolonged and rather vigorous scratching of the head and neck also, and when they settle down again there is often a nestling, half-roll motion suggestive of dust bathing.

A number of times a female bird has been watched having a lengthy bath without water, dust or sun. In our rock garden on a flat spot there is an old photographic developing tray filled with water. Beside it, is a clump of Rose of Sharon (*Hypericum*) about seven inches high and very leafy. The bird comes and settles herself on the plant, which bends sufficiently to spread around her, and then she goes through all the motions of a real bath in water, dipping head and tail, fluttering the wings, bobbing, and shaking as if throwing water over herself. She will do this for long minutes at a time, hop out and have a drink from the water-filled tray (Blackbirds and House Sparrows seems to be perpetually thirsty), and return to her "bath."

There is no dew on the leaves when she comes, so I assume that she is indulging in a sort of dry cleaning. When she is finished she flies up into the plum tree to preen, the same as the Blackbirds who actually bathe.

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