

Shining Cuckoo in Grey Warbler's Nest

By H. J. PAYNE .

MR. PAYNE, of Wairoa, having heard Dr. Falla during one of our weekly Nature Question Time Sessions from 2YA describe the paucity of evidence up to date as to the actual method employed by the shining cuckoo to deposit its egg in a grey warbler's nest, has sent us the following report of his observations.

When I lived in the country and while working with the sheep, I used to boil the billy at the one spot each day for lunch.

In a manuka bush a grey warbler was building her nest. I watched her every day until the nest was finished. She then had a spell for two days before the first egg was laid. She laid three eggs, one each day. On the fourth day I did my beat the other way round so arrived at the nest site at least two hours earlier. I went to the nest and there were four eggs. I sat down to my lunch and after I had been there a little while, still watching the nest, I saw a bird fly straight to the nest so I crept up ever so

quietly and there was a shining cuckoo in the nest with her bill sticking out. I withdrew a few feet, still watching the nest and in about two minutes out came the cuckoo, and on looking in the nest I saw five eggs, four warbler's, whiteish, with pink spots, the odd egg a wee bit bigger, whiteish with light greenish streaks; the nest did not appear damaged in any way.

I still kept watch on the nest every day and in about 14 days the eggs all hatched, five all told. All went well for four days and then I found a young warbler dead on the ground below the nest; the same thing happened every day until only the cuckoo was left.

COVER PICTURE (From a Water-Colour by the late Miss L. A. Daff)

Bellbird (Korimako)

Anthornis melanura

THE bellbird rapidly decreased before the onset of civilisation, until by 1890 in most places it was very rare. Within the last thirty years, especially in parts of the South Island, it has so increased even in settled and urban districts that it seems that the bird has adapted itself to the new conditions sufficiently to ensure its perpetuation. One factor in this is undoubtedly the variety of its tastes as regards food. In the winter it feeds largely on insects found on the furrowed trunks of broadleaf, under the papery bark of fuchsia and native holly, or on the branches of all kinds of introduced trees. Berries are also eaten, especially those of coprosma, fuchsia, cabbage-tree, and mistletoe. The native ivy tree, New Zealand flax, ratas, Australian banksias, acacias, and eucalypts, tree lucerne, and red-hot poker, all have flowers bearing nectar accessible to a bird with a brush tongue. But it is when feeding on fuchsia or kowhai

that the birds give most pleasure, adding acrobatics to their other charms as they hang down in all sorts of grotesque attitudes in their efforts to insert their bills into the drooping flowers. Their fondness for nectar enables us to attract bellbirds to our homes by exposing coloured tins of sweetened water.

The song of the bellbird has much in common with that of the tui, even to the whisper songs, jangles, sneezes, gutturals, and chuckles. It is comparatively silent during the noontide heat, unless some few individuals meet on a tree or shrub that offers a tempting show of honey-bearing blossoms. A note or two is briefly sounded, the numbers rapidly increase, and after much noisy fluttering of wings a gush of clanging melody bursts forth from a score of quivering throats forming a concert of unharmonious yet most pleasing sounds. Towards dusk bellbirds utter a succession of notes like the tolling of some distant bell.