

THE TUI

"The tui loves to think he is the boss bird of the bush", as one writer has said, and I think there could not be a better description of this energetic bird, who loves nothing better than a chase and will drive even the much larger native pigeon from a favourite tree.

One can't help liking this gay, lively songster, and if we can induce him to haunt our garden by growing his favourite berries or honey-bearing trees, we'll have endless pleasure and entertainment ahead.

Now, at first glance, the tui appears to be black, but when seen in a bright light the shining greenish-purple reflections are clearly seen. The white tuft of feathers at the throat makes the tui easy to recognise. Young birds are blackish-brown and do not have the tuft at their throats.

Its favourite food is honey, but it also enjoys berries and eats insects. It gathers the honey from many nectar-bearing trees and shrubs, by means of a fine brush at the end of its tongue, and it can often be seen clinging upside down, dipping the honey from a flower.

You will notice that it is an altogether harmless and useful bird. Its flight, which is rapid and graceful, can be recognised by its up-and-down curves, and the rustling of its wings can be plainly heard. On fine days two or more tuis may be seen playing in the air, chasing, twisting, and almost turning somersaults in their gay flight.

The tui, which is our finest song bird, is also an excellent mimic, and seems to be able to imitate a great variety of sounds, including the songs of other birds. Though it may sing at any time, its favourite times are the early morning and evening.

The early settlers nicknamed it the "parson bird", no doubt on account of the tuft of white feathers at its throat and perhaps, too, when it puffed out its feathers and started to sing, for the way it would bend its head, first one way and then another as though it were addressing a crowd.

While the female is sitting, the male will be on guard and he will often sing to her from some high tree near by. When the babies have hatched the parents will protect them most bravely and no other bird will be allowed near the nest.

Mr. Turbott tells us in his "New Zealand Bird Life" that "young tuis are perhaps the most curious of all young birds and will form bands of twenty or more apparently for no

other purpose than that of roaming the bush to stare at everything in it".

There is a fine picture of the tui on the new poster of the Forest and Bird Protection Society. See the May issue of "Forest and Bird", page 6.

HONEY-BEARING PLANTS

Because there is an article on the tui in this issue, I thought some of you might wish to grow plants to attract this delightful bird.

There is the spring-flowering kowhai which grows into a tree with beautiful golden, honey-filled flowers. It may be grown from seeds or cuttings.

Pohutukawa, which thrives best in the north and by the sea, is a lovely red-flowered tree.

Flax, which you'll know, can be started from the small plants growing around a full-grown bush. There are some attractive varieties with beautiful coloured leaves, bronze, variegated, and pinkish. These flaxes are most suitable for the garden because they do not grow as large as the wild one.

Red-hot-pokers have honey too. These make beautiful garden plants and are easy to grow. There are many varieties, even a magnificent winter-flowering one called Zululandia Winter Cheer. There are so many "pokers" that one could have different varieties in flower at most times of the year. Ask your nearest plant shop or nurseryman about these plants.

OUR WONDERFUL BIRDS

Did you know :

That the kiwi is the only bird in the world that has its nose at the tip of its beak?

That the huia's are the only birds in the world where the male and female have markedly different bills? The male bird's beak is short and slightly curved, and that of the female is twice as long. Thus the female can push her long bill far into a hole first made by her mate.

That the wrybill plover is the only bird in the world with its beak on one side? This helps it in searching for food under stones.

RARE BIRDS REDISCOVERED

One bird that was believed to be extinct, and four others classed as very rare, have been rediscovered in an undisturbed scrub forest at an altitude of 4,000 ft. on the island of Kauai, in the Hawaiian Islands.