

JUNIOR SECTION*

The Fantail Is a Fascinating Little Bird

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Photo: G. J. H. Moon

Fantail with young birds in nest.

The fantail or piwakawaka was well known to the old-time Maori, who often referred to a restless person as a "flitting fantail". A Maori saying about this bird is that a person with evil habits is like a fantail—nervous, restless, and uneasy.

The first fantail seen by Europeans was a black one and was discovered during Cook's second voyage to New Zealand. Other specimens were secured and taken back to Europe by Dieffenbach and the French expedition under d'Urville about 1840.

Three species of fantails are found in New Zealand—the South Island pied fantail, the North Island pied fantail, and the black fantail. The South Island pied fantail is a dark olive brown on the wings, with a sooty black forehead and brownish black tail feathers with white shafts and tips. The

underneath of the tail is almost clear white; the bill is black and the feet blackish brown. The North Island pied fantail is slightly paler. More distinctive than the pied fantails is the black variety found in the North and South Islands. Its general plumage is sooty black, with a rusty tinge on the back. This variety has a distinctive white ear spot.

Favourite Hunting Ground

The fantail gathers where insects are plentiful, one of its favourite hunting grounds being over small bush streams where in summer insect life is abundant. In winter these birds are often seen in large numbers fluttering after flies through the clouds of steam rising from the thermal lakes at Rotorua. Fearless and friendly, fantails will often follow a traveller through the bush, giving an amazing exhibition of aerial gymnastics in pursuit of flies disturbed from the undergrowth by his movements. They will often alight on one's hat,

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