

the swallow family from New Zealand it might be asked what agency we have here to prevent the increase of such pests to intolerable proportions. Such an agency is undoubtedly to be found in the two species of fantail, the black (*Rhipidura fuliginosa* Sparr.) and the pied (*R. flabellifera* Gm.), which subsist almost entirely on flying-insects captured in their native element by a succession of the most amazing evolutions, rendered possible largely by the large fanlike tail which has guided the choice of the vernacular name. Few birds are better known to New-Zealanders. It will suffice for a description to indicate that the black species has deep sooty plumage and is far commoner in the South Island, while the beautiful pied kind is widely distributed over both Islands.

The fantails are among the tamest and most confiding of birds, and it is probably largely on this account that indications are visible of a growing sentimental regard for these birds, comparable to the affection displayed in England for the famous "robin redbreast." In the case of the fantails, for once sentiment is guided well, by the soundest if unconscious logic, and it must be obvious that such a sentiment is of incomparably more protective value to the birds concerned than all the legislation in the world. There can be few more efficient or better-equipped fly-catchers than the fantails. The bill is capable of opening to a considerable extent, and when so opened the sides of the gape thus displayed are fringed by an impenetrable hedge of stiff bristles, forming a fly-trap from which escape must be hopeless.

During the summer months fantails show a decided predilection for the vicinity of water, where flying-insects and particularly mosquitoes are well known to abound. In such situations, frequently on a slender bough directly overhanging the water, the fantails love to build their quite unmistakable wine-glass-shaped nest—a structure of the very neatest workmanship, with shallow cavity often lined with the shining down of young tree-fern fronds, and a tapering bottom, bound with spider-webs and resembling an inverted gnome's cap. The small, whitish, somewhat shortly oval eggs are blotched with pale brown, chiefly towards the larger end.

When feeding their nestlings both parents work extremely hard, returning time after time with beak crammed full of minute flies. One of the writers observed last season a nest of young pied fantails to which the parents brought no fewer than fourteen beakfuls in forty minutes, and this in spite of the presence of the observer, only a yard away, quite unhidden.

In winter, even more than in summer, the fantails show themselves in a considerable degree adapted to the alien conditions of settlement. It is no uncommon occurrence during the winter months for them to enter houses and other buildings, hawk systematically for house-flies through the rooms, and finally depart with the grandest nonchalance. We have even an authentic record of a fantail which was regularly let in at the front door of a dwellinghouse and suffered to depart when it had cleared from the premises its daily catch of flies. In Australia a fantail very closely related to our own is of the greatest use in that it destroys the sheep-maggot blowflies which constitute there such a serious pest to the farmer. Doubtless the same good service is rendered by our New Zealand species.