

# THE TUI

By "CAFFE," with wood engravings by E. Mervyn Taylor

CAPTAIN COOK, on his second voyage, in 1773, described the tui as "not more remarkable for the beauty of its plumage than for the sweetness of its voice." Unlike many of the distinctive bush-dwelling birds which the early settlers found in New Zealand, the tui is still a common bird in most parts of the Dominion where small patches of bush are left, and may occasionally be attracted by honey-producing shrubs and flowers to the parks and gardens of the larger towns.

The tui is a member of the "honey-eaters"—a group of birds which has its headquarters in the Australian-Papuan

area—but it is only during a few months of the year that honey forms an important item in the tui's diet. In the autumn most kinds of forest berries are eagerly consumed, and even the fruit of the "stink-wood," the foul-smelling shrub of the mountain undergrowth, is not disdained.

When berries fail, a variety of insects are eaten, but it is in spring, when the native plants begin to bloom, that the tui justifies its classification as a honey-eater. Favourite food plants are the kowhai, the rata, and, in the North, the pohutukawa.

The tui's glossy dark plumage, shining with green and purplish metallic reflections, is perhaps seen at its best when a party is feasting in the golden crown of a flowering kowhai. To get the last drop of nectar from a pendant bloom the birds frequently indulge in acrobatic displays in which the body is held vertical, head downwards, while the beak is twisted up into the honey-laden flower.

The song of the tui consists of a variety of musical throaty whistles, interspersed with less pleasing cries and guttural croakings. There is frequently a confusion in people's minds between the song of the tui and that of the bellbird. The songs are certainly similar, and the differences are hard to put into words, but it is possible for the practised ear to distinguish most of the notes of the two birds without much trouble. The tui's repertoire is perhaps more varied, he covers a greater range of octaves, and has a rounder tone to his whistle than has the bellbird's tinkling chime.

The tui builds a massive open nest of similar style to that of the blackbird, but usually lines the cup with a few feathers. The eggs, usually four, are a delicate pale pink with spots and blotches of darker pink clustering around the larger end.

A tui whose picture was taken proved an interesting subject to the photographers, who spent an afternoon crouched in a "hide" behind their

