

Australian Raven (?).—On January 3, as some of us were watching kakas, harriers, pigeons and tuis sporting in the upward currents or flying out from the steep faces around the summit, a large black bird of corvine appearance, passed along the line of high inland cliffs. Being familiar with ravens in Europe, I had no doubt that this was a large member of the *corvidae*. What may have been the same bird was reported in October, 1945, from Mokohinau by Major Buddle (O.S.N.Z., Vol. ii., p. 70) and from Little Barrier by Turbott (O.S.N.Z., Vol. ii, p. 106). This trans-Tasman straggler, if that is what it is, should not find it hard to survive on these islands.

INTRODUCED BIRDS.

Song Thrush (*Turdus ericetorum*).—Occasional snatches of song were heard from the few which have colonised the island. They were shy and elusive.

Blackbird (*T. merula*).—Rarely seen, but occasionally singing even as late as January 5. Around Auckland most blackbird song has ceased before Christmas. On Little Barrier and Hen Island the small blackbird populations continue singing about a fortnight later. A nest near the camp contained two eggs. It may have been our arrival that caused the birds to desert. Another nest (old) was found some way inland.

Hedge Sparrow (*Prunella modularis*).—This species had not previously been recorded from Hen Island. We found it among the scrub on the north-western slopes.

Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*).—Though an alert lookout was kept, only one was seen.

PIED FANTAILS.

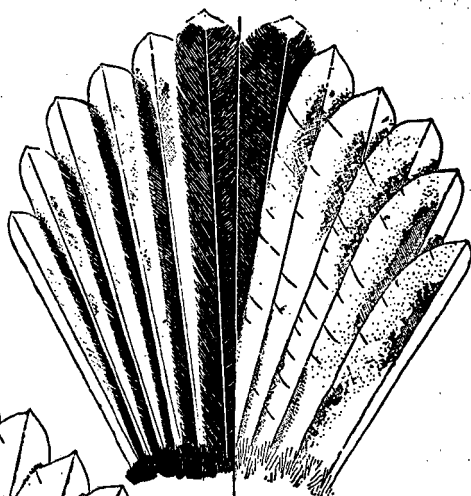
By C. A. Fleming, Wellington.

The New Zealand fantails are an example of valid subspecies differing in quite minor details of plumage pattern. Recently, I have had occasion to re-examine the differences between fantails from North, South and Chatham Islands, and prepared the accompanying sketches to show the characteristic tail pattern of each of the three races, which are a good introduction to the phenomenon of geographic sub-species in a common bird which most observers know and recognise throughout the country as the pied fantail, without thought of the characters that distinguish birds on either side of Cook Strait.

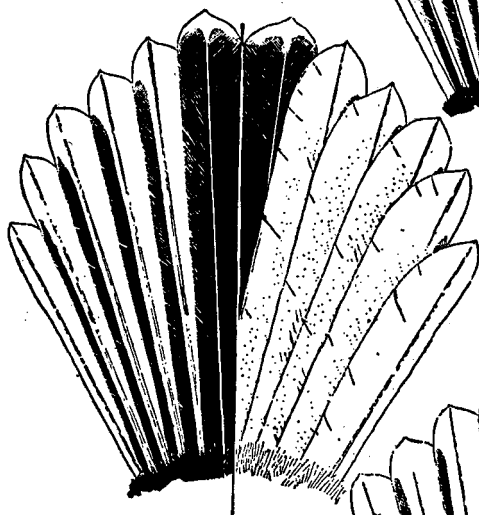
New Zealand fantails are races of a species which ranges throughout Australia and in Tasmania, Norfolk, Lord Howe, New Hebrides, New Caledonia, Banks and the Solomon Islands, and, although the species bears the name given by Sparrman to a black fantail collected in New Zealand during Cook's second voyage, it is probable that it had its origin in Australia and has spread outwards quite lately (but in pre-historic time) to its Pacific outposts (including New Zealand) where the separate races arose in isolation.

Black fantails are common in the South and rather rare in the North Island. For many years they were considered a different species from the pied fantail, but in both islands they interbreed freely with pied birds, so that modern students of bird classification consider the black birds to belong to the same species and sub-species as the pied fantails they live with, and no more worthy of a separate scientific name than are black rabbits or blue budgerigars. How the North and South Island

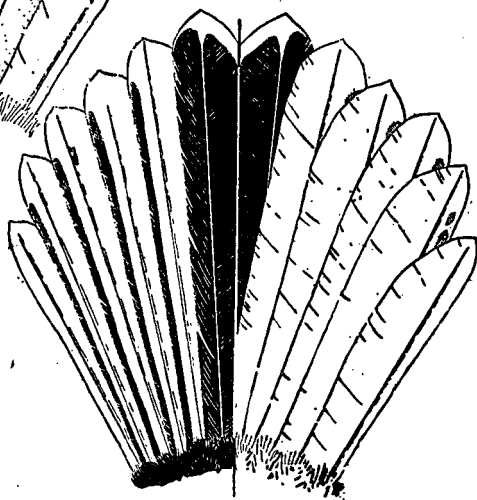
NORTH ISLAND FANTAIL



SOUTH ISLAND FANTAIL



CHATHAM ISLAND FANTAIL



NEW ZEALAND PIED FANTAILS.

Diagrams showing the pattern of upper (left) and lower (right) surfaces of tail in three subspecies: North Island (*Rhipidura fuliginosa placabilis*, Bangs), South Island (*Rhipidura fuliginosa fuliginosa* (Sparman)), and Chatham Island (*Rhipidura fuliginosa penitus*, Bangs).

fantails acquired and maintain their two plumage phases is a matter for speculation. "Polymorphism," or its special case "dimorphism," is not uncommon among birds, and although New Zealand has, perhaps, more than its share of dimorphic species (three species of shag, oystercatchers, stilt, fantail), such Northern Hemisphere birds as the guillimot, fulmar and Arctic skua remind us of its widespread occurrence.

The pied fantails of New Zealand show consistent geographic variation in tail pattern. The North Island fantail (*Rhipidura fuliginosa placabilis*, Bangs) has a restricted white tip to its central dark tail feathers, the outer vane of second to fifth feathers is black, almost or quite in to the shaft, and the inner vanes are washed with dusky grey, making the under surface of the tail much darker than that of other New Zealand sub-species.

The South Island fantail (*Rhipidura fuliginosa fuliginosa* (Sparman)) has larger white tips to its central tail feathers, a narrow white strip between shafts and black outer margins of the second to fifth feathers, and the under tail surface almost clear, being washed with a pale buff in freshly-moulted birds. The breast tends to be a darker and warmer rufous buff, the tail is about 5 millimeters longer, and the wing 3 to 4 millimeters longer than in North Island birds.

Many sub-specific differences cannot be seen in the field, but North Island observers can readily detect the whiter under-tails and darker breasts of South Island fantails, which also look a little larger than the North Island birds they know well. Keuleman's well-known figure in Buller's "Birds" clearly shows a South Island pied fantail (with the tail pattern rather carelessly and assymmetrically drawn) but Lily A. Daff's excellent plate in "New Zealand Forest-inhabiting Birds" is a faithful representation of North Island fantails.

The Chatham Island fantail (*Rhipidura fuliginosa penitus* Bangs) is essentially similar to the South Island sub-species, but has an even whiter under tail surface (judging, however, by worn specimens) and has narrower black margins to the side feathers of the tail, so that a broad strip of white margins the shaft. The whiter under-tail was conspicuous in the field, to me, familiar with the North Island bird, but I doubt if it would seem so to an observer brought up with South Island fantails.

Some of the fantails at the Three Kings Islands (Turbott and Buddle, Rec. Auck. Inst. Mus., vol 3, pp. 330-332, see N.Z. Bird Notes, vol. 3, p. 166) have a band of white-tipped foreneck feathers and paler underparts than mainland birds and may be a fourth sub-species in the making.

The differences between North and South Island pied fantails have a bearing on the status of black fantails in the North Island. If, as some have thought, black fantails which turn up on the north side of Cook Strait are waifs from the South Island, then South Island pied fantails should get blown across too, and if they breed in the North Island (as black fantails certainly do) they would presumably affect size and tail pattern of Wellington pied fantails, which, however, are as consistently grey-tailed as Auckland birds. Until a South Island pied fantail is recorded in the North Island, it is best to consider North Island black fantails members of the North Island sub-species, in which the black phase is rare, amounting to probably less than 2 per cent. of the population in Wellington, but to only a fraction of this percentage in other North Island districts (including East Cape, Auckland and Hokianga).

This note is based primarily on the study of a few skins, supplemented by examination of additional specimens in the Dominion Museum. The figure is based on individual specimens of each race, but variation is small and there is no complete overlap in the distinctive characters.