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NEST HELPERS AT A WHITE-BREASTED WOODSWALLOW
NEST

Between 2 and 22 December, 1972, I had a White-breasted Woodswallow (*Artamus leucorhynchus*) nest under daily observation. It was located in the fork of a branch high in a raintree (*Samanea saman*) in Gordon Street, Suva, Fiji, being well sheltered by the canopy, unlike those mentioned by Wood (1926: 131) which were exposed to the sun on the tops of pandanus trees. This raintree has been a favourite woodswallow roost for several years, it being usual to see up to half a dozen birds performing noisy aerobatics over the canopy as the evening darkens, or perched side by side on a branch, chattering loudly and preening each other. I have often seen woodswallows driving Fiji Goshawks (*Accipiter rufitorques*) and even a Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) from its vicinity by particularly bold attacks. The falcon definitely kills adult woodswallows on occasion, while the goshawk almost certainly takes their young.

When first noticed the nest contained three small nestlings. One disappeared on 8 December, while a second was found crushed on the road beneath the tree on 20 December, having left the nest with its companion several days earlier, to roost on nearby branches. The surviving nestling fledged successfully and was regularly seen on powerlines in the vicinity, soliciting adults for food.

Mayr (1945: 97) stated that "both parents take part in rearing the young" but the situation at this White-breasted Woodswallow nest was more complex, four birds caring for the young during part of the nesting cycle.

Numerous instances in which more than two birds were in attendance at the nest were witnessed on eight different days between 2 and 14 December, by which latter date the two surviving young were beginning to venture out along the branch supporting the nest. No more than two birds were seen caring for the young after this.

In the instances of multiple care mentioned above, three and often four woodswallows were in attendance at the nest within minutes and sometimes seconds of each other. Indeed, on more than one occasion three birds came in simultaneously with food, and had to queue up to feed the young, while the fourth bird, relieved of its watch, hawked out in search of more insects. All four birds were seen to brood and feed the nestlings, remove their faeces from the nest, and maintain guard duties, fiercely harrassing Indian and Jungle Mynahs (*Acridotheres tristis*, *A. fuscus*) and Red-vented Bulbuls (*Pycnonotus cafer*) which moved too close to the nest, but ignoring a Red-headed Parrot Finch (*Erythrura cyanovirens*), which often perched nearby. In one skirmish a woodswallow actually collided with a mynah in mid-air, apparently accidentally, but neither bird was hurt. The woodswallows would even dive at dogs passing beneath the tree, skimming in silently just over their backs and rising with an aggressive chatter, sometimes clumsily aided by a pair of Indian Mynahs, which were nesting in a hole in the trunk.

Two of the woodswallows seemed regularly to hunt as a pair, while the others hunted individually. All seemed efficient hunters. Food brought in included a variety of insects, among which I could recognise moths, grasshoppers, dragon flies and a big cockroach. Large insects were battered on branches and stripped of their heads and wings before being fed to the young. They were sometimes dropped during this hammering, but were invariably recaptured before they hit the ground, either by the woodswallow concerned, or by one of the others.

As with most Fiji birds, few nesting dates are recorded for the White-breasted Woodswallow. I have seen one of a pair carrying grass in its bill as early as mid-May, but the main nesting period probably begins in late August to early September. Belcher (1931, painting No. 6) gives this as the nesting season, while Blackburn (1971: 168) recorded nesting and courtship feeding on Taveuni at that time of year.

The December date of the woodswallow nest in Gordon Street, Suva, was roughly matched by another Suva nest, at which incubation was apparently in progress on 31 December, 1972. These late dates might quite possibly have been the result of earlier broods being destroyed by the hurricane which ravaged the area at the end of October, and this may suggest that the nest helpers at the Gordon Street nest were adult birds which had lost their brood, and had not renested. There was, however, no way of determining the exact status of the nest helpers.

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BLACK FANTAIL IN NORTH ISLAND

The appearance of a Black Fantail (*Rhipidura fuliginosa*) in my garden in Masterton in three successive years is rather unusual. The first one seen in the district since 1948, it was recorded on 20 January 1971. The following year another Black Fantail, or the same one, was seen in the garden on 17 February. Then, on 20 February 1973 (note dates) one had a bathe under the spray from a hose and two days later, presumably the same bird, was seen again but not since then.

It is possible that these records concern the same bird though I have regarded each year's observations as another record. It may be pertinent to add that in Wellington Provincial observations extending over fifty years from 1921 to date I have seen 10 Black Fantails and in that period I have notes of 1352 Pied Fantails as having been actually seen. I have ignored all records of birds heard and not seen. The area covered in these observations, the southern portion of the Wellington Provincial District, extends from the Hawke's Bay boundary in the east to the mouth of the Rangitikei River in the west and includes Kapiti Island, where I saw a Black Fantail consorting with a Pied on 22 February 1927. An additional record for the Wairarapa to those already published is one for 18 May 1924 in the Waingawa River Gorge.

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FIRST RECORD OF WHITE-TAILED TROPIC BIRD
IN NEW ZEALAND

On 27 January 1973 I patrolled approximately two miles of beach to the west of the Whakatane River mouth. The remains of 12 specimens of 8 species of sea birds were found, but one complete skull could not be identified. It was peculiar in shape, the bill was like that of a tern, but malformed, the upper mandible being crossed over the lower mandible.