

possessing the properties of mucilage — the feathering would remain erect for some time.

Early in last December Mr Roy Hendren, a bus driver, informed me that he had seen that day a strange bird 'like a Bellbird' (which species he knew well), but the head had 'a red horny plate like a Pukeko's, with a few feathers sticking up at the back'. On my interrogating him, he disclosed that the bird was resting on a 'korari' (flax stem).

In this instance the compound of nectar and pollen had formed an excrescence on the forehead and crown, some occipital feathers being erect and apparently stiff.

M. S. BLACK

FERNBIRDS ON THE GOULAND DOWNS

My wife and I spent Easter 1956 at the Goulund Downs, using the hut at the head of the Aorere Valley in the Collingwood County. About fifty yards from the hut I found a pair of Fernbirds, (*Bowdleria punctata*) feeding in the snowgrass, but it was not until the next day that I was able to watch them closely. They were near a streamlet about thirty yards from where I first saw them; and as I sat quietly it was not long before they would approach to within about a foot of me. One bird seemed to have only five tail feathers. Their sharp 'pit' call was quite clear, and not the 'utick' as mentioned in some books. This 'pit' call was used only occasionally, but most of the time they would communicate by puffing up the throat and then uttering a throaty muffled purring sound.

Once they had become accustomed to my presence, they fed freely on the tender shoots of the snowgrass and every now and then they would take turns at having a bath in a shrub-covered pool. After a bath they would hop into a small shrub, preen themselves and start feeding. On one occasion a blue-bottle flew off my knee and one of the Fernbirds made an attempt to catch it. A short while later I saw the other bird find and eat a brown caterpillar $\frac{1}{2}$ in. long. Although the Fernbirds cannot move a great distance in one burst, they are quick and can change direction freely, being especially at home in the snowgrass. They part the grass with their heads and perch themselves by hanging onto the stalks on either side of the body with feet split sideways.

About half an hour after making these observations I was chopping wood outside the hut and found a half-developed huhu type of grub, $\frac{1}{2}$ in. long, with which I decided to test the birds. Returning to the spot where the birds were feeding, I first tried them out by putting the grub on a white handkerchief, but no notice was taken; so waiting my chance, I threw the grub to one of the birds in the open. As soon as the grub moved the bird seized it. After killing it the Fernbird juggled with the grub until it was end on, and then swallowed it.

Fernbirds appear to be quite numerous in this area. They keep very close to the ground. Their flight is rather weak and the longest flutter was about twenty feet at a height of about four feet. I once saw a pair sitting in stunted beech trees about six feet off the ground.

M. J. BREEN

NATIVE BIRD LIFE IN A PINE PLANTATION

On the 4/3/56 I obtained permission to visit a pine plantation known as Fail's Forest, ten miles from Taupo. The ranger, Mr A. Bailey, conducted a friend and myself through the plantation. For the first few miles no birds were visible, although on two occasions, when Mr Bailey stopped the truck, we heard Whiteheads in the distance.

It was not until we had penetrated twelve miles into the heart of the plantation that we actually saw them. Quite suddenly, it seemed, the loud twittering of a considerable number of birds could be heard above the engine of the truck. We stopped and got out. There were birds on every tree around us: Silvereyes, Grey Warblers, Fantails, Tomtits, Bush Robins and a flock of Whiteheads. Never before have I seen such a large con-