

TWO NOTES ON ROBIN BEHAVIOUR

Although there is no red in the plumage of our so-called Robin (*Petroica australis*), it is easy to understand, if one lives in daily contact with these confiding birds, why the early settlers instinctively transferred the name of the familiar English garden bird to the toutouwai of the N.Z. forest. Sometimes when I am splitting posts at Minginui I have three or four Robins near me, and once I had five together. They get almost underfoot and great care is needed to avoid dropping posts on them. One October when a pair had a nest thirty feet up in a small tawa, I wasted a lot of time cutting out grubs and white ants for them to take to the young. If I went near the nest they would take the food and hide it in the top of a punga or on a heap of moss on a branch until I moved away. In November a very tame large male sometimes brought a young one and fed it on small pieces of bread from my lunch.

R. ST. PAUL



At the end of January, 1957, Robins were quite common up the valley of the D'Urville river. On one occasion one was sitting about 8 feet away from me, when a hare happened to pass close by. The Robin immediately flew at the hare and chased it away through the beech trees. The hare seemed most alarmed.

M. BREEN



A SURVIVING COLONY OF FERNBIRDS AT ROTORUA

On 6/7/58 I visited the duneland between Lake Rotorua and the swamp north of Kawaha Point. I had not gone more than five yards when I flushed a small, dark brown bird which flew for a few yards and landed again in a clump of sedge. Although I had never seen a Fernbird (*Bowdleria punctata*) before, I knew at once that this was one. I worked my way further into the swamp and in a matter of minutes surprised another. It was quite easily followed because the bird rustled the dry sedge leaves as it made its way through them. It was not long, however, before it took wing, flying about twenty yards before it landed. I did not follow it but watched its rather laboured flight with the ragged tail drooping. Its rapidly beating wings made a whirring sound rather like that of a sparrow, but quite distinct.

Some way in front of me was a small patch of raupo and, thinking that this might be a likely place for more Fernbirds, I made my way between the sedge clumps towards it and located two more birds, probably a pair. One flew on to a raupo stem and watched me whilst it made its curious, bell-like "u-ttick" calls. I now saw almost every detail of its plumage. The back and wings were a medium brown, streaked with dark brown or black, chest and under parts grey streaked with dark brown. The slightly curved bill was black and the legs a dark colour. In size it was larger than a sparrow, about seven inches in length.

I had heard that a Fernbird will inhabit scrub as well as swamp and as an extensive area of scrub bordered the swamp I wondered whether it would produce Fernbirds too. Sure enough, after fighting my way through blackberry and bracken, I heard two, and later saw one

bird in the manuka scrub. As I retraced my steps I heard more of these little birds, until I was well away from the swamp.

The swamp, consisting of nigger-head interspersed with patches of manuka scrub and raupo, is quite extensive, being approximately half a mile long with an average width of 150-200 yards. It lies between the scrub-covered foreshore of the lake and the pasture-land and as it is below lake-level, the possibility of its ever being drained is remote. It is probably the last remaining stronghold of the Fernbird in the Rotorua area. The original population of the species has doubtless been augmented by refugees from the marshy areas nearer to Rotorua which have been drained in past years. Perhaps this habitat, or at least part of it, could be set aside as a refuge for these birds, thus ensuring their survival.

MARK R. ROBERTS



SUPPRESSION OF THE SPECIFIC NAME *NECTRIS MUNDA* KÜHL, 1820

In Opinion 497, published on 17th December, 1957, the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature has ruled that the specific name *munda* Kuhl, 1820, as published in the combinations *Proc [ellaria] munda* and *Nectris munda*, is suppressed under the Plenary Powers for purposes of the Law of Priority, but not for those of the Law of Homonymy; and has placed these names on the *Official Index of Rejected and Invalid Specific Names in Zoology*.

This decision, made in response to an application lodged in 1952 by W. B. Alexander, R. A. Falla, C. A. Fleming, R. C. Murphy and D. L. Serventy, removes from consideration in nomenclature a name first given by Banks on Cook's first voyage to a small southern petrel. Kuhl's description was considered indeterminable by most reviewers, but Fleming and Serventy (*Emu* 43, p. 122-123; *Emu* 52, p. 17-23) maintained that it applied to a race of the Allied Shearwater, generally known as *Puffinus assimilis* Gould, 1838.

C. A. FLEMING



TUIS IN AN AUCKLAND GARDEN

The so-called 'climbing aloe' (*Aloe ciliaris*) provides nectar for Tuis; and I have also seen them obtaining nectar from lachenalias, standing on the ground to do so. They also visit bomaria, swinging on the thin stems to feed. On October 3rd I watched a Tui looking intently on the ground while perched on a tree tomato. Hopping slowly down the branches, it landed on the ground three times to pick something up, raising its beak with a jerk or two each time. On examining the ground afterwards, I found wood planings nearly rotted, but could not see any insects among them.

One season an unused Tui's nest was blown out of our basket-willow. The fronds of asparagus fern had been used to form a base and were effective in holding the manuka twigs in place. These were at least two inches deep and the nest was ten inches wide, being lined with brown scales from the stems of black punga fronds. The local Tuis build each year high up in the macrocarpa trees, collecting twigs from a nearby manuka. Often when feeding their young, they search