

WHY IS THE CHATHAM ISLAND FANTAIL *PENITUS* ?

The scientific name of the Chatham Island Fantail is *Rhipidura fuliginosa penitus* Bangs 1911; and the significance of the trinomial still causes some perplexity, since Bangs nowhere explains why he chose it! The meaning of the common Latin adverb *penitus* with a short *e* is 'deep within' and its application in this context is hard to understand. The Chatham Island Fantail, far from being found 'deep within' New Zealand is, in fact, 'far without'; that is, some 400 miles east of Bank's Peninsula. Accordingly, Helen Oliver has suggested that Bangs' meaning was that "this race was smoky or dusky under the surface of the plumage." Does this not apply to all New Zealand fantails ?

However, if the puzzling word is not *penitus* with a short *e* but *penitus* with a long *e*, it makes good sense, though the gender is wrong. With a long *e*, *penitus* is a rarely used adjective meaning 'tailed'; and derived from *penis*, which besides its more usual meaning, *membrum virile* as the dictionaries politely put it, originally meant 'tail'; for as Cicero says, *Caudam antiqui penem vocabant*. *Penitus* with a long *e*, therefore, is a synonym of the more widely used *caudatus*; and, if it was suggested by the conspicuously white tail of the Chatham Island Fantail, has the merit of aptness. This being so, since the gender of *Rhipidura* is feminine, *penitus* must be changed to *penita*.

It is curious that the marked subspecific differences of New Zealand fantails went so long unrecognised taxonomically. Yet when Hutton examined specimens taken in the Chatham Islands by Travers (1868-1871), he noted the purer white of the tail. It was left to an American taxonomist, Outram Bangs, in 1911, with only one skin for examination, to coin a name for the markedly distinct Chatham Island Fantail. Incidentally, in this designation the specific name *flabellifera* is mis-spelt *flabillifera*.

Then, after an interval of ten years, in a very terse announcement Bangs renamed the North Island Fantail *placabilis*, displacing the name *kempi* which had been already used for an Indian fantail. If Bangs wished to allude to the fearless curiosity of the North Island Fantail, his choice of the rather uncommon adjective *placabilis* is not wholly felicitous; for its basic meaning is not 'easily pleased' but 'capable of being placated'; and that implies not a 'wildness to be tamed' but a 'ferocity to be propitiated'. Did Bangs have a penchant for rare or unusual adjectives? Would not such simple descriptive words as *audax*, *confidens*, *amica* or even *amicissima* have served the purpose rather better ?

All discerning visitors who have watched the Chatham Island Fantail on its native heath have no doubt about its distinctness. As Fleming remarked, "the white undertail was a conspicuous and constant feature in the field." While the tail may be marginally bigger, its whiteness may leave an exaggerated impression of size. Up in the

canopy of old and twisted ake-akes (*Olearia traversi*) on Pitt Island, a fantail's waving white tail inevitably attracted attention.

The isolation of the Chatham Island Fantail prompts speculation. If Kadavu, an island a mere 60 miles from Viti Levu, has bred a fantail, *R. personata*, which is so different from *R. spilodera* of the main Fijian islands that it has been accorded full specific status, why is the Chatham Island Fantail still a mere race? Its closest kith and kin are a full 400 miles away. Do species evolve more quickly in the tropics? Perhaps the cool winds of the Chatham Islands dampen evolutionary ardour. Or, should it be accepted as a full species?

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### NOTES ON THE BREEDING OF THE BLACK-BELLIED STORM PETREL (*Fregatta tropica*) ON BIRD ISLAND, SOUTH GEORGIA 1973/1974

A nest site of the Black-bellied Storm Petrel (*Fregatta tropica*) was accidentally found by R. Burton on Bird Island (54°00'S 38°00'W), South Georgia, during the austral summer of 1971/1972. During the 1973/1974 season, while I was on Bird Island working for the British Antarctic Survey, Cambridge, I found the same site occupied and made several observations which add to our sparse knowledge of this species. Previous work on the species is reported by Beck & Brown (1971).

The burrow entrance faced the south by the main stream coming from Wanderer Valley and was a little above sea-level. A map of Bird Island is given by Tickell (1968). The narrow straight entrance tunnel entered a chamber, but because Burton covered it with a wooden lid, no account of the original size of the chamber can be given.

An egg was laid on 20 December 1973 and was placed on a small bed of tussock grass (*Poa flabellata*). No adult was obviously present when the nest chamber was photographed on 22 December, though one may have been present in the entrance tunnel whose situation was not known at the time. An adult was incubating the egg on the next day.

The egg hatched 35 days later on 24 January 1974 (cf. Beck & Brown 40, 45, and 38 days), and the chick was alone on the following day. It was well feathered by 25 March and weighed 112 g. Three days later it weighed 96 g and on 31 March 87 g. The culmen was then 15 mm, the tarsus 39 mm and the wing 169 mm. On 2 April