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STORRS L. OLSON, *National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. 20560 USA*; KENNETH C. PARKES and MARY H. CLENCH¹, *Section of Birds, Carnegie Museum of Natural History, 4400 Forbes Avenue, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 15213 USA*; STEPHEN R. BORECKY², *Department of Biological Sciences, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 15260 USA*.

¹ Present address: *Florida State Museum, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida 32611 USA*.

² Present address: *Carlow College, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 15213 USA*.



SHORT NOTES

EFFECT OF RAIN ON FANTAIL NEST-BUILDING

In my account of the breeding of the North Island Fantail (*Rhipidura fuliginosa placabilis*) in *Notornis* 12 (3), I suggested on p. 137 that "our fantail could possibly retain an ancestral response to factors other than increasing hours of daylight in the control of its breeding season," and I produced evidence to show that mild but heavy rain at the end of a dry winter induced nesting in the first few days of August 1959 in the two pairs of fantails around my home. Recent observations seem to support this view.

In May 1979, after heavy warm rain at the end of a dry spell, I watched a pair putting the finishing touches to a nest, although no eggs were laid in it. On 6 April 1983, just 2 days after a fall of 2½ inches, which broke 5 months of drought in the Gisborne-East Coast district, I saw fantails collecting nest-lining material from a *Dicksonia*

squarrosa. Over many years this tree fern, hard by our back door, has been the source of lining material for fantails from two territories, being just outside the limits of both territories.

In many Australian species, the urge to breed depends on adequate rainfall, and our fantail may have retained the instinct to nest, even though not necessarily to breed, after rain. According to Fleming (*Notornis* 9: 270), our fantail has descended from the Grey Fantail of Australia over some 20 000 years, developing only slight differences in plumage. Several authorities such as Serventy & Whittell in *Birds of Western Australia* and Pizzey in *A field guide to the birds of Australia* say that there is a post-breeding dispersal, or migration, to dry areas by the Grey Fantail; thus, the dependence on rainfall as a stimulus may have developed.

A. BLACKBURN, 10 Score Road, Gisborne



APRIL BIRD-COUNTS AT OHAU GORGE NEAR LEVIN

In April 1982 I made 82 5-minute stationary bird-counts in the Ohau Gorge near Levin to obtain indices of abundance of the forest birds there. I counted on the track to the Ohau Shelter from 878 975 (NZMS1 N152) to 894 957. This route of about 2.8 km passes along the side of the gorge, or crosses flat terraces, on the south bank of the Ohau River at an altitude of about 200 m, well above the river. The mixed podocarp-hardwood forest is continuous with that of the Tararua State Forest Park. It has been modified by logging and by mammalian browsers. Many remaining emergents are dead or damaged.

I used Dawson and Bull's method of counting (1975, *Notornis* 22: 101-109). The counting-stations (not fixed) were at least 250 paces (200 m) apart, and the first was at least that distance from the forest edge. I walked a little further between stations to escape the sound of the river below if it was loud. I could make up to 12 or 13 counts in each direction. Counts were completed in fine weather (not wet or windy) between 1013h and 1529h (NZ Standard Time). The distribution of counts was 3rd of April (3 counts), 6th (23), 11th (10), 17th (25) and 24th (21).

The species encountered and total numbers seen plus heard during the counts were Grey Warbler (*Gerygone igata*) 57, Fantail (*Rhipidura fuliginosa*) 56, Tit (*Petroica macrocephala*) 44, Blackbird (*Turdus merula*) 22, Silveryeye (*Zosterops lateralis*) 147, Bellbird (*Anthornis melanura*) 58, and unidentified 18. Table 1 gives the average numbers per count. Except for 7 Magpies (*Gymnorhina tibicen*), I noted no other species during the counts, although I saw New Zealand Pigeons (*Hemiphaga novaeseelandiae*) at other times, and Riflemen (*Acanthisitta chloris*) occurred on nearby ridges.