

## "PIP."

(By HUGH ROSS, of Invercargill, Junior Member.)

Pip I call him, the name certainly seems to suit him. I have taken a great fancy to the little fellow; he interests me so much, but why I cannot exactly say. I have seen dozens more of his kind every bit as cheeky and perky as he is, some even more so. Perhaps it is because, with all his perkiness, he has a shyness that attracts me—for shy he is. He will advance to within three feet of where I stand, but beyond that distance he will not venture.

I first noticed this little tomtit a few weeks back. He was perched on my spade-handle where I was chipping gorse. Immediately I started work he was round after grubs, small slugs, scuttling ants, small worms, anything in the creepy crawly line he seemed to regard as a great luxury; I also fancy, as a great joke. The instant I moved back from upending a gorse bush he would pounce upon some fat grub or other, fly with it to a nearby willow tree, and there with a violent criss-cross movement of his beak, kill the insect against the perch he was sitting on, then very deliberately swallow it; after which he would hop up and down for a moment or two, trill his little song, then back again for more.

He does not seem to care a bit about his personal appearance, though he is by no means bedraggled or untidy. Nothing seems to damp his good spirits. Even the day a clod flew from the end of my spade and knocked him headlong off a wire fence into the mud, he did not seem to mind particularly. True, he went away for about half-an-hour, but back he came to his old perch on the willow, and it was not long before he pounced upon a grub, having apparently forgotten the accident altogether. An accident it certainly was. I am glad he regarded it as such; for I am very proud of the little insect-eater and would not hurt his feelings for anything.

Pip, although he is by no means proud, has reason enough to feel that way. For a small bird he is quite good-looking. With his \*yellow breast merging to grey-white near the wings, then to black, he is indeed handsome. His legs are reddish-brown, his tail black with a few white feathers. He has a white patch on each wing, patches that glitter like snow when he flies. The little round glossy head is armed with a miniature bill, ridiculously small it appears to be, but nevertheless it is a formidable weapon when used against the small fry on which he preys. Above this little bill is a tiny white spot that seems curiously to suit him. Sometimes I wonder if it is part of nature's plan for something I have never been able to discover.

\*White in North Island.