

THE WAYS OF THE BELLBIRD.

(*Anhorns melanura.*)

(From "*New Zealand Forest-Inhabiting Birds*," published by the N.Z. Native Bird Protection Society.)

It is usually accepted that Cook indicated the bellbird (known to the Maoris as Korimako, Makomako, etc.), when he wrote in January, 1770:—"The ship lay in Queen Charlotte Sound at the distance of somewhat less than a quarter of a mile from the shore, and in the morning we were awakened by the singing of the birds. The number was incredible, and they seemed to strain their throats in emulation of each other. This wild melody was infinitely superior to anything that we had ever heard of the same kind. It seemed to be like small bells most exquisitely tuned."

The bellbird rapidly decreased before the onset of civilisation, until by 1890 in most places it was very rare. Within the last twenty years, especially in parts of the South Island, it has so increased even in settled and urban districts that it seems that the bird has adapted itself to the new conditions sufficiently to ensure its perpetuation. One factor in this is undoubtedly the variety of its tastes as regards food. In the winter it feeds largely on insects found on the furrowed trunks of broadleaf, under the papery bark of fuchsia and native holly, or on the branches of all kinds of introduced trees. Berries are also eaten, especially those of coprosma, fuchsia, cabbage-tree, and mistletoe. The native ivy tree, New Zealand flax, ratas, Australian banksias, acacias, and eucalypts, tree lucerne, and red-hot poker, all have flowers bearing nectar accessible to a bird with a brush tongue. But it is when feeding on fuchsia or kowhai that the birds give most pleasure, adding acrobatics to their other charms as they hang down in all sorts of grotesque attitudes in their efforts to insert their bills into the drooping flowers. Their fondness for nectar enables us to attract bellbirds to our homes by exposing coloured tins of sweetened water.

Until one has had some practice it is difficult to see the bellbird in the bush, as the colour of the feathers harmonises so completely with the background; on the wing they are easily seen. The soft slender lines, the long tail, the undulating but rapid flight are characteristic. It is one of our most shapely birds.

Both sexes work at nest building. The structure may be found in a variety of positions, such as a fork in thick branches, beneath a sheltering canopy of bush lawyer, near the top of a small tree, or under the thatch formed by the leaves of a cabbage-