

THE TUI.

(*Prosthemadera novaeseelandiae*).

One of the World's Best Singers.

This is the gayest and most aggressive bird in the forest, noted throughout the land for its extreme rapidity of movement, the gloss and sheen of its plumage, the wild outburst of joyful notes, its general air of bustle, happiness, and gaiety. We know it as one of our main honey-eaters. To enable it to collect the nectar from rata and kowhai and other honey-producing flowers, its tongue is furnished at the tip with a brush of exquisite fineness. It is a beautiful sight to see these charming songsters clinging and swinging in grotesque postures on the brilliant crimson blooms of the rata, sipping the nectar and flying every few minutes to some bough to gladden the forest with an ecstasy of song. In the winter they may leave the bush and visit civilization to feed on the nectar provided by the tree lucerne and certain eucalyptus which flower at this time. Then in early spring the kowhai groves are visited by flocks of tuis, the trees echoing with a continuous peal as the birds practise their acrobatics in obtaining the nectar from the pendulous flowers. Berries and insects, many of the latter caught on the wing, supplement the diet.

The tui is at all times a lively and active bird, with flight rapid, graceful, almost undulating, the rustle of wings plainly audible. Delight is found in combined display. "Perhaps ten or even more will turn, twist, throw somersaults, drop from a height with expanded wings and tails or perform other antics, till, as if guided by some preconcerted signal, they suddenly dive into the forest and are lost to view." The varied notes of this, our most remarkable songster, continually break the stillness of the bush. Although thoroughly joyous only in the full glow of sunlight, it nevertheless sings earliest in the morning and latest at night of all the bush birds. It is remarkable for the variety of notes as well as the versatile manner of delivery. A medley of musical notes will intermingle with chucklings, clicks, and clucks; beautiful liquid sounds will be followed by a noise not unlike the breaking of a pane of glass or perhaps a series of gentle sobs; dainty whisper songs alternate with coughs and sneezes. After sunset the wild revelry ceases. Until darkness sets in the song consists of a succession of notes like the tolling of a distant bell.

The nest is placed in the fork of a bushy shrub or perhaps among the leafy tops of a forest tree. Fairly wide and shallow, it often has an untidy appearance because of the interlaced twigs and rootlets which project in all directions. These twigs are often mixed with coarse green moss; sometimes cobwebs are used to hold them together. The cavity is lined with fibrous grasses