

FANTAILS HUNTED BY GERMAN OWLS.

New Zealand has many lovable birds, but perhaps the favourite is the brave little fantail which will cheerfully flutter through open windows or doorways of houses in search of flies.

When Zane Grey was in camp near the Tongariro River a few years ago he had some happy hours in watching and hearing birds. "I liked especially the fantails," he wrote in "New Zealand—the Angler's El Dorado." "What delicate birds! . . . I often watched the fantails. On one occasion two gave



me a pretty exhibition of their feeding. It was early in the morning and I was back in the woods just at the edge of an open place. I stood motionless. These birds flew down and perched on a snag above me. Then one darted out, fluttered and whirled, and returned to his perch. The other made nearly the same manoeuvre. I saw the insects in the air. A fantail would flutter out a few feet—snip—then back to his perch. Finally I saw one actually catch an insect; but if I watched the birds I could not detect their prey. It was only by looking up at the sky and locating a tiny gnat or moth that I could see the actual tragedy. Snip! What vicious little bills, considering their size! The noise was as hard to hear as the bills were to see.

"I was about to make my presence known when both took after the same insect, quite a large fluttering creature. The birds met practically in midair in collision. That seemed to anger them, and one flew after the other, uttering fierce little notes. They darted within a foot of my face, and all around over my head; and finally the pursuit took them off into the woods."

Reports from various districts state that German owls continue to kill many fantails, warblers, tom-tits and other native birds. The alien pests (introduced by the Otago Acclimatisation Society) do not wait for nightfall to begin their butchery of charming little birds, which are also useful to mankind.

By its white legs the murderous marauder can be distinguished from the morepork which has yellow legs, and is also larger than the imported nuisance. The morepork is strictly a night-worker, whose diet takes no serious toll of birds.