

to come and steal one drop of honey.

When the kowhai, pohutukawa, flax, rata, fuchsia, and rewarewa have finished flowering the tui feeds on berries, especially the soft fruit of the kiekie. In winter it feeds on insects. In Taupo the winter-flowering red gum is very popular with tuis and bellbirds.

Rapid flight

The tui's flight is very rapid and undulating. It often flies high above the trees, then swoops down suddenly in a flash.

One evening at sunset, during a visit to Kapiti Island, I witnessed a fascinating aerobatic display by several tuis. One by one they soared high into the air, then suddenly closed their wings and plummeted down, almost turning

somersaults, until a few yards from the ground. Then, spreading their wings, they flew up into the air and repeated the performance.

When the first bird dropped I thought it had been shot. Obviously they enjoyed their game, as they continued for some time. I have since read reports from other people who have seen this display.

Sometimes a tui will fluff out its feathers and appear to be singing at the top of its voice, yet not a sound can be heard by the human ear. Perhaps it is singing a special love song which can be heard only by its mate.

Tuis nest between October and January. Their nest is a rough, untidy structure high up in a fork of a tree. Twigs, moss, scales from tree ferns, and feathers are used with a

broad rim or landing platform of stiff twigs.

Fiercely protective

The brown-spotted pink eggs hatch in 2 weeks. The chicks are fed for 2 weeks with insects and berries in the nest. Their parents are fiercely protective and violently ward off any intruders.

The young birds are blackish brown at first, and their white throat feathers do not appear for 6 weeks.

Though primarily a bird of the forest, the tui, in its search for food, is becoming more common in built-up areas where kowhai, flax, pohutukawa, and flowering gum are flourishing.

Let us continue to plant its favourite trees and ensure that our gardens may be enhanced by its presence. ■

New Zealand plants

By
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Karaka

Karaka (*Corynocarpus laevigatus*) is a coastal tree having a thick rounded head usually shaped by the prevailing winds. It reaches a height of up to 18 m.

The leaves are thick and shining, and the flowers are small and greenish. The trunk is grey and smooth.

The karaka's fruits ripen to orange and have an unpleasant smell. They are poisonous, though the Maoris ate the kernels after carefully cooking and removal of the flesh.

Many Maori children suffered from poisoning after eating the fruits. Because this caused convulsions and muscular spasms which could leave the body permanently crippled, their limbs were

firmly tied, and they were buried in sand up to their necks until the effects had passed.

The Chatham Islanders call-

ed the tree kopi, and used it for their canoes. Often in the Chatham Islands, and sometimes on the mainland, Maoris carved figures in the bark, which does not flake off.

