

# Quest

Welcome to the first edition of Quest, the section for younger readers of *Forest and Bird*. It is our intention to offer you plenty of interesting things to read and do, and we hope that you will write to us with your ideas and comments. This is *your* section so you must let us know what you think about it. Stories, drawings, useful tips, dreadful jokes — put them on paper and send them in. Who knows? We might even print them! So remember, Quest is for you and we look forward to hearing from you.

*Herb Heyman*

Editor.

## The “Forest and Bird” bird....



Photo: Wildlife Service

Most of us know the tui. Perched on his kowhai branch, this bird is the Society's emblem, a symbol for all the native animals and plants in New Zealand that need our protection. It is one of the fortunate few which has been able to survive the change from the old New Zealand to the new. Huge amounts of the native bush that was its original home have been cleared away to make room for our farms and cities, but up to now it has been able to find enough food to keep going in the small scattered patches that remain.

Tuis belong to the family of birds known as Honeyeaters. This is rather a confusing name as it gives the impression that they raid beehives. Actually, it is not honey, but nectar that they eat, which tuis reach by pushing their narrow downward curved beaks into the flowers and poking out their long pink tongues. A tui tongue is specially equipped with a feather-like tip for lapping up the nectar,

and as well shall see later, the birds perform a valuable service for the flowers by feeding in this way.

Tuis will feed on nectar all the year round, although in the winter it is obviously more difficult to find. With so little native forest left they are now using substitute supplies from our parks and gardens, and they will often travel at least 30km to find a fresh source. You can help tuis by having the right sort of plants in your garden, and over the page you will find a list of these, together with details of how to make a tui feeder to provide sugar water for them as well.

Nectar is not the only thing that tuis eat. In the summer, when they are feeding their young, they will take spiders and insects, and in the autumn they will happily gobble up the fruit from plants like the *coprosma* pictured above. Here again your garden can play a valuable part in helping the tui.

One of the most remarkable things

about the tui is its song. It contains an amazing mixture of warbles, coughs and sneezes, and no two tuis seem to sing alike. The young appear to pick up sounds from their parents and they can be heard 'practising' rather squawkily throughout the autumn. They will add variations of their own which they learn from other birds that they hear around them, and they don't only stick to tuis. In fact, it doesn't even have to be another bird, for tuis have been heard singing away using noises that sound suspiciously like cats and even chainsaws! One would think that neither of those sounds would be exactly top of the pops among the tuis.

[Information about tuis and tui feeders was kindly supplied to Quest by Carol Bergquist. Carol is researching tui behaviour with Auckland University and is special tui consultant for the Auckland Bird Rescue group.]