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Tuis Record Their Spring Song

SPRING, it may be assumed, is now here. The first day of this pleasant season is not specifically defined in New Zealand, but in terms of the calendar September, October and November are the Spring months. Bearing this in mind technicians of the NZBS, set out on September 1 to capture a new set of tui spring-songs for use by the shortwave station, Radio New Zealand, for the original recordings, made just a year ago this month when the station opened, have now worn thin.

Fortunately for the technicians, recording the tui's song does not involve an expedition with heavy equipment into the bush. All they have to do is drive the Mobile Recording Unit to Rona Bay, Eastbourne—12 or so miles from Wellington—push a telescopic microphone into the branches of a flowering red gum, and let the birds perform without flattery or persuasion. The original recordings were made with some difficulty, mainly through wind in the branches of the tree drowning out the song at critical moments, and when another attempt was made on a calm day a little later, fewer birds attended the session.

The recordings made this month were more successful. It was a completely calm morning and the only extraneous noises picked up by the microphone were the tap of a carpenter's hammer not far away and the whirr of a busy housewife's vacuum cleaner. But as recording went on for a full hour, Radio New Zealand now has a large and varied stock of tui notes.

Bird recording generally takes an infinite amount of patience, as the BBC



"All you have to do is push a telescopic microphone into a flowering red gum"

found when they used a 'cello to induce a reluctant nightingale to co-operate, but the Eastbourne tuis seem to be a radio-minded lot, for at one time during the recording as many as 20 formed a chorus and sang as if an audition committee was in attendance with a fee in the offing for a good job. In fact, during a fight for position at the microphone, two birds hit it with a clang.

Recently Radio New Zealand has received reports of reception from as far away as Spain, Sweden and Scotland, so that these countries, as well as Australia and the Islands can hear the tui immediately preceding the 7.0 p.m. time-pips and the tune of "God Defend New Zealand," before the programme proper gets under way. Even the tuis receive fan-mail from overseas, for the station has had many inquiries about them, and answered on their behalf. The bird notes have been recorded on a 15-minute disc so that any part of it can be used when one track has outlived its usefulness.



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DR. DALE TRENDALL, Professor of Classical Archaeology at the University of Sydney (centre), inspecting the Fels Memorial gift of Greek vases in the Otago Museum (see page 21)

N.Z. LISTENER, SEPTEMBER 16, 1949.