

The Rufous Fantail in the National Park

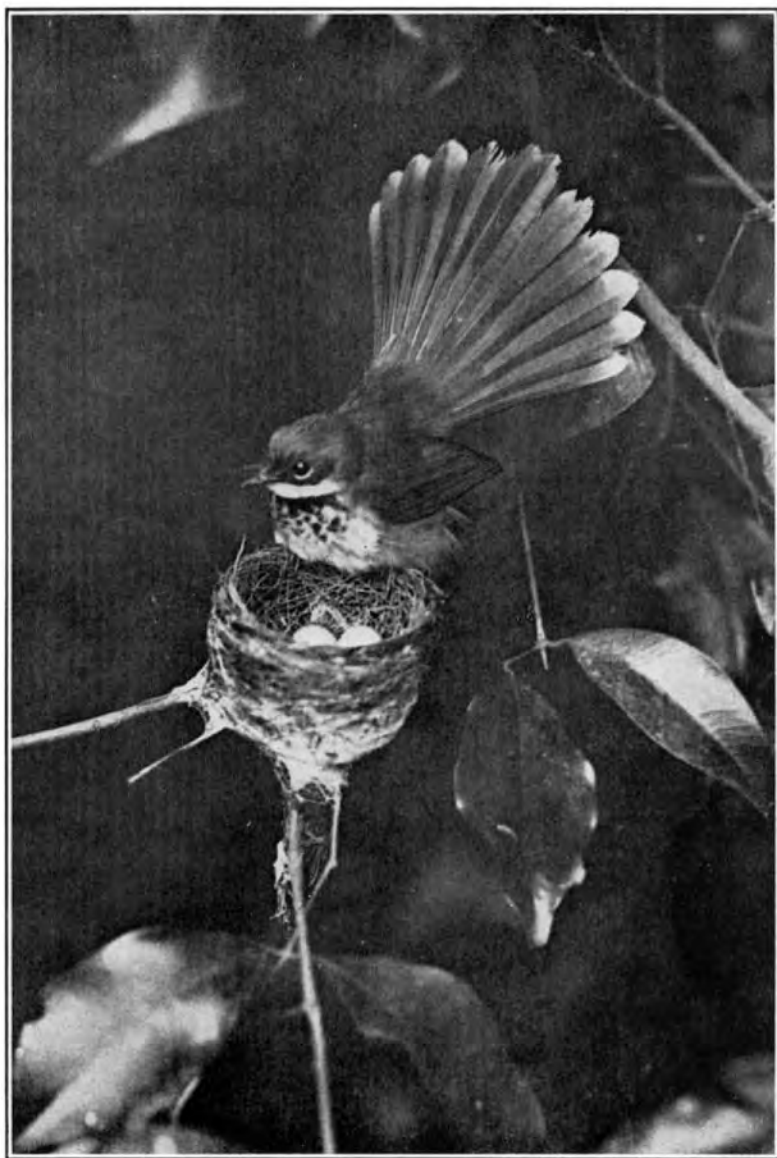
By N. CHAFFER, R.A.O.U., Roseville, Sydney.

Of the small birds of the dense gullies and brushes of Eastern Australia the Rufous Fantail (*Rhipidura rufifrons*) is, I consider, the most attractive and interesting. Along the brush-fringed watercourses in the National Park near Sydney, it is fairly numerous, adding considerably to the life and colour of this interesting area. The trustfulness of the bird as it flits about within a few feet of an observer is truly gratifying. It is vivacious and alert in song and manner, and continually on the move. And what a little gem of colour the bird is—richly rufous and brown above with long, fan-shaped, light-tipped tail. The throat is white, a bar of black crosses the upper breast and below this the breast is prettily freckled, making in all a very pleasing combination.

The Rufous Fantail, in common with many other birds of the brush, nests late, the months of November, December, and January being mostly selected for nidification. On the 27th December, 1928, three nests, with eggs, and two others in process of construction, were under observation within easy reach of the bird cabin in the National Park.

The nest, usually placed in a more or less horizontal fork overhanging a stream, is a wonderfully neat little structure which has aptly been likened to a wine glass broken off the stand. It is composed of fine bark fibres, grasses and shreds of decayed wood closely-bound together with a goodly supply of spider web, the last named material firmly binding it on to the supporting twigs. The outside bottom of the nest is continued in the shape of a tail or, to use the above simile, like the stem of glass. The situation usually chosen is rather dark and unsuitable for photography. Two whitish eggs spotted with light brown and purplish spots are laid.

Every year a pair of Fantails build their nest overhanging the stream within a few yards of the bird cabin. This pair have for the last two seasons selected comparatively open situations, and in consequence have provided subjects for more than one photographer. I have spent hours watching and photographing these birds and I think from no other bird have I derived more pleasure and interest. At early dawn the cheerful animated song may be heard to be continued frequently throughout the day. The whole of the bird's movements are graceful and animated. Watch one for a few minutes. At one moment he flits about amongst the bushes with partly opened wings continually swinging the body and expanding and closing the



Rufous Fantail at nest.

Photo. by N. Chaffer, R.A.O.U.

beautiful fan-shaped tail. Then away he flies like a flash in pursuit of an insect, twisting and turning in the air in every conceivable attitude. He is seized with a sudden impulse, swoops down to the streamside and after a hurried bath is off again. Momentarily he pauses to pour forth his song of joy. His whole being seems to vibrate with the joy of living. Then he remembers his mate brooding on the dainty cradle overhanging the stream and hurries back to relieve her. At his approach she slips off. He whisks around the nest with expanded tail for a few moments and then quietly and contentedly settles on the eggs and is at peace.

Another pair nested over the stream a few hundred yards away from the cabin. These birds were as usual very trustful, and we began taking liberties with them. I secured a photograph of the female as she fed the young bird between the fingers of my companion's hand held over the nest. I tried to induce her to hop on to my hand to feed the young bird held therein, but she cleverly evaded doing so. She would hop around my hand and then feed the young bird whilst hovering in the air.

Tragedy overtakes a large percentage of the nests of the Fantails and other birds, particularly the Black-faced Flycatcher (*Monarcha melanopsis*) in the National Park. Both eggs and young frequently disappear. The Pied Currawong (*Strepera graculina*) is suspected of being the chief offender. However, in spite of the many setbacks, the number of these beautiful creatures appears to be maintained to delight the eyes and ears of all lovers of nature.

The Starling

By C. F. H. JENKINS, R.A.O.U., Seabrook, W.A.

My experience of the Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*) was chiefly in the fruit-growing districts of South Australia. The Starling's most bitter enemy is the orchardist, and there is, in my opinion, just cause for complaint against the bird. With the farmer the balance is more equal, and, although armies of Starlings may be seen moving over newly sown wheat-fields, much of the food they are consuming consists of caterpillars and other forms of insect life. In the case of the grazier the tables are completely turned, and most valuable service is done for him by this species of bird.