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Fantail: pp 243-244.



## FANTAIL

**Family** Monarchidae

**Species** *Rhipidura fuliginosa*

**Common name** Fantail

**Status** Endemic

**Abundance** Common

**Size** 160 mm (cf sparrow 145 mm, Grey Warbler 100 mm)

**Habitat** Found anywhere where there is vegetation. This might be a suburban garden, scrubland, wetland or native or exotic pine forest.

**New Zealand range** Throughout New Zealand and the offshore islands. Absent from alpine areas and areas of vast grassland.

**Phases** This bird comes in both a pied phase, similar to the Grey Fantail, and a black phase. The black phase is more common among South Island birds,

especially in areas of the Marlborough Sounds, south of Christchurch and north of Dunedin. In the North Island, black birds are only rarely encountered.

**Discussion** The New Zealand Fantail is a race of the Australian species the Grey Fantail (*Rhipidura fuliginosa*). It is also closely related to the fantails of Vanuatu, New Caledonia, Fiji and those of the islands eastwards to Samoa. Whereas New Zealand only has one species, most of the islands in the Pacific have two species – the Grey Fantail (*R. fuliginosa*) and the Speckled Fantail (*R. rufifrons*), each Fantail occupying separate niches within the bush. There are subtle differences between the Grey Fantail and the New Zealand race, the New Zealand bird showing less white on the eyebrow and lacking the white “tear-drop” behind the eye. It is also of brighter colouring and a more confiding bird than the island or Australian varieties, living in suburban situations where vegetation is sufficient to provide feeding and nesting habitat. It will sometimes enter houses.

#### **Description – pied phase**

**Head** Brownish-black with a white eyebrow. **Upperparts** Brown. **Chin** White, below which is a black bar. **Underparts** Tan colouring but yellowish when in full breeding plumage. **Tail** The two central feathers are black. The outer feathers are white.

#### **Description – black form**

**Upperparts and underparts** Black. Usually a faint white tear-drop can be seen behind eye.

#### **Conspicuous feature**

- White, showy, fan-like tail.

#### **Conspicuous characteristics**

- During winter birds flock over grass and hawk insects close to the ground.
- Will enter houses and sit on lamp-shades, while all the time shifting position with sideways movement of its tail.

**Call** A high-pitched “cheet cheet” communication call. When in nesting territories male birds have a vocal and constant repetitive chattering call.

**Nest** A neat, wineglass-shaped cup, made of grass, bark, moss and cobwebs, about three metres from the ground. Up to 4 white, brown-speckled eggs are laid. Nesting birds usually give away the presence of a nest by suddenly stopping singing as an intruder approaches. Commonly nests around creeks and rivers.

#### **Where to find**

Can usually be found in any vegetated area.