

It is the intention of this paper to accurately and completely describe one South Australian bird in every issue, beginning with the commoner.]

### Order Passeriformes, Family Muscicapidae.

*Rhipidura tricolor*—The Black and White Fantail.

Adult.—All the upper surface black, over each eye a conspicuous line of white narrowing to a point posteriorly. Chin, throat, and upper part of breast black, the feathers of the chin and throat minutely tipped with white, the rest of the under surface white. Wing—Lesser upper coverts black, median and greater coverts brownish black the five outermost tipped with dull white, spurian wing dull black, primaries and secondaries blackish brown, the outer web of each feather darker than the inner, the last two secondaries black. Under wing coverts black, the outermost tipped with white. Thighs, black with an indistinct edging of white at the knee. Tail, black, the feathers showing indistinct transverse barring in certain lights. Bill iris and feet black.

Total length 210 m.m., culmen 11.5 m.m., Wing 96 m.m., Tail 106 m.m., Tarsus 25 m.m.

The sexes are alike in colour. Young birds have the white stippling under the jaw more marked than in adults. The white line over the eye varies much, in some specimens it is almost absent.

• The black and white flycatcher or fantail is more generally known as the wagtail or shepherds companion. It is distri-

buted throughout Australia and is found upon some of the neighbouring islands. They are still common even in the city of Adelaide, nearly every garden of any size having its resident pair of birds which drive away all others of their own species, even their own young are chased away as soon as they are able to look after themselves, for this reason there is seldom more than one pair in each garden. They are familiar birds and if not interfered with soon become tame enough to come into verandahs and even rooms. They spend much of their time upon the ground and may often be seen on lawns and grassy places making short runs with wings half spread, lighting-like twists and turns and short leaps into the air as they capture some insect on the wing. They are forever on the move, the long tail now shut now open like a fan and wagged from side to side or revolved as though upon a pivot, never moved up and down as with the true wagtails. A favourite haunt is near the head of feeding horses, cattle, and sheep, to catch the harvest of flying insects disturbed by the browsing animals.

They are pugnacious birds; they will attack cats, dogs, hawks, or anything which meet with their disapproval. A pair has been known to line their nest with the fur stolen from a live cat, and Mr. C. F. Rischbieth has a pair in his garden at Glenelg, which have the house cats in complete subjection, Directly a cat appears on the lawn the wagtails attack and drive him off again, the birds will even light on the cat's back. On one occasion at Seaton golf links a pair kept a nankeen kestrel on a tree afraid to move for a quarter of an hour or more, they kept hovering over him and directly he opened his wings they darted furiously at his head. Occasionally a cat secures one, but not often.

Their song is not unpleasant but monotonous, it has been compared to the words "Sweet pretty creature," and also to "Willie split his breeches." On moonlight nights they sing all night and if near a bedroom window they become an intolerable nuisance. The alarm note is a harsh chatter.

Nest building begins in September and goes on until the end of December and sometimes later. The nest is usually placed within a few feet of the ground but is sometimes as much as 30 feet up. It is built on a horizontal limb or fork, dead wood for preference, when near a creek it is usually placed on a branch overhanging water. When semi-domesticated they will build in almost any situation such as the rafters of a shed or veran-

dah, the bight of a loop of rope (specimen in the Adelaide Museum), or the leaves of a prickly pear. A pair have been known to build on a beam over the stampers of a quartz crushing mill.

The nest is cup-shaped and built of strips of bark and dried grasses bound together with cobweb; it is lined with fine grasses and sometimes a little sheep's wool, rabbit fur, or horse hair. When the young are hatched the old birds will attack anything or anybody that comes near their nest. They are at first careful to carry off all droppings and let them fall at some distance from the nest but as the young grow older they become less particular and the nest and vicinity become much fouled. When flushed from the nest the parent bird runs or flutters along the ground as though on broken legs. Two and occasionally three broods are reared in a season, sometimes the same nest is repaired and used for all, the broods and sometimes a new one is built. Sometimes it is rebuilt, on an adjacent branch of material from the old nest. There is a specimen in the Adelaide Museum of four successive nests built on top of each other. Three or four eggs are laid for a setting; the eggs are of a creamy white ground colour, with a zone of black, dark brown, and purplish brown spots at the larger end, the purplish spots look as if beneath the surface of the shell. The zone is sometimes about the middle of the egg and sometimes at the smaller end. They are sometimes hosts to the pallid cuckoo and narrow-billed bronze cuckoo. The average measurements of 18 eggs is 19.5 m.m. x 14.3 m.m., largest egg, 21 m.m. x 15 m.m., smallest egg, 18 m.m. x 14 m.m.

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