

A diverse group ranging in size from the Shining Cuckoo to the Channel-billed Cuckoo. Generally grey or brown, often with conspicuous barring, especially on the underparts; long tail with transverse bars and white notches; short bill and short legs. Sexes alike. Most lay 1 egg in nests of other insectivorous species. Young cuckoos make insistent penetrating begging calls. The adults are vocal when breeding and are more often heard than seen.

FAN-TAILED CUCKOO *Cacomantis flabelliformis*

Rare Australian vagrant

26 cm. Slim cuckoo with habit of cocking and fanning tail on alighting on a perch. Adult *blue-grey above, mostly rust red below, but with tail notched black on white*. Immature speckled rufous and brown with pale brown belly and undertail coverts, dark bars on chest and undertail. Feeds by swooping to ground from a perch. Call a repeated rapid descending trill. **Habitat:** Breeds Australia and SW Pacific. Vagrants reach NZ, mainly in lightly forested open country. [Sp 270]



CUCKOOS

Cuculidae

About 120 species worldwide; 2 breed in New Zealand and 4 are vagrants.

Most cuckoos are parasitic, laying their eggs in nests of other insectivorous bird species and then letting the host rear the young, fledging often well after it is capable of flying well. Cuckoos lay their eggs while the host's clutch is being formed, or a day or two after completion of that clutch. The cuckoo removes one of the host's eggs and replaces it with its own. The cuckoo egg develops very rapidly and usually hatches first. The cuckoo chick then ejects all other eggs and chicks from the

nest, or simply dominates the smaller chicks and they starve to death. Young cuckoos make persistent, high-pitched begging calls even after leaving the nest, and this stimulates its foster parents and other birds of the same or different species to feed it, thus causing confusion about the true identity of the foster parents.

Cuckoos are strong fliers, and most migrate between temperate and tropical regions. During the breeding season, they are conspicuously vocal, but at other times they remain silent and cryptic.

270. FAN-TAILED CUCKOO *Cacomantis flabelliformis*

Plate 62

Size: 26 cm, 50 g
Distribution: Breeds in Australia and Tasmania, New Guinea, Solomons, Vanuatu, New Caledonia and Fiji, parasitising mainly dome-nesting species but also some cup-nesting ones. After breeding, some Australian birds migrate northwards, but many remain sedentary or become nomadic. Very rare vagrant to New Zealand from Australia (subspecies *flabelliformis*) with only five records, including a small invasion in 1991: Lyttelton Harbour (subadult female killed by

a cat in June 1960), Wanaka (September 1991), Haast (October 1991), Whangarei (October 1991) and Culverden (December 1999).

Behaviour: Fan-tailed Cuckoos often perch on low branches, power poles or fenceposts in open country or open forest, then glide down to the ground to hop around in search of insects and earthworms. On landing on a perch, they typically cock and fan their tail. Their call is a repeated phrase consisting of a rapid descending trill.