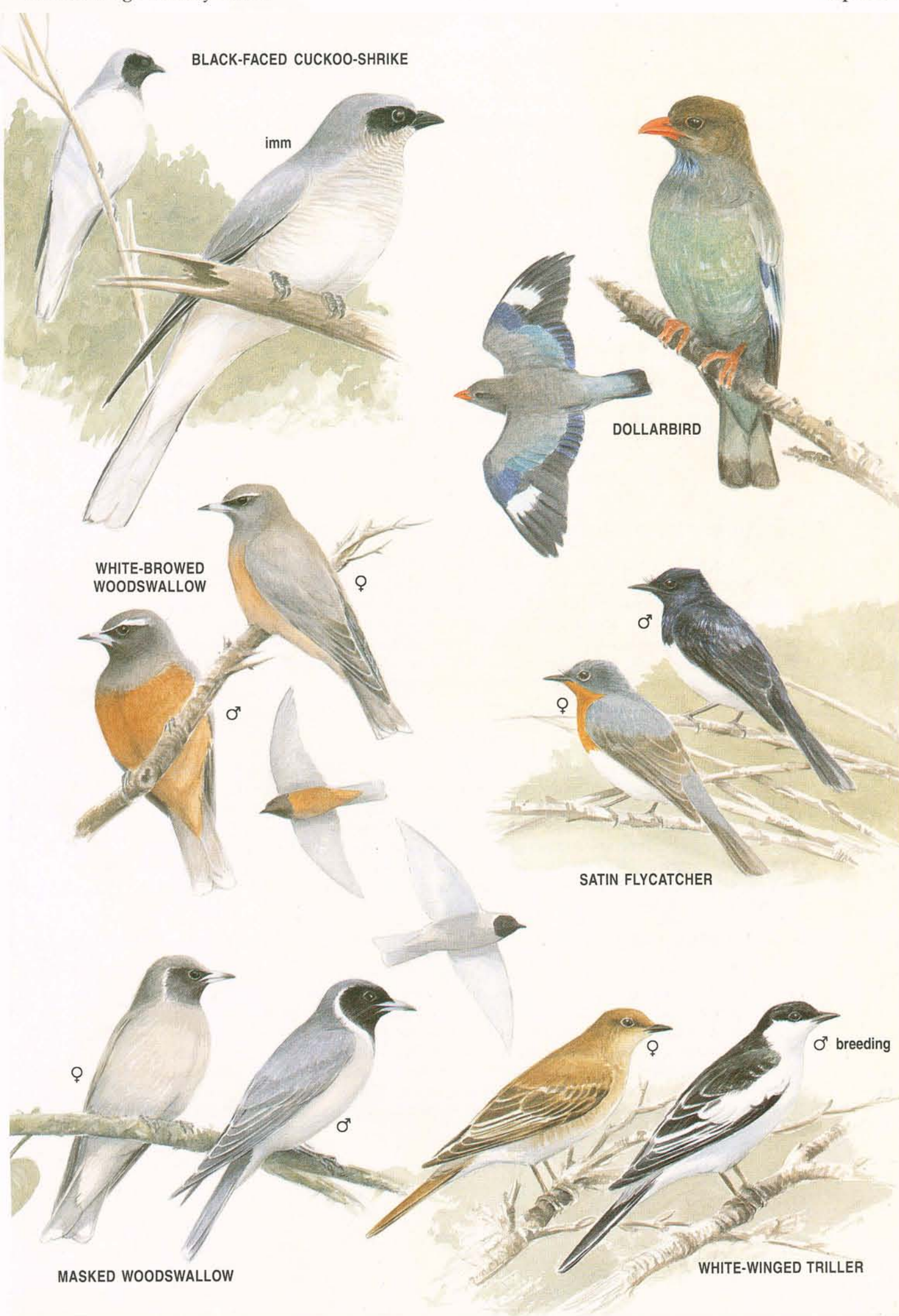


Passerines are the largest group of birds. They are small to medium sized land birds found worldwide, except on Antarctica. All species have four toes, three pointing forward and one back, well-adapted for perching. Most species are song-birds, with complex musical calls, but there are exceptions (e.g. crows). They show great diversity of form, behaviour and breeding biology.

MASKED WOODSWALLOW *Artamus personatus* Rare Australian vagrant

19 cm. In flight, like a small slim Starling soaring and gliding gracefully. Males two-tone grey, darker above; *black face and throat mask*, bordered white. Females duller with less distinct mask. Feeds on insects taken in the air and on the ground; also nectar. **Habitat:** Open country. Only NZ record was a pair that bred in Otago in early 1970s. [Sp 324]



WOODSWALLOWS

10 species in Australasia; 2 are vagrants to New Zealand, although 1 of them bred once.

Woodswallows are not closely related to the swallows (Hirundinidae) and are probably related most closely to the bell magpies (Cracticidae). They are accomplished fliers, soaring and gliding gracefully on long, curved

Artamidae

wings as they catch insects with their short, stout bill with a strongly decurved upper surface. They also feed on the ground and take nectar and pollen. Woodswallows build a flimsy platform nest of fine twigs in a tree fork. They are gregarious, often roosting huddled in tight bunches.

324. MASKED WOODSWALLOW *Artamus personatus* Plate 65

Size: 19 cm

Distribution: Breed in mainland Australia only. They are migratory and nomadic in Australia, and a pair once reached New Zealand. The birds were seen at Naseby, Central Otago, from January 1972 to August 1973, and although a nest was not seen, they are believed to have reared two chicks in an exotic pine plantation in the summer of 1972–73.

Breeding: In Australia, most nests are within several metres of the ground. They lay 2–3 pale greyish-white eggs (21 x 17 mm), which

are profusely marked with brown blotches and smudges, especially at the larger end. Both adults incubate and feed the young. Flying but apparently dependent young were first seen at Naseby in early March 1973. **Behaviour:** A persistent twittering and chattering kept the Naseby birds in contact. They often roosted huddled together on a wire or branch.

Reading: Child, P. 1974. *Notornis* 21: 85–87. Child, P. 1975. *Notornis* 22: 67–68. Darby, J.T. 1972. *Notornis* 19: 114–117.