



Chatham Island fantail *Rhipidura fuliginosa penita*

16 cm

CHATHAM ISLANDS ENDEMIC SUBSPECIES,
NOT THREATENED

Identification

The Chatham Island fantail is a small flycatcher with a rounded head, short bill and long tail which is often fanned. Sexes are alike. It is a subspecies of the New Zealand fantail, and looks similar to pied fantails (*R. f. fuliginosa* and *R. f. placabilis*) of mainland New Zealand, but with more white in the tail.



Chatham Island fantail,
Chatham Island.
Photo: Peter Reese.

Distribution and ecology

Fantails are common in most areas of native forest, scrub and gardens on Chatham and Pitt Islands, and occasionally breed on Rangatira and Mangere, straying to Star Keys. While fantails can be abundant at times, there are frequent population fluctuations, with sharp declines during severe weather. They eat insects, and forage with distinctive flitting movements, their tail fanning and closing as they manoeuvre through forest and gardens. Compact, open-topped nests are built 1.5–5 metres above the ground, generally in the understorey, in October–January. Both sexes incubate the 3–4 eggs and brood the chicks.

Threats and conservation

The deterioration and loss of forest habitat through burning and clearance for farming, and the introduction of browsers are likely to have been key factors in the decline of fantails. Recently observed declines and recoveries of fantail populations appear to be in response to climatic conditions, where storms lasting many days make it difficult for fantails to find sufficient prey. Protection of forest habitats will assist maintenance of fantail populations on Chatham Island. Reduced browser pressure allows development of a dense, sheltered understorey and deep leaf litter, which encourage healthy insect populations considered essential for fantails to survive long-term.



Chatham Island fantail at
nest, Chatham Island,
October 1993.
Photo: Peter Reese.