

ENDEMIC SPECIES FEATURE

PĪWAKAWAKA

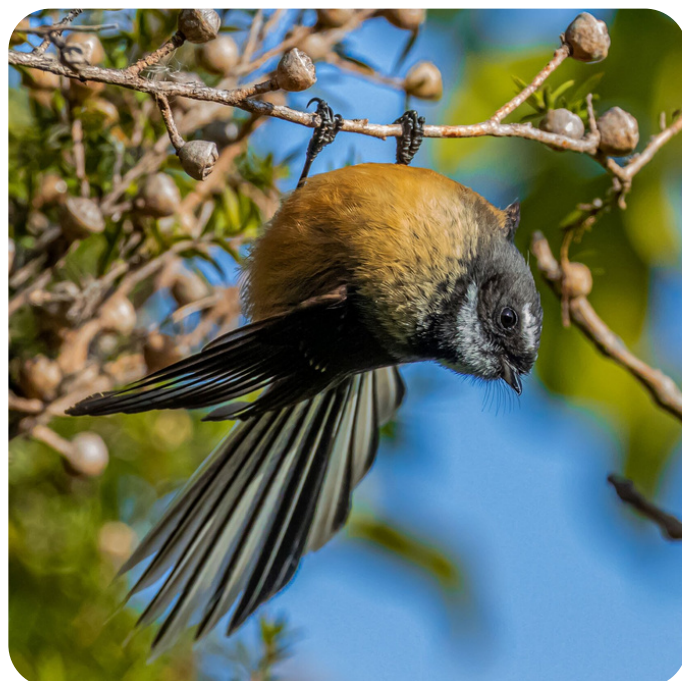
South Island Fantail

Rhipidura fuliginosa fuliginosa

It is unusual to stroll through the Sanctuary without, at some point, finding oneself accompanied by one or more pīwakawaka. Being common, however, makes them no less charming. Fantail species belong to the genus *Rhipidura* and are found throughout South-East Asia and the Antipodes. All are very similar in morphology and behaviour. New Zealand is home to one species, the endemic *Rhipidura fuliginosa*, of which there are four subspecies: the North Island fantail, South Island fantail or *Rhipidura fuliginosa fuliginosa* ('fuliginosa' means 'sooty', so the South Island fantail is extra sooty), Chatham Island fantail and the extinct Lord Howe Island fantail. Black fantails are not a separate subspecies, but a colour variation found more commonly among South Island fantails, where they make up roughly 5% of the population.

Pīwakawaka are widespread in a variety of habitats, including both native and exotic forests, scrublands, orchards and urban parks and gardens. The dainty pīwakawaka do not fare well in cold conditions and consequently suffer high mortality in winter. For this reason, they are not common in areas with snow or severe frost. South Island fantails typically only live 1-2 years. By comparison, North Island fantails may live 5 years while Australia's willy wagtails may live 12-15 years. Nesting adults, eggs and chicks are also vulnerable to predation by introduced mammals, especially ship rats which are small enough to climb up narrow branches.

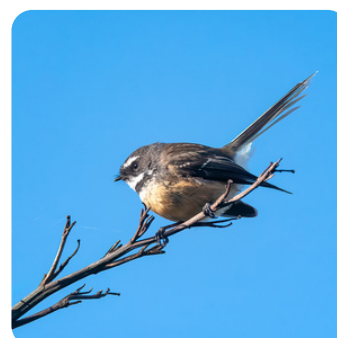
Pīwakawaka are prolific breeders. Females may lay up to 3 successful clutches, each with 3-5 eggs, within a season. Males and females remain paired year-round. High mortality in winter frequently necessitates survivors find new mates. Nest building begins in late August. Unlike their North Island counterparts, who leave nest building to the females, South Island males assist with nest building. Nests are tight circular cups woven between narrow branches with nesting material trailing underneath. Eggs are incubated for 13 days by both parents. The chicks fledge at 12-14 days old.



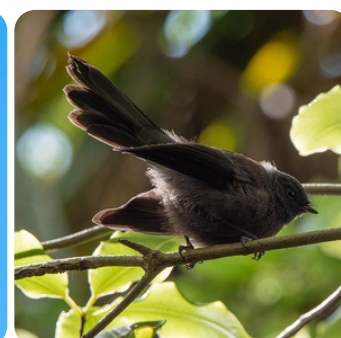
pīwakawaka © Matt Linden



pīwakawaka © Toya Heatley



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pīwakawaka © Oscar Thomas



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pīwakawaka © Steve Richards

PĪWAKAWAKA South Island Fantail *Rhipidura fuliginosa fuliginosa*

The female may begin to build a new nest before the chicks have fledged, leaving the male to feed the chicks alone. Chicks are fed every 10 minutes or approximately 100 times per day.

All this feeding means pīwakawaka are almost constantly on the move. They are insectivorous, with moths, flies, spiders, wasps and beetles making up most of their diet. They have three main foraging strategies:

1. Hawking. Used in open areas, a pīwakawaka seeks a vantage point from which it can see long distances. When it spots a swarm of insects, the pīwakawaka flies through it snapping up several insects at a time.
2. Flushing. Used in denser bush, pīwakawaka flit around disturbing insects, often using their tails to sweep insects from vegetation, eating them as they are flushed out.
3. Feeding associations. Pīwakawaka follow other birds, such as silvereyes and kākārīki, as well as people and eat the insects disturbed by them.

Pīwakawaka are also often seen picking off insects on the underside of fern fronds. Very occasionally they eat fruit.

Katherine Chamberlain, Bird Count Coordinator



pīwakawaka © Oscar Thomas