



Silvereye pairs may raise three broods between September and February. Their delicate nest cups may be found secured to the outer twigs of garden shrubs and trees. Most nests are built in October.



The range of food taken by silvereyes may be part of their success. Here a youngster is fed a large katydid but birds also feed on a range of invertebrates, nectar and fruit.

They rustle through the garden announcing themselves in a continuous chorus of bird chatter. The shrubs vibrate as little flocks of silvereyes hunt and peck their way through the foliage in search of food.

Silvereyes are the most common of native birds to visit the garden. Mature gardens offer them as good a home as the fringes of the bush. They can find food aplenty — they are omnivorous feeders — and find shelter both for roosting and nesting in the cover of modest urban trees.

With their attractive white-encircled eyes, silvereyes have been given several common names including the descriptive white-eye and waxeye. The Maori name of tahou (meaning stranger) is a reflection of

their comparatively recent self-introduction to New Zealand.

The first silvereyes were reported here in 1832, but large numbers found their way here in 1856 from Australia. There are some six subspecies of silvereye in Australia — they vary in their chest colouring — and the New Zealand invasion was from Tasmanian stock. This subspecies, *Zosterops lateralis*, has a migratory habitat, moving in winter from Tasmania across Bass Strait to eastern Australia. Among the theories about how the invasion happened here — it would take only two or three days for birds to be blown across the Tasman in a high wind — is the belief some hitched a ride in the rigging of a sailing ship. While there are

accounts of silvereyes settling on ships at sea, the numbers that reached New Zealand in 1856 were much greater than this method would allow, and sufficient to establish breeding populations in many places.

Part of the reason for the success of these birds is their catholic feeding habits. They take insects and other invertebrates, along with nectar and fruit for feed. In the garden they can find berries from native and introduced shrubs, nectar from plants such as kowhai and puriri, and a host of insects and other small creatures including spiders, caterpillars, flies and bugs. Their fondness for aphids early earned them another nickname — ‘blight-birds’.

In the forest, flocks may form about trees in fruit, particularly the giant podocarps,