

Of course, a well-placed bird bath will attract the silvereyes which use it to groom all through the year. Silvereyes also drink sugar water — artificial nectar set on the bird table — but keep it fresh and use sugar in the mix, not honey which can spread bee diseases.

The best time to feed silvereyes is in the winter when there is less food in the garden. It is also the season when birds from the higher country come to warmer places, or are in need of supplementary feeding. In inland Canterbury, for example, flocks of silvereyes can come down from the ranges and feed in country gardens on the plains, even though the surrounding open country is not their normal habitat. (There is evidence that some silvereyes in New Zealand have not lost their habit of migrating locally, as do many of their ancestral race in Australia, moving to warmer areas in cold winters.)

Make sure feeding in winter is regular or the increased number of birds in the garden will starve. Cease feeding in spring when birds are nesting, as the young will benefit from being fed natural food.

Silvereyes are among the few birds that can live their whole life cycle in the garden (or a series of adjacent gardens). They nest in shrubs from as low as a metre off the ground, usually in the outer foliage. The nest is suspended by bindings to adjacent twigs and is rather delicate; a cup woven from grass and light fibres, softened with moss, lichens and spider web. There are usually three pale blue eggs, but broods of

up to five occur.

A pair of silvereyes may raise two or three broods each spring and summer, from eggs laid from September to February. The adult pair stay together from season to season and both take their turn brooding on the nest and feeding the young. Young birds cease to follow their parents after two or three weeks, becoming independent feeders, but flock with others in winter.

Silvereyes are a great introduction to the fascination of birdwatching because their group behaviour is so obvious and easy to observe. They soon become a popular feature of the bird garden, but they are less popular with orchardists and winegrowers.

Silvereyes can be a pest because of their habit of eating fruit. As a result they are one of the few native birds to be only partially protected. Commercial growers can get permission (from the Director-General of Conservation) to kill them in certain circumstances, under the Wildlife Act. Their defenders argue the effect on crops is generally on fruit already damaged by other birds. Winegrowers take a different view and not all are willing to protect their grapes with netting. In the home garden the damage they might be able to do is, generally, minimal.

— **GORDON ELL** is the author of *Encouraging Birds in the New Zealand Garden*, and its successor, *Enjoying Nature in the New Zealand Garden*.

— **GEOFF MOON** is a pioneer of nature photography in New Zealand and author of many books about birds.



Silvereyes share the job of raising young. Both male and female brood the eggs and feed the chicks. Pairs stay together from year to year but join others in winter flocks.

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