

THE WHITE-EYE

By "CAFFE" with wood engravings by E. MERVYN TAYLOR

THE WHITE-EYE of New Zealand is one of a large number of essentially similar birds which have their homes scattered across a vast belt of temperate and tropical lands from Africa, through India and South East Asia, the East Indies and Australia, to New Zealand and some of the Pacific Islands. Of the sixty-seven kinds of White-eye, the one so well known in New Zealand has the widest distribution and has apparently spread within the last hundred years. Unknown in New Zealand before 1856, the White-eye rapidly multiplied after its first appearance at that date, and is now probably the most abundant of all New Zealand land birds, equally at home in virgin bush and in city gardens, where its habit of feeding on scraps of food has made it almost as familiar as the common sparrow. The White-eye has recently been the subject of intensive study by New Zealand bird-watchers, who have trapped and marked hundreds of birds with distinctive leg-bands, and thus gained much exact knowledge of its habits, life-history, and movements. This account draws largely upon the results of this investigation, published in the journal

New Zealand Bird Notes.

Throughout the winter months in most parts of New Zealand White-eyes are found in flocks of thirty to a hundred birds, which roam fairly widely over the country, feeding together in tree-tops, shrub, and rose-bush on aphids and other insects, and, at times, on scraps and on ripe fruit. From the evidence of marked birds we learn that the same individuals may feed in a garden for days on end and then move away, perhaps returning again after a few days or weeks. Many, on the other hand, are never seen again after their first visit. Birds which frequented a garden with some regularity returned to it when captured and released at a distance of 12 miles, a remarkable "homing" achievement in birds which had no nests nor young as an inducement to return. There are many records of voluntary wandering of up to 10 miles from the place of original marking, but little evidence that there is any regular "migration," though one remarkable Dunedin bird was found in Canterbury, 150 miles away, twenty-one months later.

The winter flocks break up in September, but before that month there are signs that pairing has begun, and that

