

# Breeding of the Oriental White-eye

(*Zosterops palpebrosus*)

with the help of nest site supports.

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Nest site support can have critical influence in the successful raising of softbill birds. Two aspects are discussed for nest site support; a) the setting up of a suitable nesting habitat and b) the placing of a nest support structure.

Nest site support was given to accomplish successful breedings by one pair of *Zosterops* and four pairs of Pekin Robins (*Leiothrix lutea*) in the year of 2000. All five pairs were given nest site support which resulted in the hatching of 13 clutches of eggs. The writer feels that the support given to establish and to build a non-failing nest was instrumental and is note worthy of publication.

## Setting Up the Birds

Four unsexed Oriental White-eyes were purchased in May 1999, with the hope that at least one pair would form among the birds. The birds showed no difference in size, significant coloration or weight. The White-eyes were weighed on an electronic letter scale while baited to a dish placed on it. They all weighed 12 grams. As it turned out three birds began to sing shortly after placing all four in planted aviary while one was not observed singing and presumed to be a female.

After two months a pair of Pekin Robins was added to the aviary. The four White-eyes stayed close together and no obvious pair formation took place. As a note of interest, the Pekin Robins appeared to be affected by the boisterous troop of White-eyes and only commenced building a nest in late August, once the White-eyes

were moved to another aviary. The following fall-to-spring the four birds remained compatible in an indoor flight (9' X 8' X 8' h), again housed together with a pair of Pekin Robins. In the middle of March 2000 two White-eyes paired up and attempted to build a nest in a bamboo plant. The pair showed some aggression towards the other two males, but no serious conflicts were noted. The tolerance is attributed to the dense planting which included bamboo and potted hemlock fir. As a word of caution, despite the described compatibility of the four White-eyes, there are many report of intense intra-specific aggression where birds may even kill one another. A small space without sight barriers and escape opportunities elevates this problem once pairs are formed and territories are being established.

## Breeding

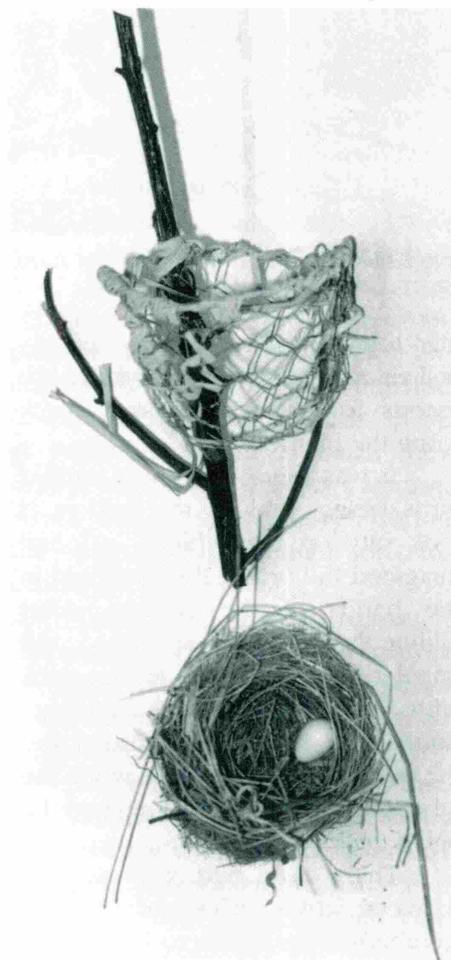
However, since this enclosure was designated to breed Pekin Robins, the pair of White-eyes and the extra two males were transferred on April 20 to other enclosures. The pair was given a space 4' X 6' X 7'h in a corner of a greenhouse. A potted hemlock fir and pruned-off tall stalks of bamboo were added to create a suitable nesting habitat. The pair was offered 12 to 15 inch long pieces of split raffia and various lengths and various types of dry grasses, moss, and lichen to assist in nest construction. Within two days the White-eyes began to weave strands of raffia in the hemlock 40 inches above ground level.

Apparently the preparation of the habitat suited the birds to start nesting. However, the pair had difficulty forming the nest in the site they had selected. After observing their futile attempts, a nest support structure was hastily placed in the spot.

## Support for the Nest

The support structure is made out of 16 gauge galvanized wire shaped into a ring with and two to three crossing wires forming a basket. The wire ends are left long enough to reach past the rim of the

Photo by the author



*White-eye nest support structure. The nesting material has been removed to show how the structure supports the nest. The egg is infertile.*

basket to help secure the structure in place. The diameter is about three inch and the depth of the basket about two and a half. The wire is wrapped with raffia to cover all metal surfaces, the thought being, that when the the nest support struc-

ture blends in with material the birds have placed, there should be less hesitation accepting it.

The pair reacted to the intervention and delayed nest building for part of the day until night fall, but resumed next morning and completed a rather untidy nest within a day. On April 26. three eggs were noticed and the birds began incubation.

The following day the nest had tilted, spilling the eggs to the ground. The writer had not wrapped the wire ends well enough around the thin branches of the hemlock, nor had the birds tied the nest in place with additional strands of raffia, which had been observed in other cases. It appeared that the female was very anxious to lay her eggs, which stopped nest building.

To correct the failure, the writer wrapped a piece of hexagon 1/2 inch chicken wire around the bottom of the nest basket to retain the nesting material better. The nest was tidied up and anchored back in the same location. This time more diligently. The birds were let out of the enclosure during this procedure to explore the service area to distract them.

**Success**

The pair was apprehensive this time to return to the nest and delayed nest building for three days. They then reworked the nest for two days and placed a good lining of fine grasses inside and immediately laid a clutch of four eggs by the fourth of May.

Both parents incubated the eggs and rarely were off the nest at the same time. They seemed to share incubation duties evenly between them. Three eggs hatched on May 13 after 9 to 10 days of incubation, since incubation started before the clutch was completed. One egg was infertile and ignored by the parents. The chicks opened their eyes on day 9 to 10 and fledged on day 12. All left the same day within approximately a two hour period. The chicks remained huddled together for the first three days before they began to move around.



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*Adult Oriental White-eye.*

Photos by the author



*Three young White-eyes with adult.*

On May 31, the female began to work on her nest again and within three days four eggs were noticed. After 9 to 10 days of incubation three chicks hatched, all while the previous brood was still cared for by both parents. On the third day after hatching a cat was seen at 2:00 A.M. on the green-

house roof. The disturbance caused a pair of Pekin Robins in the adjoining enclosure, to abandon their five-day-old fledglings. The writer placed cedar boughs on the roof to give better protection, which unfortunately also caused the White-eyes to abandon their nest. By the time the chicks

were removed, two had died and the third succumbed within 24 hours, during an attempt to hand raise it. Fortunately the two abandoned Pekin Robin chicks were raised successfully.

Later the White-eyes were moved with their young to another enclosure with an outside flight. They did not breed again in the following weeks and were surplused as a family group to a zoological garden to make room for the growing Pekin Robin colony.

### **Diets**

With respect to diets, the White eyes received a softbill bird mixture, moistened with freshly prepared carrot juice plus sugar water from a drinking tube. The sugar water had 20% sugar and carrot juice added to it to enhance plumage color. The birds received live food on a regular basis with greater amounts in preparation to breeding and during the rearing their young. Wax moth larvae (waxworm) were preferred over mealworms, but both were fed readily to their chicks. Crickets were not selected if the former were available. A branch with a colony of Coddling Moths' caterpillars were a welcomed treat. Fly maggots, even if raised on a cereal/yeast formula, were refused. Enchytraeids (potworm) were accepted, but these were not fed on a regular basis.

### **Conclusion**

The writer believes that diversity, high quantity, and quality of live food is an important catalyst to motivate White-eyes to breed and, evidently, setting up a suitable environment and providing nest support structures contributes significantly to the successful breeding of White-eyes. It goes without saying that rather territorial softbills should always have their own undisturbed space to breed.

White-eyes are very active birds and a pleasure to observe in a spacious, planted enclosure. The species has a habit of trimming young leaves and buds off plants, which can be a problem in a small enclosure. Their song is varied, soft, and pleasant. 