

NESTING OF THE WHITE-EYE

On the morning of 13/11/62, I saw a White-eye (*Zosterops lateralis*) with a piece of green lichen in its bill, and about mid-day on 14th November found the nest, placed 4ft. 6ins. above ground level in the upper part of a gorse bush near the top of a bluff on the southern shore of the Kerikeri Inlet, alongside a frequently used track. The nest was still unfinished and at this stage consisted mainly of thistledown. By 16th November the nest was completed. The nest contained two pale blue eggs when inspected at 10.15 a.m. on 19th November and again at 8 a.m. on 20th November. A third egg had been laid by 10 a.m. on the 20th November.

The first egg hatched about 12.50 p.m. on 29th November. I saw the parent sitting on the edge of the nest holding in its bill what at first looked to be a blue feather, but on closer inspection proved to be half an eggshell. When the bird flew off I found the chick still in the other half of the eggshell. The second egg hatched between 3 p.m. and 5 p.m. the same afternoon, and the third egg hatched between 10.30 and 12 noon on 30th November. By the 3rd December wing quills were showing about $\frac{1}{4}$ in., and over the next few days the feathers on the body grew until at 6.45 p.m. on 9th December the three chicks were fully feathered, greenish grey on the upper parts, but without the white eye ring of the adult bird. When the nest was inspected at 8.30 a.m. on 10th December, the chicks had left. The family party was seen in the area two days later.

Oliver (Second Edition, p. 499) gives the period of incubation at the White-eye as eleven days, occasionally twelve days: Moon (Focus on New Zealand Birds, 1960, p. 28) gives 10-11 days: Stead (Life Histories of New Zealand Birds, p. 140) 10 days, and Buller (Vol. 1, second edition, p. 83) quoting Potts, states that birds commenced incubation on October 16th, and the young hatched on October 25th — a period of nine days. From the data obtained on the Kerikeri nest it appears that incubation must have started when the second egg had been laid, on 19th November: the first two eggs hatched on 29th November (10 days) and the third egg hatched the following morning, also after a ten-day incubation period. The young birds left the nest just under ten days after the last chick had hatched.

During the incubation period the parent bird sat tight and did not move even when I approached to within three feet of the nest. Throughout the whole incubation and nestling period the parents were quite unafraid. I cannot say with certainty that both parents incubate, but on at least three occasions when the sitting bird flew off the nest in one direction, a bird flew in from another direction and sat on the eggs within a minute of the first bird's leaving. These apparent change-overs were observed to occur at about half-hour intervals.

I had no opportunity for detailed observation of feeding of the chicks, but on 7th December the parent brought to the nest a green caterpillar about 1 inch long, and on 8th December, a small green plant hopper (probably *Siphanta acuta*).

The nest was a small cup constructed of fine dry grass stems interwoven with thistledown. On the rim and on the outside of the

cup there were small and large patches of green and brown lichen. The walls were thin and flimsy but the rim tightly woven with cobwebs, thicker and stronger at the points of attachment to the two dead gorse twigs between which the nest was slung. The base of the cup was also tightly woven and compacted with cobwebs. Inside the cup, at the junction of walls and base, the nest was strengthened by a layer of black hairs (probably from Polled Angus cattle) forming a circle about 40mm. diameter and 8mm. broad. A few black hairs were also woven into the underside of the base. The nest was measured after the chicks had left, outside dimensions 70mm. across by 50mm. deep; inside 50mm. across by 40 mm. deep: these measurements are probably in excess of the original size of the nest, as the walls had stretched and on one side slightly torn apart with the weight of the chicks.

— PETER GROSS



WINTER FLOCKS OF FINCHES FEEDING ON REDROOT

At North Rd., Clevedon, Messrs. A. E. and J. C. Blundell, on neighbouring farms, have been growing the winter forage crop known as chou mollier. This was fed to dairy cows, being grazed in strips with the use of electric fences. The crops were free of weed for two or three years but in 1958 a weed named Red-root or Pigweed (*Amaranthus retroflexus*) infested the crops badly. Its millions of small black seeds attracted many small birds. In 1959 M. J. Blundell (Mrs. A. E.) reported Greenfinch 100, Goldfinch 300-400, Yellowhammer 300-400, but when asked to estimate the numbers for 1960 stated that she could not attempt it owing to the great number of the birds and the mixing of the species. This difficulty was fully realised when H.R.McK., with Mrs. Blundell and R. St. Paul, on 10/6/61, went to make a count. Mixed flocks would fly up and change places. Then from a part of the crop where no birds were to be seen would erupt another large flock, so that they were never all in sight at the same time. When a flock rose and flew into the trees there was no time to count the species separately so we estimated the total and then proportioned the species. It is therefore not claimed that the numbers are correct but they are, if anything, under-estimated. The birds fed just as readily where the crop had been eaten off, the seed being still plentiful there.

Other chou mollier crops in the Clevedon district were noted. First croppings from pasture had no weed and so no birds; but one heavy crop about five miles away had much weed and only a few birds. At Alfriston where R. St. Paul was staying, a small part of a chou mollier crop had on 11/6/61 c. 1,000 Goldfinches, c. 200 Greenfinches, c. 100 Redpolls and c. 250 Sparrows. On 12/7/61 he counted in two and a half chains square 800 to 900 mixed birds. Note was taken of the small birds about H.R.McK.'s home in Clevedon, only two and a half miles from Blundells' The usual small numbers were present. No attempt is made to explain this.

Counts were made as follows:—