

## NORTHERLY MOVEMENT OF SILVEREYES IN WINTER ON THE WEST COAST SOUTH ISLAND

By PETER GRANT

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Mr. G. E. Logie, Ngahere, told me that some years ago he had seen a strong northerly movement of Silvereyes *Zosterops lateralis* along the coastal strip between Hokitika and Greymouth. This was probably in the late 1940's.

On 2/6/70, a clear day with a strong easterly wind, I saw a large flock of small birds flying northwards along the coastal strip about half a mile south of the Greymouth aerodrome. The weather deteriorated and it was not until Saturday, 6th June, that I again saw birds on the move. A strong easterly caused some birds to hug the lee of the terrace behind my home and in about 40 minutes of watching I counted some 520 birds in intermittent flocks numbering from 10 to 50. However, birds were also going beyond the terrace top and I could not count these. Others were passing along the shore strip. A count from half a mile south from 11.05-11.35 a.m. gave a rate of flow of about 2,000 per hour, and this did not include the flocks right by the beach. Mr. H. C. Hooper said they were passing over a position by the coast in quite large flocks which tapered off by 11.35 a.m. I had neither seen nor counted these birds in my tally. The flow was light and intermittent until about 4 p.m. when larger flocks began moving past steadily. This continued until nearly sunset.

On Sunday, 7th June, further counts were made and a flow rate of up to 2,000 per hour was counted. However, this would be conservative in the viewing conditions. Quite frequently birds could be heard but not seen. Higher flying birds up sun were very difficult to pick. With little wind the birds were noticeably higher.

On 8th June a much lower rate of flow was occurring, possibly as low as 200 per hour behind my home and some flocks were still moving on 22nd June, the last date on which I recorded them.

The movement of the flocks was interesting. It appeared that the birds settled in the bush and scrub-covered gullies for the night, then in the morning started calling. A longish call is made for a start and is repeated steadily. Some birds gather together on this call; then short flights are made through the covering foliage until more and more birds join together. The calling becomes more rapid and excited until it becomes a fast twitter, when the flock will suddenly burst forth. In some cases a small flight will be made and the flock will return to the bush or scrub but in most cases the flock burst forth and made some altitude before flying directly north. Flocks holding to the lee of the terrace to keep out of the wind tended to keep low, but some making a line nearer the coast flew to a height of several hundred feet. On the bush-covered slopes, and also on the lupin- and scrub-covered flats on the coastal strip the flocks seemed often to leapfrog along. Birds frequently dropped into the cover then came out again. They were difficult to observe in these conditions.

However, over clear ground they held well together in flocks of up to 100 birds. At one point Black-backed Gulls *Larus dominicanus* caused relatively large numbers to drop into a clump of larger trees from which they would burst in smaller numbers from time to time. The gulls circled the trees. The main flow of birds did not seem to get under way until the sun was shining well on the hills — about 8 a.m. — and went on until it tapered off about 11.30 a.m. An intermittent flow lasted until about 4 p.m. then a strong flow built up until nearly sunset.

It is difficult to estimate how many birds passed in a day but at a flow rate of at least 2,000 per hour and, possibly markedly more than this for at least 3 hours in the morning (6,000), with a reduced flow of say 200 per hour during the day until 4 p.m. (1,000), and a further 1,000 before sunset (1,000), 8,000 would, in my opinion, be a conservative estimate. This rate was observed for two days and could have gone on longer. A light flow still continued nearly three weeks after the first movement was noticed.. In view of the incomplete daily information and period of the flow it is not possible to estimate how many birds may have passed.

The cause of the movement was possibly the onset of snow on the hills. This would tend to force the birds to the lower levels and the configuration of the land would tend to bring them out to the sea coast. However, a television item at the time showed a discussion between two persons in the Ashburton area, and the same excited Silvereye calls could be heard in the background. The movement may have been up the eastern side of the Southern Alps as well. It would be interesting to know just how far and what proportion of the flocks moved. At least some Silvereyes remained in the Greymouth area over the winter.