



No. 25 Silvereeye

Description

The silvereeye (*Zosterops lateralis*), is also known as the white eye or greenie. It is a small olive-green bird with an obvious ring of white feathers around the eye (Figure 1). It is 11-13 centimeters in length and 8.5-10 g in weight and gives a variety of high-pitched calls – the contact call is a thin 'psee'.



Figure 1 Silvereeye *Zosterops lateralis* (Photo Tony Krikby / WA Museum).

Distribution and habitat

Silvereeyes are common in many habitats in coastal and sub-coastal areas including thickets and forests, suburban gardens and orchards. In Western Australia, they are found from Carnarvon to Kalgoorlie and Eucla and in the south-west (Figure 2).

Diet

Silvereeyes eat small insects throughout the year, taking them from the ground, leaves, flowers, on and under bark and from the air. They also eat fruits including those from Black Nightshade *Solanum nigrum*, figs *Ficus spp.*, saltbush *Rhagodia spp.*, *Atriplex sp.*, Grapes *Vitis vinifera*, and other soft fruits. Nectar is a favoured food of Silvereeyes and research has shown that the birds prefer nectar to grapes.

Silvereeyes damage grapes and other soft fruits when their natural food supplies are scarce. This usually occurs during summer when the birds migrate to vineyards and orchards. When Marri *Corymbia*

calophylla trees produce large amounts of nectar in summer, damage to fruit is usually minimal.

Breeding

The nest of the Silvereeye is a small cup made of grass and spider webs, suspended from the branch of a shrub or tree (Figure 1). Between September and January (peak in November), 2-4 eggs are laid and the eggs are incubated by both parents for 10-13 days. The young leave the nest about 12 days after hatching.

Some breeding pairs can produce up to 4 broods of young in one breeding season and in good seasons, local populations can double during this time. The number of young birds in the population is highest in January.

Behaviour

Silvereeyes occur in pairs or small parties as they rapidly move about feeding areas, calling constantly. Large flocks of birds form in January and February, when the birds move inland as a result of a decrease in food supply in the coastal breeding areas.

Damage

Silvereeyes can cause severe damage to grapes by piercing the skin with their sharp beaks to consume the juice and fruit. Grapes that are well-protected by vine leaves are often subject to greater damage than more exposed bunches. This is possibly because the birds feel less exposed to predators when feeding amongst the foliage.

Damage to grapes by Silvereeyes results in reduced yields of marketable fruit, higher cleaning costs in the table grape industry and a reduction in wine quality in the wine industry. Stone fruit, figs and some vegetable crops are also damaged by the birds.

Status and damage reduction

The Silvereeye is a declared pest of agriculture under the provisions of the *Agriculture and Related Resources Protection Act 1976*, administered by the Western Australian Department of Agriculture and Food. This declaration allows for the approval and implementation of a management program in various areas of the state. As a native species, the Silvereeye is protected under the provisions of the *Wildlife Conservation Act 1950*, administered by the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC). Under this Act Silvereeyes can be shot on private land in accordance with an open season notice without the need to obtain a damage licence from

DEC. The area covered by the notice comprises the south-west land division. Within this area Silvereye populations are secure and damage to agriculture is likely to be a continual problem.

Outside the open season area, a damage licence must be obtained from DEC prior to shooting. For more information, contact DEC and refer to Fauna Note No. 9. Destruction of Birds to Reduce Damage. DEC, Western Australia.

Destruction should be viewed as a last resort after all other control options have been attempted. For other management options see the table Options for Reducing Damage Caused by Silvereyes below. A strategy comprising a number of techniques will probably be needed to reduce damage caused by Silvereyes.

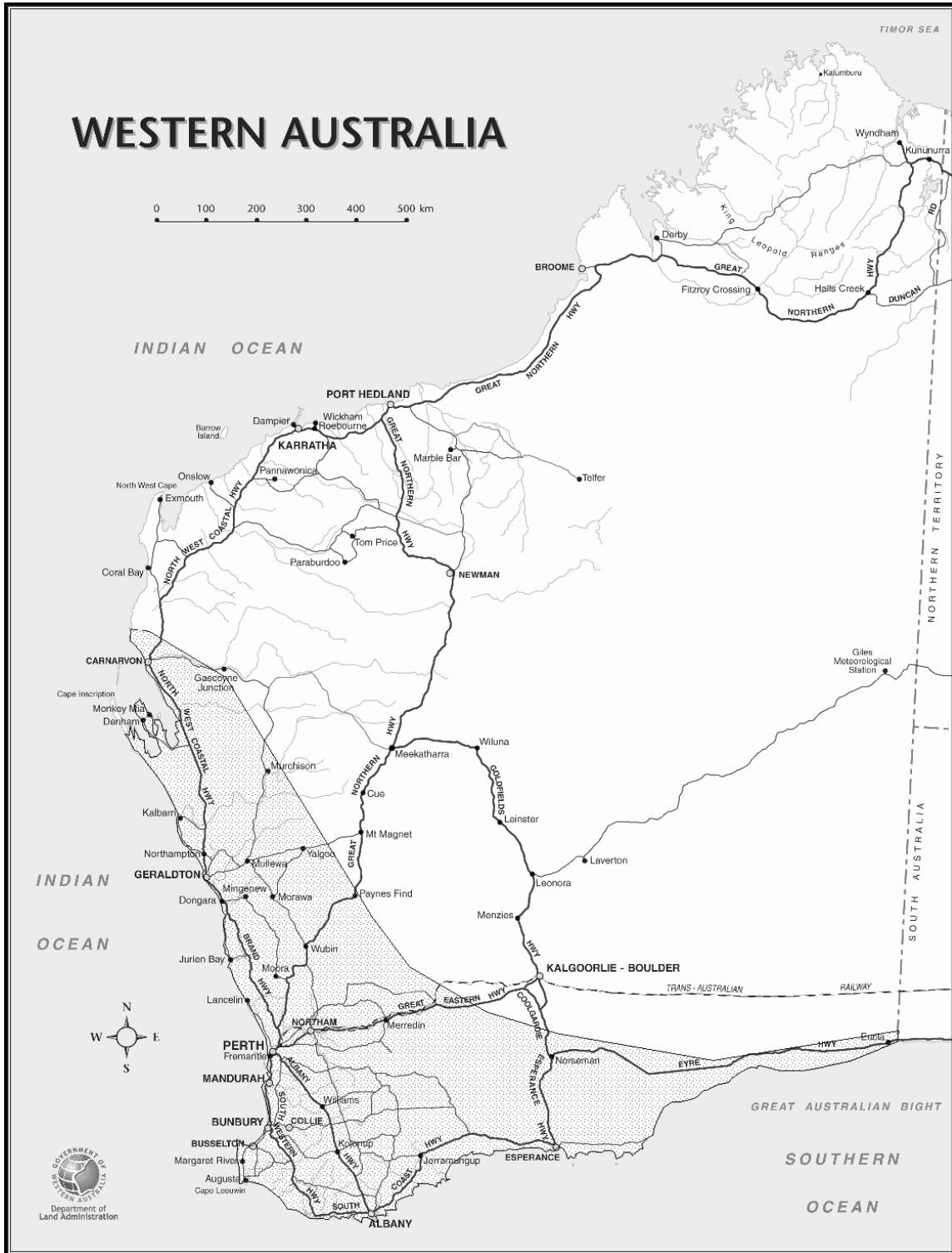


Figure 2 Distribution of the Silvereye (*Zosterops lateralis*) in Western Australia (Modified from Blakers *et al.* 1984).

Preventing damage

- Enquire with neighbours before planting to determine if Silvereyes are present and if there is a history of damage.
- Plant crops in large blocks because they have a smaller edge to area ratio and may suffer less damage. Silvereyes tend to damage outside rows first and most severely. Plant early or late maturing varieties away from crop edges.
- Plant crops away from native vegetation (which Silvereyes rely on for nest, roost sites and food) where they are less likely to be damaged.
- Plant rows parallel to native vegetation to reduce damage levels. This way, birds cannot easily fly down rows and penetrate into the heart of the crop to feed.
- Minimise water supplies near the vineyard because Silvereyes appear to require fresh water when eating grapes.

Further reading

- [Silvereye](#). Birds in Backyards, Australian Museum.

References

Tracey, J. and Saunders G. (2003) Bird damage to the wine grape industry. A report to the Bureau of Rural Sciences, Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. Vertebrate Pest Research Unit, NSW Agriculture, Orange.

Department of Environmental Protection and Water and Rivers Commission, Western Australia (2002) Environmental management guidelines for vineyards. DEP and WRC, Western Australia.

Further information

Contact your local office of the Department of Environment and Conservation.

See the Department's website for the latest information:
www.dec.wa.gov.au.

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