

### Silvereyes hunting insects on the wing

On 8 April 1989, at 6.30 a.m. of a still and misty morning, I noticed small birds making short hovering flights from the shrubs and fruit trees of my garden. With binoculars I identified the birds as Silvereyes (*Zosterops lateralis*) and could see that they were going after insects. These were some kind of clear-winged insect (not flying ants) which were rising in columns above each bush. During the following half-hour I watched 20-30 Silvereyes and several House Sparrows preying on these flies. Each bird would fly one or two metres, hover briefly, snap at an insect, and return to the same bush. The snap of the bill was quite audible. I could not see whether an insect had been caught but, unlike a Fantail in pursuit of flies, the Silvereyes seemed to make only one attempt at capture on each brief flight. Often several birds were in the air at the same time, and I noted that they popped out of the foliage and dropped back into the bush. That is, they were not using and returning to vantage points after the usual style of flycatchers. The Silvereyes may also have been capturing the insects on the foliage, but I could not confirm this. A pair of Grey Warblers which passed through the garden during this time took no part in this feeding, and although I could hear a Fantail it remained some way off and out of sight.

Silvereyes are well known to be opportunistic feeders but I have not seen this behaviour before. B. Brown (1988) has recorded 20+ feeding like sparrows on a lawn for several hours and there is a report by A. Blackburn (1981) from Gisborne on 14/8/79 of the species "taking larger insects in typical flycatcher manner". It is not clear whether this latter note refers to one or several birds.

#### REFERENCES

- BLACKBURN, A. 1981. Silvereye (*Zosterops lateralis*). In Sibson, R.B. Classified Summarised Notes. Notornis 28: 57-82.  
BROWN, B. 1988. Silvereye (*Zosterops lateralis*). In Keeley, B.R. Classified Summarised Notes, North Island. Notornis 35: 285-310.

MICHAEL TAYLOR, 28 Awarua Crescent, Orakei, Auckland 5