

*Description (Male).*—Forehead chestnut; tail fuscous; rest of upper surface olive-brown, each feather having a broad dark (fuscous) stripe. Lores, throat, and chest light purplish-blue; rest of under surface greyish-brown.

Dimensions in inches :—Total length, 5; wing, 1.54; tail, 3.04; bill, 0.39; tarsus, 0.6.

(NOTE.—This note has been held over for some time in the hope that Mr. M'Lennan could procure another specimen, perhaps a female, but, on account of the shy nature of the little birds, he has, so far, been unsuccessful.—A.J.C.)

## The White-eye (*Zosterops coerulescens*): its Relation to the Orchardist.

BY A. H. CHISHOLM, MARYBOROUGH (VICT.)

THERE has been so much said to the discredit of this familiar little bird that I am tempted to take up the cudgels in its defence, and state my personal and practical experience of its destructive and useful traits.

*Z. coerulescens* is the only representative of the genus in this district, and is a fairly plentiful bird. About the end of December, just after the usual breeding season, two or three couples and their attendant young will gather together into a small flock, and set out upon a systematic tour through the orchards and vineyards. As about this time soft, sweet fruits, such as grapes, mulberries, &c., are ripening, it is not to be wondered at that the White-eyes, possessing as they do a decided taste for saccharine matter, are not slow to take toll of the luscious fruit hanging so temptingly in the sunshine. Then the angry grower, who sees only the empty skins hanging on the grape bunches, does not stop to consider the other side of the question, but sets innumerable poisons, and shoots the birds on sight, whereas, if he would only take the trouble to observe the bird, its habits, and its food a little more closely, he would soon be convinced of the undesirability of such a proceeding. Time and again have I debated this point with prejudiced orchardists.

It is principally during the autumn and winter months (when most birds are on their best behaviour) that the extreme usefulness of White-eye to the orchardist and horticulturist becomes most apparent. To enumerate some of its good qualities:—First of all, it is the great enemy of that most destructive pest the fruit tree aphid. I have frequently watched groups of White-eyes busily clearing aphid of various colours off all kinds of fruit trees. Each bird takes a certain branch area, and works systematically, industriously, and well. I am always sorry to see them leave, for I consider them better and certainly cheaper

than all spray pumps and other mechanical devices. As illustrating the "Blight-Birds'" decided usefulness with regard to another insect pest, the following note may not be out of place:—"28th July, 1907.—A damp morning. White-eyes plentiful in the garden, hopping up the (now) bare branches of the trees, peering under the damp bark, and picking out large numbers of parasitical insects, which, if left to themselves, would in the end ruin the trees."

I have also frequently watched this energetic little bird feasting on some small insect (name unknown to me) which causes a lot of damage among the rhubarb plants. And if this were not sufficient evidence to support its claim to the friendship and protection of the orchardist, it is a great enemy of the codlin-moth and pear-tree slug—two of the greatest pests the grower has to contend with. No doubt many more cases outside my knowledge of its useful traits could be cited, but these should convince any fair-minded grower of White-eye's great value to him. Taking it on the whole, I can unhesitatingly affirm that (in this district, at all events) the good done by this much-maligned little bird far outbalances what little damage it may cause; in fact, I consider that the bird is justly entitled to a little laxity in the spring and summer in return for the incalculable amount of good it does during the cooler months.

### The Value of Babblers as Insect-Destroyers.

BY A. H. CHISHOLM, MARYBOROUGH (VICT.)

MR. J. A. Leach's recent timely reminder as to the extreme usefulness of the Babbler, or Codlin-moth-eater (*Pomatorhinus temporalis*)\* will be sure to meet with the approval of every person who has had any experience of the bird.

As a practical illustration of its value I may mention a case that came under my notice recently. A grub, light green in colour, and varying in size from half an inch to an inch and a half long (probably the larva of the agrotis moth), was attacking my rhubarb plants in great numbers, and bade fair to ruin the whole of the plants, when my friends the Babblers took part. The grubs did not come out during the day, but hid in the soft earth at the foot of the plant, only coming out to feed when the night fell. This fact did not deter the Babblers in the slightest degree. As soon as they located the grubs the birds arrived in dozens, and all day long were to be seen digging and pecking with great vigour all around the plants. In a very short time, where formerly there were hundreds, there was not a single grub pest left—vanquished by my inexpensive allies.

\* Campbell, "Nests and Eggs," p. 272 (1900); French, *Agric. Journal of Victoria*, p. 68 (May, 1903).