

SURVIVAL INSTINCTS IN
SILVEREYES

On the afternoon of December 29, 1961, a nest of the Eastern Silvereye (*Zosterops lateralis*) was found in a low leafy bough of a mallee (*Eucalyptus diversifolia*) overhanging a track at Beachport. The nest contained a single small naked nestling which was banded with C.S.I.R.O. band 010-36309. A later inspection revealed that the nestling had vanished on the night of December 30-31, and a note was entered in the field book "Nestling presumed taken by predator."

How wrong this proved to be, for on December 28, 1962, the bird was caught in a mist net only a few yards north of the tree where it was banded. I would imagine that a naked Silvereye nestling would have no hope of survival out of the nest due to the vast number of ants on the ground, the cold, and predators. It could hardly have left the nest voluntarily as it was virtually helpless, nor do I consider it was coaxed out of the nest by the parents as (a) it was all but incapable of doing so, and (b) it could not have survived on the ground for the reasons stated above, even if attended by the parent birds. Ants alone would have destroyed the nestling in a short while.

The fact that it did survive can only leave one to reach the conclusion that it was removed by the parents to another nest. Human interference with nestlings can cause different reactions by parent birds, and in this case human interference could be classed as excessive, as the bough overhung a little-used track that was used that day several times by a utility with a canopy that brushed the bough heavily aside. This together with the banding constituted the known direct human interference. However, there were about 10 people periodically walking along the path, which could also have disturbed the birds. One can only be left to wonder at the ingenuity of the parents in seeking another nest for the safety of their young and to wonder how they carried out the removal of the youngster.

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