ZOSTEROPS SIMPLEX, Swinh.

Plain Zosterops.

Zosterops japonica, Swinh. in Ibis, 1861, p. 35 (nec Temm. et Schleg.).

—— simplex, Swinh. in Proc. of Zool. Soc., 1862, p. 317, and 1863, p. 203.—Id. Ibis, 1863, p. 294, and 1870, p. 348.—G. R. Gray, Hand-list of Birds, part 1. p. 163.

Sheong-shee of the Cantonese (Swinhoe).

According to Mr. Swinhoe, this species of Zosterops inhabits all the provinces of Southern China, and is also found in the islands of Formosa and Hainan. Its nearest allies are the Zosterops palpebrosa, of India, and the Z. japonica, of Japan; but the Indian bird is easily distinguished from it by the more lively yellow colour of the throat and upper surface, and the Japanese species by its larger size, by the duller-coloured hue of the upper surface, by the smaller amount of jet-black on the lores, and the darker hue of its flanks. In its habits, disposition, and entire economy it assimilates most closely to its near allies in Australia; a discrepancy, however, occurs in the colouring of their eggs, those of the Chinese bird being described by Mr. Swinhoe as white, while those of the Australian species are delicate blue. As is the case with the other members of the genus, the sexes of Z. simplex are alike in colour; but the male slightly exceeds the female in size.

For the following notes respecting this species we are indebted to the researches of Mr. Swinhoe:—

"The Zosterops simplex ranges in China from Canton to Foochow, and perhaps a little higher, but not to Shanghai, where it is replaced by Zosterops erythropleura. In Formosa and in Hainan it is also an abundant resident. Like the Z. palpebrosa it is grey on the underparts. An occasional specimen or two, however, may be picked out of my Amoy series with a tinge of chestnut-brown on the underparts, showing the tendency of the species towards the Z. japonica. Some have the abdomen deeper grey than others. The yellow on the throat varies in intensity, as also does the green of the upper parts; but these are chiefly distinctions of sex and age. I have one pale (almost yellow) variety, procured by Captain Blakiston at Canton. All the adults have the black lore and eye-line common to so many of this group. I have specimens from Hongkong, Macao, Canton, Amoy, Foochow, and Formosa, all agreeing in their essential characters.

"It is abundant at Hongkong, where in winter it may constantly be seen, roaming from tree to tree along the roads in small parties, searching every twig for *Aphides* and other small insects. When engaged in pursuit of its food, it hangs in all manner of attitudes, uttering the while a peculiar call-note. In spring it emits a short sweet song. Its well-blended tints of yellow and green, and the snow-white ring that encircles its sharp black eyes, may be seen to advantage by the observer who stands under the trees whereon a number of these sprightly little fellows are exploring the twigs and leaves for small insects. On the 2nd of April I had the good fortune to discover its nest, at the end of a bough of a large-leaved tree. It was attached to several leaf-stalks about eight feet from the ground, and might at first sight have been taken for some insect's nest. It consisted of a small cup, composed of delicate grasses, spider's web, and moss, and much resembled the nest of a Humming-bird. This pretty little structure contained two clear-white eggs.

"In confinement this species readily becomes tame, even when several are kept together; and it may be seen as a cage-bird in most of the towns of South China. At feeding-time they are particularly lively—but when satiated settle on their perch, sidling up to their companions; and after caressing one another for a short time, all ruffle their feathers and dip their heads under their wings. The siesta they take is not long. They all wake up suddenly, and feed again, the males often putting forward the head and singing their soft melodious notes. The *Zosterops* is very fond of bathing, and, for food, besides insects, is very partial to fruit, showing an especial fondness for plantains and bananas, on which it may be almost entirely sustained."

I am indebted to Mr. Swinhoe for permission to copy a beautiful drawing in his possession of the nest of this species, probably of the one spoken of above.

Forehead, throat, breast, vent, and under tail-coverts sulphur-yellow; upper surface yellowish green, brightest or yellower on the head; abdomen brownish grey, suffused in some specimens with a ruddy tinge; a ring of white feathers round the eye; axillaries white; quills and tail dark brown, margined externally with yellowish green; under edge of the quills, the under surface of their shafts, and also those of the tail white; bill and legs slate-colour.

The Plate represents both sexes and a nest, of the natural size.