

Birds in the Backyard

Indian White-Eye (*Zosterops palpebrosus*)

This small bird, which is olive-yellow above and has a yellow throat and vent, is easily identified by its white eye-ring. It has a black stripe that runs from the beak to halfway down the white eye-ring. The underside is white or greyish. The species is found across most of India except the arid west, and inhabits forests and gardens. They feed on insects, buds, nectar, and fruits, including fruits of the invasive Lantana.



The genus *Zosterops* is famous for its rapid speciation rate and overwater dispersal ability, with about 80 species described from Africa to Australasia. Therefore, the genus has been the focus of many studies on phylogenetics, phylo-geography and island biogeography. However, with the exception of a few species, there does not seem to be much work on behaviour and ecology, which could also provide insights into the proximate mechanisms of diversification. Several subspecies of *Zosterops palpebrosus* are thought to exist within India (top photo taken in Mohali, lower photo taken in Bengaluru – see if you can find any difference!), presenting opportunities to study their taxonomy, biogeography, behaviour and ecology.

By T N C Vidya

Photo credits: Kaustubh Verma (top)

Revathe T (bottom)

