

Nesting of the Black-capped White-eye

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Introduction

The Black-capped White-eye *Zosterops atricapilla* is typically associated with montane and sub-montane forest ecosystems and is known to feed predominantly on nectar, fruits, and insects. It is common at Kinabalu Park, Sabah, Malaysia.

Information on the nesting behaviour of Black-capped White-eye is limited to two prior, brief reports. Whitehead states "*I found a nest of this species*" (at 1550 m on Mount Kinabalu, probably in March) "*which was built of fine roots on the underside of a moss-covered bough, in the damp dark forests on the slopes of the mountain. The old birds were feeding their young on grubs*" (Smythies 1999). Robson has reported young in a nest in April at Mount Kinabalu (Smythies 1999). Adults carrying nesting material have been noted in May (Sumatra) and fledglings seen in April (Borneo), June (Sumatra) and July (Borneo) (Van Balen 2020).

Nesting Observation

While watching birds on 23 June 2025 at Kinabalu Park, Sabah, Malaysia (1580 m), the three of us observed a pair of Black-capped White-eyes collecting the flowers of *Poikilospermum scabrinervium* to feed nectar; possibly to feed young nestlings. Alim Biun has previously seen their nest and he explored the area and found the nesting site nearby.

The nest was located at approximately eye level from the ground (1.7-1.8 m) and constructed among the foliage of *Podranea ricasoliana* (ornamental Pink Trumpet Vine, family: Bignoniaceae) (Plate 1). This plant, planted as part of the landscape design in front of a Kinabalu Park hostel building, incidentally provided a concealed and sheltered nesting site, offering protection from both predators and human disturbance. We observed an adult brooding two young chicks.

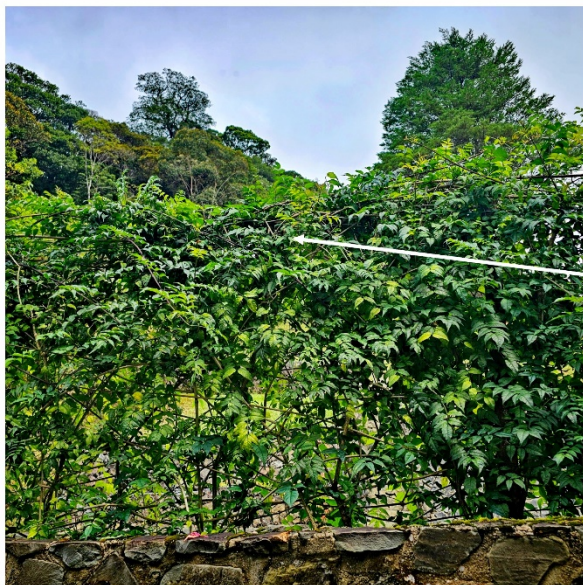


Plate 1: Nest location of the Black-capped White-eye, Kinabalu Park, Sabah, Malaysia, 23 June 2025.

We kept our observations very brief and continued our birdwatching in the park. We were not able to monitor the nest but decided that one person in the team would return for nest measurements once chicks fledged.

Physical Measurement of the Black-capped White-eye Nest

On 19 July 2025, Alim Biun conducted a follow-up field visit to Kinabalu Park to assess the nest. The chicks had fledged but we are uncertain of the date. As planned, structural measurements of the nest were taken during the visit (Plate 2).

Nest Characteristics:

Cup-shaped structure

Construction:

The nest consists of approximately 95 plant fibres intricately woven to form a compact and stable structure. The base was reinforced with dried leaves, supported by a layer of coarse fibres. The inner chamber, used for egg-laying and incubation, was lined with fine plant fibres, believed to act as thermal insulation, protecting the eggs and chicks from low ambient temperatures. The dark coloration observed at the base suggests a densely compacted inner layer, which likely enhances the nest's insulating efficiency.

Nest Measurements:

External Height: 6.0 cm.

Internal Height: 3.5 cm.

Opening Diameter (External): 6.0 cm.

Opening Diameter (Internal): 3.5 cm.

Wall Thickness: 1.0 cm.

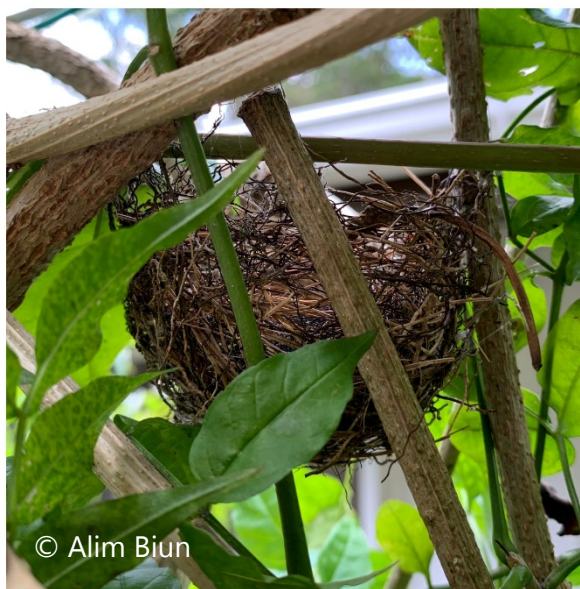


Plate 2: Close up view of the Black-capped White-eye nest, Kinabalu Park, Sabah, Malaysia, 19 July 2025.

Discussion

Based on field observations and previous experience, the nest's location is considered unusually low for this species, which typically constructs nests at a height of around 3 metres

above ground level, most commonly within bamboo clumps in the same area. This marks the third recorded instance of a nest of this species found in a similarly low and sheltered location. However, it remains uncertain whether the nest was built by the same individual or by another bird of the same species.

Acknowledgement

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References

1. Smythies, B.E. (1999). *The Birds of Borneo*. Fourth edition. Revised by Davison, G.W.H. Natural History Publications (Borneo), Kota Kinabalu.
2. Van Balen, B. (2020). Black-capped White-eye (*Zosterops atricapilla*), version 1.0. In *Birds of the World* (J. del Hoyo, A. Elliott, J. Sargatal, D. A. Christie, and E. de Juana, Editors). *Cornell Lab of Ornithology*, Ithaca, NY, USA. <https://doi.org/10.2173/bow.bkcwhe1.01>

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