

= Golden white @-@ eye =

The golden white @-@ eye ( *Cleptornis marchei* ) is a species of bird in the white @-@ eye family Zosteropidae . It is the only species within the genus *Cleptornis* . The golden white @-@ eye was once considered to be a honeyeater in the family Meliphagidae and although it is now known to be a white @-@ eye , its position within that family is still uncertain . The species is restricted to the islands of Saipan and Aguijan in the Northern Mariana Islands , where it is sympatric ( shares its range ) and competes with the related bridled white @-@ eye . The golden white @-@ eye has golden plumage and a pale eye @-@ ring . It feeds on insects , fruit , and nectar and forages in pairs or small family groups . The bird is monogamous and lays two eggs in a small cup nest .

Fossil evidence shows the golden white @-@ eye once also occurred on Tinian and Rota but was extirpated in those locations through the impact of human activities . Despite its current abundance on Saipan and Aguijan , and the fact that it has among the highest recorded densities for any bird , it is nevertheless considered to be critically endangered . It is threatened by the invasive brown tree snake , which has become established on nearby Guam , and this predator is expected to cause a rapid decline in the population if it reaches Saipan . Efforts are under way to control the snakes and breed the white @-@ eye in zoos .

= = Taxonomy = =

The species was once called the golden honeyeater as it was considered to be a honeyeater ( *Meliphagidae* ) . It was placed within the genus *Ptilotis* by French naturalist Émile Oustalet when he described the species in 1889 ; that genus is now considered defunct and is no longer used . It was subsequently moved into the genus *Cleptornis* , which had been provisionally established by Oustalet in case the species proved to be distinct . Behavioural and morphological characteristics led American ornithologist Harold Douglas Pratt , Jr . , to suggest in 1987 that it was related to the white @-@ eyes . Subsequent studies have supported the idea that this species was a white @-@ eye . It is possibly most closely related to the Micronesian white @-@ eyes of the genus *Rukia* , or the monotypic Bonin white @-@ eye ( *Apalopteron* ) , another species once placed with the honeyeaters and subsequently moved to the white @-@ eyes . The golden white @-@ eye has a long 10th primary feather ( one of the flight feathers ) , unlike other white @-@ eyes where that primary is reduced or absent , which has led to the alternative suggestion that it is basal ( an early offshoot ) among the white @-@ eyes .

Its generic name , *Cleptornis* , is derived from the Ancient Greek *kleptes* , a robber or thief , and *ornis* , a bird . This is not a reference to any aspect of the golden white @-@ eye 's behaviour , but to the old French name of the Mariana Islands , *les Îles des Voleurs* , or Robbers ' Islands . The specific epithet *marchei* refers to the French explorer and writer Antoine @-@ Alfred Marche , who procured the original specimens .

= = Distribution and habitat = =

The golden white @-@ eye is endemic to the Northern Mariana Islands in the western Pacific Ocean , where it currently occurs on the islands of Saipan and Aguijan . Within its range , it occupies a variety of habitats , both natural and man @-@ made . It is common in native forests , particularly limestone forests , but also occurs in open shrubland and suburban areas . On Saipan , the only habitats it is absent from are the marshes around Lake Susupe and grassy savannas .

= = Description = =

The golden white @-@ eye differs from the other white @-@ eyes in having large eyes and an outermost primary wing feather that is not reduced ( as it is in the other species ) . It is a large white @-@ eye , 14 cm ( 5 @. @ 5 in ) long and weighing around 20 g ( 0 @. @ 7 oz ) . The species has bright , unmistakable plumage , with : an orange @-@ yellow head coupled with a pale eye @-@

ring ; a yellow @-@ green back , wings , and tail ; and golden orange undersides . The bill and legs are also orange . The plumage of both sexes is similar ; the males can be told from the females only when examined in the hand , since the males have longer wings than the females . The juveniles have similar plumage , though duller than the adults ' , with brownish patches on the face and neck and brown @-@ yellow streaks on the breast . Juveniles also have dusky bills and dull legs .

The golden white @-@ eye makes a variety of calls . The song is a long raspy warble , rendered as " séé mé @-@ can you séé mé @-@ I can séé yóú @-@ can you séé mé " . The species also makes rasping shorter calls and whistles when in flocks and in flight . Chicks give plaintive whistles when begging for food from adults .

#### = = Behaviour = =

Like other white @-@ eyes , the golden white @-@ eye is diurnal . In contrast to the bridled white @-@ eye , which forages in groups and is not territorial , the golden white @-@ eye occurs in pairs or small family groups consisting of a breeding pair and fledged young . The golden white @-@ eye is also territorial , and pairs will sing throughout the day in response to neighbouring pairs . Groups can become aggressive when they encounter one another . The golden white @-@ eye is also aggressive towards the smaller bridled white @-@ eye , chasing it away from food and perches and flying through flocks of them in order to disperse them . While it chases other forest passerines , it is less aggressive towards them , and in fact the rufous fantail seeks out the golden white @-@ eye , foraging behind it to snatch insects flushed by the latter species . The golden white @-@ eye is socially dominant over the bridled white @-@ eyes and rufous fantails , but it is subordinate to the Micronesian myzomela and is chased by that species . It is also occasionally chased by the fantails if it approaches their nests too closely .

#### = = = Diet and feeding = = =

The golden white @-@ eye is a generalist , feeding on fruit , berries , and insects . Nectar forms part of the diet , and , along with the Micronesian myzomela and the bridled white @-@ eye , the golden white @-@ eye is a pollinator of some trees , albeit not one as important as these other species . Insects may be either gleaned from the bark of trees and from leaves , or caught in the air . Certain tree species are preferred as foraging habitat . The common forest tree *Cynometra ramifolia* is the most favoured tree and used more frequently than the equally common *Guamia mariannae* . There is considerable overlap between this species ' foraging range and that of the bridled white @-@ eye , but the golden white @-@ eye is more generalised in its diet . Within the forest there is some partitioning of niche , with bridled white @-@ eyes ( and Micronesian myzomelas ) feeding primarily in the forest canopy , and the golden white @-@ eye feeding in both the canopy and understory of the forest , as well as a variety of smaller trees and bushes . It shares the understory with the rufous fantail , which has a different feeding technique . At a smaller scale additional partitioning occurs . The golden white @-@ eye shows differences in the preferred microhabitat for obtaining insects , for example , feeding in dead leaves and branches , whereas the bridled white @-@ eye prefers gleaning insects on live leaves . It is the most generalised of all the extant forest passerines on Saipan . It has been suggested that the versatility in diet and foraging technique is an adaptation to the challenges presented by typhoons , which can dramatically alter the structure of the forest .

#### = = = Breeding = = =

Breeding occurs throughout the year on Saipan , where the species ' nesting behaviour has been studied . The peak breeding period seems to be from March to July . The species is monogamous . The nests are simple undecorated cups of casuarina needles , grasses , and vines . These are placed around 2 @.@ 9 m ( between 1 @.@ 5 and 6 @.@ 5 m ) off the ground in a variety of trees including *Casuarina* , *Guamia* , *Cynometra* , *Leucaena* , and *Citrus* . The nests are predated by

other bird species , specifically Micronesian starlings and collared kingfishers , as well as the introduced green tree skink .

The typical clutch size is two eggs , 20 @. @ 3 × 15 @. @ 1 mm in size , which are pale blueish green with red or brown splotches that are concentrated around the wider end . Both sexes share the incubation duties , with each parent incubating for stints of around 25 minutes before being relieved . This species is extremely territorial around the nest , chasing away other birds , including brindled white @-@ eyes , rufous fantails , and other golden white @-@ eyes . From laying it takes about two weeks for the eggs to hatch . The hatchlings are altricial , in other words naked and helpless . Both parents share the brooding and feeding duties , and take away faecal sacs to keep the nest clean . The diet of the chicks is almost exclusively composed of insects and caterpillars . Chicks fledge around 10 ? 14 days after hatching . After fledging they may remain with their parents in small groups for some time .

= = Threats and conservation = =

The range of the golden white @-@ eye has contracted considerably since the arrival of humans in the Mariana Islands . Fossil bones of this species have been found on the nearby islands of Tinian and Rota , and it may once have occurred on Guam and other islands in the Marianas .

At present the golden white @-@ eye is very common , and in fact a 1996 study found that their densities on Saipan were among the highest recorded for any bird , up to 2 @, @ 095 birds / km <sup>2</sup> ( 8 @. @ 47 per acre ) . It was believed that Saipan cannot sustain a larger population of this white @-@ eye than it already does . A 2009 study , which incorporated results from a 2007 survey , found that the species had declined between 1982 and 2007 , in common with two other species on Saipan , the rufous fantail and the nightingale reed warbler . All three species are insectivorous and were theorised to have declined due to habitat loss . Nevertheless , the species remained relatively abundant , and the current world population is estimated at around 71 @, @ 997 birds .

The species is nonetheless evaluated as critically endangered by the IUCN because the population is expected to undergo a rapid decline if the brown tree snake becomes established on Saipan . The primary threat to this species is the brown tree snake , a native of Australia , New Guinea and the Solomon Islands , which eliminated all 12 landbird species on nearby Guam after being accidentally introduced . The snake has not yet become established on Saipan , one of the two islands that compose the range of the golden white @-@ eye , and which holds the largest population of the species . The isolation of Aguijan makes the introduction of brown tree snakes there unlikely , but the small population there is vulnerable as the island is only 718 ha ( 1774 acres ) in size and a direct hit by a supertyphoon could wipe them out . Efforts are under way to breed the species in captivity and to prevent the snakes from being introduced and established on Saipan . Six zoos have recently received this species and breeding was expected to begin by 2011 . Success came more quickly , and the first captive birds were bred in 2009 in the North Carolina Zoo . Birds from captive breeding will be introduced on new islands . In addition , 24 birds were translocated from Saipan to the island of Sarigan , a predator @-@ free island reserve , in 2011 in the hope of establishing a breeding population .