The Silver-eared Mesia

by Grant Rishman
Victoria, British Columbia

The Silver-eared Mesia is related to the popular Pekin Robin. It comes from India and southern Asian and makes a delightful aviary bird.

Softbills in Canada are not the easiest of birds to obtain so a few years ago when we decided to add some Silver-eared Mesias to our collection we quickly realized that we would have to buy them from abroad. We imported about 20 birds from Holland. When they arrived in quarantine it was very disappointing to see that half the birds had no feathers on their head and back while the other half had no feathers at all. By the end of the 30 day quarantine all the birds, with one exception, looked quite good. We were very surprised at how much demand there was for these birds so all the birds were sold except one hen and the "bald guy." We housed these birds individually and it was a couple of months before the feathers started to appear. The wait was well worth it. The bird eventually moulted all his feathers and was transformed from an "ugly duckling" into a beautiful, proud, male mesia. With the plumage came the song, seven to eight notes of pure energy. The song is more tuneful than the Pekin Robin and considerably louder. We are fortunate to have some understanding neighbours as the male can be heard one-half mile away!

In their natural habitat in Burma and the Himalayas, the Silver-eared Mesia (Leiothrix argentauris) frequents secondary growth and abandoned cultivation clearings. It has been found as low as 1,000 feet in Burma, but it is much more common above 3,000 feet and has been reported as high as 7,000 feet in the Himalayas. Coming from this altitude the birds are incredibly hardy and remain totally unconcerned if the winter temperature drops to below freezing. However, it is best if they have access to frost free accommodation when the temperature drops this low.

Over the years we have found that mesias have different temperaments when they start to breed. Some pairs are quite happy to share their aviaries with other species like Pekin Robins, doves, thrushes and even Green Singing Finches, while we have one pair that become positively murderous when they start nesting. The only nesting material that any of the mesias have used is coconut fibre. (One year we could not obtain any and the pairs laid their eggs on the bare nest – none hatched that year!)

Some pairs prefer to use a wicker
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Chicago, Illinois

AFA Convent ion 1993
August 3 - 8
(Tuesday thru Sunday)
Salt Lake City, Utah
Little America Hotel

The welfare of all the members, birds and animals affected by Hurricane Andrew are in our thoughts and hearts.