

White-eyed Vireo

Vireo griseus maynardi

While most vireos inhabit tall trees, the White-eyed Vireo is usually found in low thickets where its presence is most easily detected by its loud and distinctive song.

Individual repertoires consist of a dozen or more distinct songs, each comprised of up to ten variable elements. Individual songs are repeated many times before switching to another song. A young bird's song is mostly learned from the father's repertoire with a few songs copied from immediate neighbors or calls of other bird species.

The White-eyed Vireo is a relatively small bird, around five inches in length. It is olive green above, white below with yellow flanks, and has two white wing bars. The adult has a white eye surrounded by yellow "spectacles." The immature is similar to the adult but has brown eyes.

The American Ornithological Union recognizes six subspecies of White-eyed Vireos. The one found here, *Vireo griseus maynardi*, is a year-round resident that breeds in Florida from the Keys north to St. Augustine.

The different subspecies decrease in size and brightness of color from north to south. The northern subspecies, larger and brighter yellow, is fully migratory, breeding from Illinois east to southern Connecticut and wintering in Mexico and the Yucatan Peninsula.

White-eyed Vireos can inhabit virtually any habitat type that contains a well-developed understory including, dense thickets, pine flatwoods, cypress swamps, and scrubby edges of roads, canals, and ponds.

Preferred breeding habitat has extensive undergrowth, shrubs, and saplings, interspersed with taller trees. Common birds in the same breeding habitat include Carolina Wren, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, and Tufted Titmouse.

In the breeding season, White-eyed Vireo males defend territories for the seasonally monogamous breeding pair.



The males establish territories while the females wander from territory to territory, eventually settling on one and mating with that territory's male.

Females choose a nest site, sampling potential nest sites in a territory by straddling the fork of a branch and pivoting. The site is most often a low, Y-shaped horizontal branch from one to eight feet above ground.

Nest building begins several days after pairing. Both adults construct the nest, collecting spider and caterpillar silk, attaching it to forked branches to create a cup or until a wad of webbing fills the crotch of the branch. They then attach plant matter inside and out and shape the cup with their bodies by settling into the mass and rocking or shifting their weight. The female lines the nest. It takes from three to five days to build a nest.

The nest is a hanging cup usually located in a dense thicket. It is a deep open cup composed of twigs, strips of bark, coarse grass, bits of paper wasp nest, and leaves that are bound together with plant fibers and spider webs. The lining is fine grass and bits of Spanish moss. The outside of the nest is often decorated with lichens, moss, or leaves.

In Florida, early egg dates are around the second week of April. A clutch consists of 3 to 5 eggs which both adults incubate for 12 to 15 days.

Young are born without down, with eyes closed, and pinkish bodies. Both parents bring food. Quills break through the skin around day five or six and feathers usually emerge from sheaths on day seven. By day eight or nine, the young



preen themselves and cower in response to movement near the nest. The young leave the nest ten or eleven days after hatching, usually in mid-morning. They climb out and walk along branches near the nest and after perching for several minutes, make a feeble flight into nearby vegetation.

The White-eyed

Vireo forages in shrubs or dense undergrowth using short deliberate hops or flights, pausing to look for insects by tilting its head and peering. It gleans by picking, hovering, reaching, lunging, or hanging.

Most catches are made while perched, but some are taken in air. Favorite prey are caterpillars but it also eats insects, spiders, and small lizards. In fall and winter when insects are less common, its diet is supplemented with seeds and berries including sumac, poison ivy and wild grape. Most foraging occurs from three to fifteen feet off the ground.

After food capture, the White-eyed Vireo typically perches and swallows the prey. It will pin larger items to a branch with a foot, disassemble it, and then eat. Sometimes it will flog caterpillars repeatedly on a branch before eating.

Cool Facts

- The only fossil record in North America for the family Vireonidae is a wing bone of a White-eyed Vireo from the late Pleistocene of Florida, from approximately 400,000 years ago.
- The White-eyed Vireo bathes by rubbing against wet foliage.