

KINGFISHER

Alcedo atthis



Unobtrusive, often only seen as a blue flash.

DESCRIPTION – The Kingfisher is small and plump with a very short tail but has disproportionately large head and long dagger-like bill.

Its plumage is beautifully bright: the back and tail are iridescent "electric" blue, the crown and wings are greenish-blue. The underparts and cheeks are an orange-red, and the throat and collar are pure white. The legs are red.

The sexes are very similar, the main difference being the colour of the lower mandible: the male's bill is all black while the female's is black with red on the lower mandible.

Juveniles are similar to adults, but the plumage is duller and greener and the tip of the bill is white.

HABITAT – Kingfishers are found by still or slow flowing water such as lakes, canals and rivers in lowland areas. In winter, some individuals move to estuaries and the coast. Occasionally they may visit garden ponds if of a suitable size.

FOOD – Freshwater fish are the main part of the Kingfisher's diet, but they will also take aquatic insects and more rarely crustaceans, molluscs and small amphibians.

When fishing, they perch on a branch over or close to the water watching and waiting for a fish to swim by. They dive in to the water for the fish, inevitably catch it, and then return to the branch where they will stun the fish before swallowing it head first.

NESTING –The nest is usually in a tunnel, 30-90 cm (12-36") long, in a bank next to slow-moving water. The tunnel is excavated by both sexes and is not lined with any material.

The eggs are white, smooth and glossy, and are almost round at 23 mm by 20 mm. The male and female take turns incubating the eggs, and both adults feed the young.

Kingfishers lay 6-7 eggs and may have up to three clutches a year. Laying starts in late April. The eggs are incubated for 19-21 days and the young fledge after 23 days.

From mid-summer to autumn, young birds move away from their natal grounds, though rarely further than 50 km (30 miles). Kingfishers have



VOICE – There is much dispute as to whether Kingfishers have a song. Whether or not they do, the commonest call is a shrill whistle "chi-keeee". Often made while on the wing.

OTHER FACTS – British birds are mainly resident, but in the winter harsh weather may force birds towards the coasts.

Kingfishers have returned to many once polluted rivers in industrial towns and cities. Despite this, pollution remains a threat, especially in Europe, and the Kingfisher remains an **amber listed species** of conservation concern.