

Feather Fascination!

with local Birdwatcher, Jim Butler

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NON-FISHING KINGFISHER!

Kingfishers are usually thought to live near water and eat fish! Not so! Most of the world's 90 kingfisher species live away from water and eat insects and reptiles. In Australia we have ten species of kingfisher. The most famous are the two biggest and loudest which live in the suburbs, the Kookaburras: Laughing and Blue-winged. The other eight are divided into two groups: six forest kingfishers and two river kingfishers. The individual that posed for the photo is a Sacred Kingfisher, a non-fishing forest kingfisher. I chose the Sacred because it is the one most seen in our local eucalypt forests and parks. The Sacred is found throughout Australia and New Zealand, and from New Guinea to Indonesia. They nest in tunnels dug into earthen banks or disused termite nests.

The Sacred Kingfisher hunts by perching on a branch and bobbing its head as it surveys its surrounds and expectantly waits. When prey is spotted, it swoops down to take it in its long beak, before returning to its perch to feed. It will also take prey from foliage or in the air;



rarely from water. The diet of the Sacred Kingfisher includes insects, spiders, centipedes, worms and crustaceans. It also preys on small vertebrates, including tadpoles, frogs and lizards.

The Sacred Kingfisher is usually seen alone or in a breeding pair and is quite territorial, often calling for long periods during the breeding season. If you learn to identify the different calls you will be constantly aware of their presence and you will be able to identify what they are up to because it aggressively chases away other bird species. The Sacred is monogamous, and it is thought that breeding pairs use the same breeding and non-breeding territories year after year. The oldest known Sacred Kingfisher lived to about eight years.

~ Jim

Photo: Perched & Expectant Sacred Kingfisher
Image: Ed Frazer, Brookfield ©