

AZURE KINGFISHER

Ceyx azurea diemenensis

Status

Endangered (Tasmanian *Threatened Species Protection Act 1995*), due to the declining population and habitat loss and degradation.

Description

A small kingfisher, 16–19cm in length, weighing about 40g and with a wingspan of 25–29cm (Higgins 1999). The head, neck, upperparts and side of the breast are dark blue with a white or buff spot/stripe on the side of its neck. The breast is orange or reddish brown and the legs and feet bright red.

C. a. diemensis feeds on mainly small fish, crustaceans and aquatic invertebrates caught in lowland freshwater rivers and streams. Prey is caught by shallow-plunging from perches 1-10m overhanging the water surface (Higgins 1999).



This species forms solitary monogamous pairs (PLUC 1996). Nests are made in burrows excavated in banks beside freshwater or tidal watercourses, lakes and other wetlands. The breeding season is from October to January, clutch size is five to six eggs (Higgins 1999) and the young are dependent on the parents for three to four weeks.

Image by M Wapstra © M Wapstra

Distribution and habitat

The Tasmanian population is an endemic subspecies and is currently only known from the western half of the island in moderate to high rainfall areas. Historically the subspecies has been recorded from locations throughout Tasmania, although it may never have been common in the east and north (Thomas 1979).

C. a. diemensis inhabits tree-lined waterways, lakes, ponds and other wetlands with dense streamside vegetation (Higgins 1999). The subspecies is usually seen singly, occasionally in pairs or family parties and is never found far from water (Higgins 1999).

The species breeds in drilled out holes (burrows) in the banks (just above the waterline) of major rivers. However, specific breeding sites are poorly documented beyond a few within the formal reserve system that, although well known to many people, do not yet appear in databases. It is reasonable to assume that any permanently flowing major rivers along the north-west and west coasts are potentially suitable for the species.

The species tends to forage in similar sites. It is a perch feeder from branches above the water's surface.

Important locations

The species' stronghold is the western and far north-western river systems (e.g. Arthur, Pieman, Henty, Gordon, Montagu, Duck, Emu, Cam, Blythe, Leven, Mersey, etc.) but it also may occur in some other river systems with sightings from the south-east (e.g. Lune, D'Entrecasteux, Cockle Creek, Huon, Derwent, Jordan, etc.), east (e.g. Maria Island), northeast (e.g. Derby, Ansons River, Bridport, etc.) and the central regions (e.g. Lake River, highland lakes, Maydena). The species has been reported from both Flinders and King Islands but whether it is a breeding resident is not known.

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