



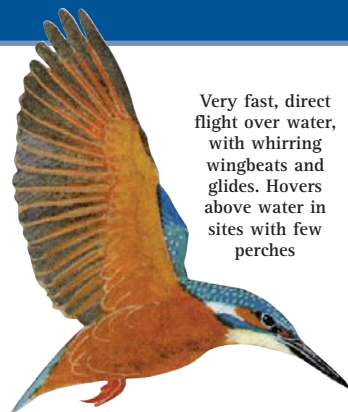
Kingfisher

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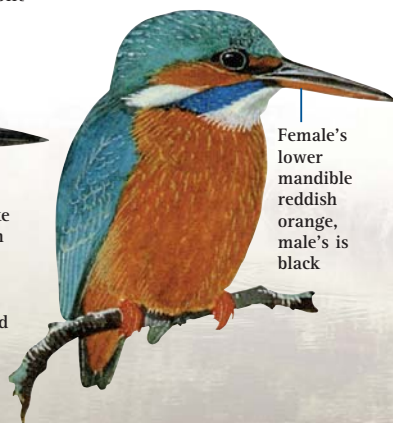
A sighting of a Eurasian (or Common) Kingfisher is one of the most exciting events in a birder's day – although it is all too often only a brief glimpse of this most eye-catching of British birds as it streaks by in fast flight, low over a river or stream.

The electric blues and greens of the Kingfisher's plumage are produced not by pigments in the feathers, but as a result of iridescence. When sunlight strikes specially modified cells in the feathers, it becomes split (refracted) as if by a prism, and also reflected.

Depending on the angle of the viewer, the plumage



Very fast, direct flight over water, with whirring wingbeats and glides. Hovers above water in sites with few perches

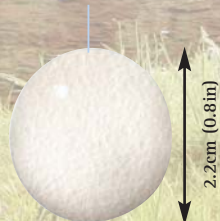


Female's lower mandible reddish orange, male's is black

Long dagger-like bill, cheek patch and underparts rich chestnut-orange, snow-white throat and neck patches

Juveniles resemble adults but have duller, greener plumage and black legs and feet

Eggs are glossy white and almost totally round



Back and tail an unique azure blue or green, bright blue rump, greenish crown and wings

Birder's Tip



Listen for Kingfishers calls near a river and look out for white droppings beneath a favourite perch or at a burrow.

KEY FACTS



Length: 16-17cm (6.25-6.75in)

Wingspan: 24-26cm (9.5-10.25in)

Weight: 32-43g (1-1.5oz)

Habitat: Breeds by slow-flowing lowland rivers and canals, and lakes with soft banks for nesting; in winter may move to estuaries and sheltered coasts

Food & feeding: Mainly small freshwater fish, also some aquatic insects, a few crustaceans, molluscs and amphibians

Voice: Loud whistling calls, especially in spring and autumn when courting and defending territory. Common calls are a short, shrill whistling *chee* or *chi-kee*, repeated several times when excited; also piping *shrit-it-it* song

Nest: Chamber at end of long burrow dug out by both sexes in a sand or earth bank, usually above water. Eggs laid in shallow scrape

Eggs: 5-7, white
Incubation: 19-21 days, by both sexes

Fledging: 23-27 days

Broods: 1-3

Maturity: 1 year

Breeding season: Late March-early September

Nest tunnels are built at a slight upward angle to allow for drainage when it rains.

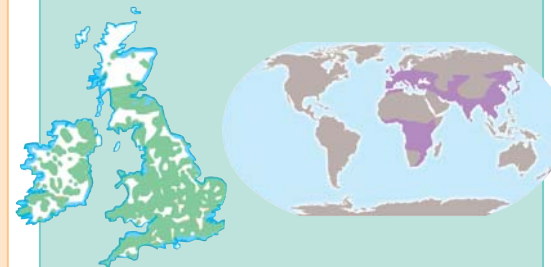


appears electric blue or green. Darker blue feathers on the head and wings have brighter, paler blue spots at their tips, creating a speckled pattern and a series of dotted bars on the wings.

Kingfishers are very territorial as they need a lot of fish to survive – a pair with young may need to catch over 100 fish a day to keep the whole family satisfied. A typical territory in Britain includes about 1.6 km (1 mile) of river containing good fishing sites. To deter rivals, a Kingfisher will fly up and down its territory, calling loudly. If the other bird does not leave, the territory owner will adopt threat postures to drive the message home. Unless intimidated by this, the rival bird will respond in kind. Usually, one bird will eventually dominate and drive the loser away.

DISTRIBUTION

Movement: Breeds across much of Europe; in Asia from the Near East to India, China and Japan, and some Pacific islands. Birds breeding in northern and eastern Europe and northern Asia winter further south, usually within the breeding range.



Population: 3,300-6,000 pairs in Britain; about 1,300-2,100 pairs in Ireland. Around 100,000 pairs in Europe.