

Azure Kingfisher

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The Azure Kingfisher *Alcedo azurea* is a small kingfisher (17-19 cm), in the river kingfisher family, Alcedinidae. It is found in Northern and Eastern Australia and Tasmania, as well as the lowlands of New Guinea and neighboring islands, and out to North Maluku and Romang. It is a very colourful bird, with deep blue to azure back, a large white to buff spot on side of neck and throat, rufous-buff with some blue-violet streaks on breast and flanks. The feet are red with only two forward toes. The lores are white and inconspicuous except in front view, where they stand out as two large white eye-like spots. The subspecies differ only in minor details. *ruficollaris* is smaller, brighter, and has more blue on the flanks. *diemenensis* is rather large, short-billed, and has a distinctly darker crown. *lessoni* is more contrasting, with little blue on the flanks. *affinis* has a red billtip, as has the smaller *yamdenae*, and *ochrogaster* is very pale below. Still, there is very little intergradation in the areas where subspecies meet. Comparing subspecific variation with climate data, the former's pattern does not follow and in some instances runs contrary to Bergmann's Rule and Gloger's Rule. (Schodde & Mason 1976, Woodall 2001) The contact zone between the mainland Australian subspecies is along the E coast of Far North Queensland, between Cairns and Princess Charlotte Bay (Schodde & Mason 1976), that of the New Guinea ones between Simbu Province and the northern Huon Peninsula as well as south of Cenderawasih Bay. (Woodall 2001) Habitat includes the banks of vegetated creeks, lakes, swamps, tidal estuaries and mangroves. Often difficult to see until it quickly darts from a perch above water. Feeds on yabbies and small fish. Nest in a chamber up to 1 metre long in an earthen creek bank. 5-7 white, rounded, glossy eggs. Voice is a high-pitched, shrill, 'pseet-pseet'.