

# **BELTED** **KINGFISHER**

*Megaceryle alcyon*



It is a medium sized bird with a large head and shaggy crest. It has a large thick bill. They have a bluish head and back with a white throat and collar. It is white on the belly with a blue breast band.

The male has a white belly without the rufous band but may have flanks and some reddish in blue chest band.

The female has rufous flanks and band across chest just below the blue band. It

also has rufous tips to feathers in blue chest band.

The immature Belted Kingfisher is like the adult but the male has incomplete rufous chest band.

The size of a Belted Kingfisher is about the same for both sexes. They are around 11-14 inches in length, a wingspan of about 18-23 inches and a weight of approximate 4.5-6.5 ounces.

The Belted Kingfisher is a solitary bird. However, during the mating and nesting season, they pair off just like other birds. The Belted Kingfisher is a monogamous bird. They nest along the streams, rivers, lakes, and estuaries with banks. However they prefer to nest in banks near the water. It uses its strong feet and bill to dig burrows which will serve as their nest. The burrow is usually 3' to 6' deep, either horizontal or slopes upward slightly. The nest-burrow may or may not be lined. Occasionally, leaves and or grass are used to line the cavity. They have anywhere between 5-8 eggs. The eggs are white and unmarked. The Incubation lasts from 23-24 days. When the chicks hatch, they are featherless, blind, and completely helpless; their eyes remain closed for about two weeks. Both parents tend the chicks. They are fed diligently for about four weeks, at which point the parents cease to bring food so as to coax the young birds out from their subterranean burrow. The chicks are then taught to fish; a parent catches a small

fish, then drops it into the water, encouraging the young to dive in and seize their meal.

It winters along coast, streams, and lak

They eat fish, aquatic invertebrates, insects, and small vertebrates. It watch in clear water from perch or while hovering, plunges into water headfirst t catch prey in bill. It pounds prey on per to kill it. They eject pellets (in a similar manner to raptors).



Male Belted Kingfisher in flight.



Female with prey.

## Cool Facts

- The breeding of the Belted Kingfisher is limited in some areas by the availability of suitable nesting sites. Human activity, such as road building and digging gravel pits, has created banks where kingfishers can nest and allowed the expansion of the breeding range.
- The Belted Kingfisher is one of the few bird species in which the female is more brightly colored than the male. Within the 93 species of kingfishers, the sexes often look alike.
- During breeding season the Belted Kingfisher pair defends a territory against other kingfishers. A territory along a stream includes just the streambed and the vegetation along it, and averages 1 km (0.6 mi) long. The nest burrow is usually

in a dirt bank near water. The tunnel slopes upward from the entrance, perhaps to keep water from entering the nest. Tunnel length ranges from 30 to 250 cm (1 to 8 ft).

- The term "kingfisher" means "king of the fishers." It is more interesting to look into the meaning of the scientific words for the belted kingfisher. "*Mega*" translates to "big" and "*ceryle*" comes from the Greek word for "seabird". The second name, "*alcyon*", comes from Greek also and goes back centuries into Greek mythology. According to myth, a lady named Alcyon grieved so much for her drowned husband that the gods took pity and turned them both into kingfishers.

**In any State, you can call your local Game & Inland Fisheries, local Veterinarian, or animal shelter and they should have some phone numbers for local Wildlife Rehabilitators.**

**If you have any questions you may call Pearl Beamer, State & Federally licensed Wildlife Rehabilitator within the state of Virginia about wildlife. Pearl specializes in Raptors. 757-855-2922 (7am-7pm)**

**“KOLA WAKON OF WILDLIFE”**

Roughly translated it means “Sacred Friend of Wildlife”. This is what every Wildlife Rehabilitator, every person who rescues wildlife, everyone who transpo and every Veterinarian that works with wildlife are to the wild kingdom.

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**KINGFISHER**  
*Megaceryle alcyon*



Photograph by Kay Shoda

The Belted Kingfisher is a common waterside resident throughout North America. It is often seen hovering before it plunges headfirst into water to catch a fish.