

Natural History Snippets

THE COMMON KINGFISHER

Alcedo atthis

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The Common Kingfisher is named with the prefix “Common” due to it being common not only to our Asian region but in Europe and North Africa as well, with seven sub-species. However, the most commonly seen kingfisher in Sri Lanka is the White Throated Kingfisher (*Halcyon smyrnensis*) - right, Internet image.



Alcedo atthis is quite a small bird, the adult measuring on average about 16 to 17 cm. It is a rather uncommon breeding resident, seen almost throughout Sri Lanka, but rarer in the higher hills. Usually solitary, it is sometimes seen in pairs during the breeding season. Sightings are usually in open wetlands and in the borders of streams and rivers, most often perched on branches over-hanging the water.

It has a very high pitched shrill *keek* call which is usually repeated. This call often alerts one to its presence and enables initiating a search to find it. It tends to use habitual perches in any locality, to which it returns repeatedly unless disturbed. It flies quite fast, with very fast wing-beats and often only a little blue spot is seen when it departs with a low flight over water.

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Kingfishers in Sri Lanka			
Family Alcedinidae			
Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis taprobana</i>	Common Resident	LC
Blue-eared Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo meninting phillipsi</i>	Highly Scarce Resident	CR
Black-backed Dwarf Kingfisher	<i>Ceyx erithaca erithacus</i>	Uncommon Resident	NT
Stork-billed Kingfisher	<i>Pelargopsis capensis capensis</i>	Uncommon Resident	LC
White-throated Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smyrnensis fusca</i>	Common Resident	LC
Black-capped Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon pileata</i>	Scarce Migrant	Not evaluated
Lesser Pied Kingfisher	<i>Ceryle rudis leucomelanura</i>	Uncommon Resident	LC

Adapted from: BIRDS OF SRI LANKA - A PICTORIAL GUIDE AND CHECKLIST
By Gehan de Silva Wijeyeratne
Retrieved from: https://www.jetwingeco.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Part_2.pdf

National Conservation Status from The National Red List 2012 of Sri Lanka (LC = Least Concern; NT = Near Threatened; CR = Critically Endangered)



The male (1) has a bill that is entirely black whilst the lower mandible of the female (2) is dusky red and the upper black.



Its back is bright blue (3, 4) with a lighter blue stripe running along the middle, the belly being orange-brown with a white patch on the throat.



The distinctive rufous orange/chestnut ear-coverts serve to distinguish this species from the almost similar Blue-eared Kingfisher that is overall a much darker colour with blue ear-coverts.



Blue-eared kingfisher
Alcedo meninting
(Internet image)

Layout by Malik Fernando
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