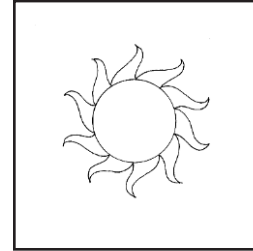
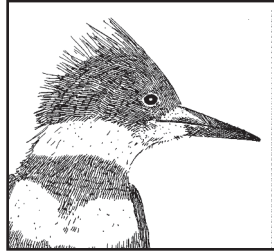
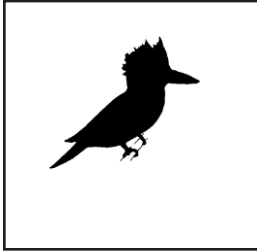




# Belted Kingfisher

Order Coraciiformes  
Family Alcedinidae  
*Ceryle alcyon*



Easily identified by an **unusual body-shape, loud rattling call and distinct fishing technique**, the **belted kingfisher's body is short and stocky**. Their unusually large head is topped with a **ragged crest**. Their black beak is large and pointed, while their tail and feet are relatively small compared to their overall size.

The kingfisher has lovely blue plumage highlighted by a white breast and a ring of white around the neck. The female also has a **belt of rusty feathers along her breast and sides**. The belt gives this kingfisher its name, despite the fact that **male kingfishers lack this fieldmark**. Kingfishers can be up to 14 inches in length and are found in aquatic habitats throughout the state.

Hunting from perches like overhanging branches, pilings, utility wires or bridges, kingfishers hover over the water while searching for fish below. They will **dive into the water with their eyes closed** and grab their prey with their strong bill. **When returning to their perch with food, they smack it against their perch to stun it** and then eat the fish headfirst. Kingfishers will eat whatever kind of fish they can catch up to about 5 inches in length. They will also occasionally eat small birds or mammals, insects, mollusks, reptiles or amphibians, especially after rain has muddied their hunting waters.

Like birds of prey and some herons, **kingfishers regurgitate a pellet of indigestible matter** (bones, fish scales, fur, etc.) sometime after feeding. Most of their feeding occurs in the morning.



If you flush a kingfisher from its stream-side perch, you will be scolded with a **crackling rattle**. The call is **used both as an alarm and for territorial clashes**.

Mated pairs call to one another more softly. Both defend their territory while raising their young. **During courtship the male will feed the female, and they often engage in acrobatic flights close to the water's surface**.

**Kingfishers have unusual nesting behavior.** Both males and females **dig a burrow several yards into a steep bank above a body of water** or in sand and gravel pits. The burrows are usually several feet below the top of the bank, rarely more than a mile from water.

The nest tunnel slopes upward and is three to four inches in diameter, ending in a nesting cavity about the size and shape of a watermelon. **Whenever the adult is about to fly into the tunnel, it sounds a call from a nearby perch and then dives down into the tunnel.** The only signs of activity will be toe marks at the entrance to the nest.

The female lays five to eight white eggs on the floor of the cavity. After about 24 days the eggs hatch. The **chicks are altricial**—depending entirely on **their parents to feed them regurgitated fish** until they are able to handle whole fish—delivered to them in the cavity as often as every 20 minutes during the day. The chicks cover their waste by scratching soil from the tunnel. This helps to reduce any odor that may attract predators. Within a month, the chicks are enticed out of the tunnel by their parents perched nearby with fish in their bills. It will take another three weeks or more for the parents to teach the young how to fish and find other food. As they grow and learn to care for themselves, **young kingfishers escape danger by diving into the water.**



## A Simple Review of Belted Kingfishers

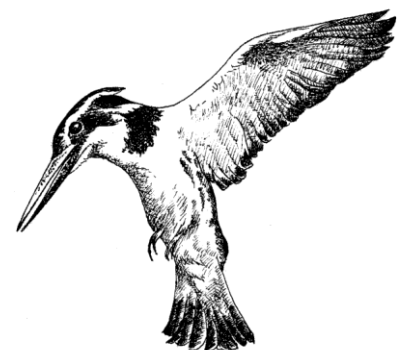


**Kingfishers are oddly-shaped**, but attractive birds. They have a **feathered crest on their head, a white collar, and large, black bill.** Males have a blue band across the chest, while the female has a blue and a orange band across her chest. Kingfishers are one of the few bird species that have a female more colorful than the male.

If you've ever heard a belted kingfisher call as it flies along a stream, you won't be surprised to learn that a group of these birds is called a "rattle" of kingfishers. Their **cackling call does sound like a large rattle.**

**Kingfishers feed mostly on fish.** They hover over streams, rivers, lakes and bays searching for food before diving into the water to catch their prey.

Once they catch a fish they will find a branch to perch on, **sometimes smacking the fish against the branch to kill it.**



Believe it or not, kingfishers **build a nest by burrowing into a dirt bank** (at right). Sometimes they even share their nesting tunnels with small birds like bank swallows. They are considered **colonial nesters**. That means they will often nest in a colony with other kingfishers. When they approach their nest they will swoop down to enter the tunnel, leaving just a feather mark or some toe scratches on the loose dirt surrounding the tunnel entrance.

Larger birds, like hawks, might try to catch and eat a kingfisher. **When they feel threatened, the kingfisher will dive underwater to escape danger.**

