

Learn about: Kingfisher



As Gaeilge: Cruidín; Scientific name: *Alcedo atthis*

We have lots of wonderful wildlife that depends on our rivers and lakes for their survival. Today we are going to learn about one particularly colourful animal that lives on our water-ways: the Kingfisher!

What is it?

The Common Kingfisher is a small bird, it is found in Ireland, throughout Europe, Asia and North Africa. It has a bright “electric” blue back, an orange breast and eye-stripe and a long sharp beak. Kingfishers can seem very dull coloured in dim light, and at certain angles, this is because of the special structure of their “iridescent” blue feathers.



How big is it?

Very small! Kingfishers are about 16cm long and weigh about 40 grams. They have a wing-span of about 25cm (length from wing-tip to wing-tip).

Where does it live?

Kingfishers live along the banks of slow-flowing rivers and canals. They dig burrows in the sandy banks where they make a nest for their eggs. Female kingfishers lay a “clutch” of about 6 eggs in late

March/early April. The eggs hatch after three weeks and the chicks are fed by their parents for about 23-24 days. After this time, the young kingfishers leave the nest (known as “fledging”) and find their own territory. The mother kingfisher will usually lay another clutch or two of eggs that same summer.

What does it eat?

Kingfishers eat small fish like minnows and sticklebacks, and large water insects. They perch on the edge of riverbanks and dive into the water to catch fish. When they dive, their eyes are covered over by a membrane, so they have to be very accurate and quick to catch their prey!



Fun fact: A bird's feathers are called its plumage

Threats:

The main threats to kingfisher populations are habitat loss, disturbance by humans, and water pollution.

Links:

Click the link below to see a short video of the kingfisher by RTÉ – The Secret Life of the Shannon:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1CsyenHROSE>

Click here to see a video of kingfishers nest-digging (© Vishal Jadhav):

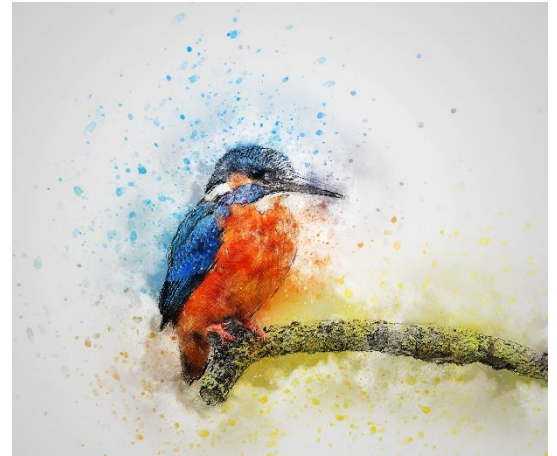
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HqquyWJbsck>

Kingfishers make a “chee” sound. Click this link to the Xeno Canto website to hear what a kingfisher sounds like: <https://www.xeno-canto.org/470769>

Your Turn!

Get some blank paper and colours and draw your own kingfisher. Here are some things to think about for your drawing:

- Remember what colours the kingfisher is...
- Remember its long sharp beak
- Its blue wings look electric, can you make them bright, sparkly or shiny?
- What's around the kingfisher? Draw the river or canal where it lives, what else might you see there?



Quick Quiz:

- Name one thing a kingfisher eats.
- Where do kingfishers make their nests?
- When do kingfishers lay their eggs?
- What is the word used for a bird's feathers?
- True or False: kingfishers are only found in Ireland?

If you're stuck for an answer, read back over the fact sheet!