

SACRED KINGFISHER



• *Sacred Kingfisher at entrance to nest.*

Photo: N. Chaffer

Sacred Kingfisher *Halcyon sancta*

Ageing

Sacred Kingfishers can be grouped into five age categories by plumage—juvenile, immature (first winter), immature (first summer), adult (winter) and adult (summer).

Juvenile

Throat: White, sometimes with slight dark tips to feathers.

Breast: Whitish or buff, with distinct black tips to feathers.

Wing coverts: Buff tips to lesser, medium and secondary coverts.

Immature (First Winter)

This plumage is attained by moult of body feathers only.

Throat: Very pale buff becoming white, sometimes with very slight dark tips to feathers.

Breast: Usually deep buff with well-marked to slight dark tips to feathers.

Flight feathers: Unmoulted, still juvenile.

Wing coverts: Unmoulted, remains of buff tips still visible.

Tail: Unmoulted, still juvenile.

Immature (First Summer)

Apparently this plumage is attained by wear of the body feathers.

Throat: Whitish.

Breast: White or pale buff, sometimes with slight black tips to the feathers.

Flight feathers: Unmoulted, still juvenile.

Wing coverts: Buff tips usually still faintly visible.

Adult (Winter)

This plumage is attained after the first complete moult. The underparts are very similar to those of the immature (first winter)—see Fig. 2.

Throat: Very pale buff becoming white.

Breast: Deep buff with dark tips to feathers.

Flight feathers: New.

Wing coverts: New without buff tips.

Tail: New.

Adult (Summer)

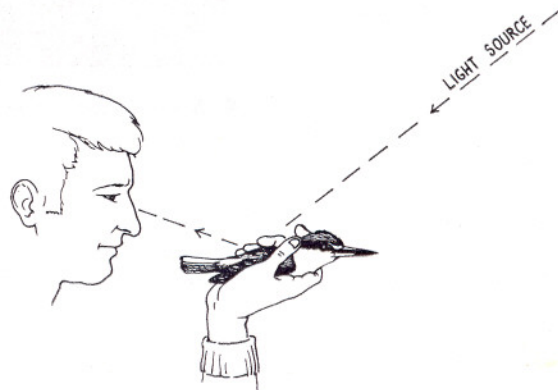
This plumage is attained by feather wear.

Throat: White.

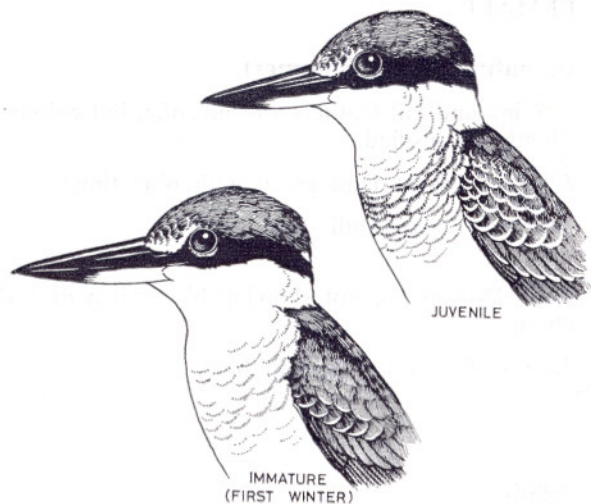
Breast: White, occasionally with black tips to some feathers.

Flight feathers: See under sexing.

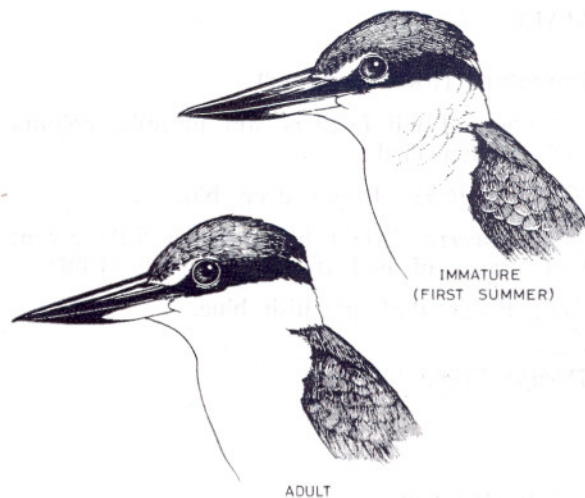
Wing coverts: See under sexing.



• Figure 1. Method of holding bird to determine plumage colour.



• Figure 2. Plumage pattern of juvenile and immature (first winter) birds.



• Figure 3. Plumage pattern of immature (first summer) and adult birds (summer).

Sexing

The sexes differ on plumage colour when viewed by refracted light. The bird should be held with its bill pointing towards the light

source, in such a way that the light strikes the feathers at an angle similar to that in Fig. 1. Pairs are easily distinguished by this method. Young birds may also be separated but not as easily as adults.

MALE

Juvenile

Flight feathers: Bright deep blue.

Wing coverts: Bright green with a blue tinge and well marked buff tips.

Tail: Bright dark greenish blue, showing a definite blue when moved in the light.

Rump: Bright blue.

Immature (First Winter)

Similar to juvenile.

FEMALE

Juvenile

Flight feathers: Dull green with a slight bluish tinge.

Wing coverts: Dull green, sometimes with a slight blue tinge, and with well marked buff tips.

Tail: Dull green, not showing blue when moved about.

Rump: Dull pale greenish blue.

Immature (First Winter)

Similar to juvenile.

MALE

Immature (First Summer)

Wing and tail feathers still juvenile, colours slightly intensified.

Flight feathers: Bright deep blue.

Wing coverts: Bright blue with a little green; faint traces of buff tips usually still visible.

Tail: Bright dark greenish blue.

Rump: Bright blue.

Adult (Winter)

Flight feathers: Bright blue.

Wing coverts: Bright blue with a little green.

Tail: Bright deep blue.

Rump: Bright blue.

Adult (Summer)

Upper parts much brighter all over and deeper blue than the winter plumage.

Flight feathers: Bright deep blue.

Wing coverts: Blue.

Tail: Bright deep blue.

Rump: Bright blue.

SUMMARY OF SEXING

The plumage of the male is bright and predominately blue when the bird is held in the hand as shown in Fig. 1, while that of the female is dull and mainly green. This colour difference is evident in the field during the breeding season. If female birds are held in other than the recommended manner they can appear dull blue, whereas males are still a bright blue.

NOTE: Generally adult females are larger than adult males and this is obvious in mated pairs.

FEMALE

Immature (First Summer)

Wing and tail feathers still juvenile, but colours slightly intensified.

Flight feathers: Dull green with blue tinge.

Wing coverts: Dull pale green.

Tail: Dull green, not showing blue when moved about.

Rump: Pale dull greenish blue.

Adult

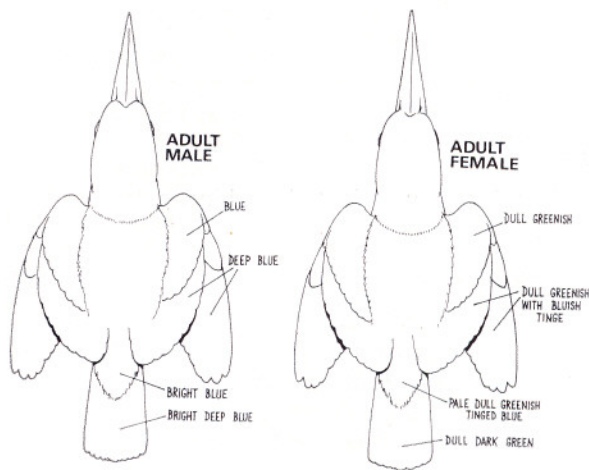
The adult winter and summer plumages (upper parts) are similar.

Flight feathers: Dull greenish with a bluish tinge.

Wing coverts: Dull greenish.

Tail: Dull dark green.

Rump: Pale dull greenish with a blue tinge.



• Figure 4. Details of plumage colour in adult male and female birds.

Drawings by W. T. Cooper