

# Unusual Sightings of the Azure Kingfisher

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Sightings of the Azure Kingfisher *Ceyx azureus* have been made in the Darling Range area 30-40 km east of Perth, W.A. Sightings have occurred over late winter/early summer in 1973 and 1974 and in October and November of 1976. Should these observations be verified by others and the species be seen more regularly in future then the range for the Azure Kingfisher will be extended down the west coast of Australia as it is in the east.

The present range of the Azure Kingfisher in Australia is considered to be throughout northern Australia, down the east coast and extending to Adelaide. It is also found in Tasmania and in the islands to the north of Australia (Marshall, 1931; Whittell & Serventy, 1948; Slater, 1970; Readers Digest, 1976). Its range also extends into the north of Western Australia and is considered by Serventy & Whittell (1976) to be classified as a Kimberley bird. It is not considered to be found farther south in Western Australia (Fig. 1).

## Study Area

Casual observations on the wild birds in the Bickley Valley of Western Australia, 32°00' S., 116°06' E., were begun in 1973. This valley



● Figure 1. The presently recorded Australian distribution (hatched) of the Azure Kingfisher and the location of the new sightings for this species.

occurs within the Darling Ranges 30-40 km east of Perth. The valley is an old established citrus orchard area with Jarrah *Eucalyptus marginata*, Marri *Eucalyptus calophylla*, and a giant banksia *Banksia grandis* understorey still generally predominating and occurring down the valley sides to the orchards. Piesse Brook flows along the valley floor and supplies the water for irrigation of the area. Although the stream now runs dry from mid-January until the winter rains (early April) large open soaks still exist. The area generally is made up of small properties ranging from 5-10 or more hectares. The northern and eastern aspects are heavily forested, while the southern and western approaches become increasingly more populated to the city of Perth.

## Observations

Over the late winter/early summer of both 1973 and 1974 casual sightings of an iridescent blue bird with tangerine chest markings were made. I classified the bird as the Azure Kingfisher. The bird clearly reminded me of an earlier experience with the Common Kingfisher, *Alcedo atthis*, which I had seen many times in my childhood in England. Because of the certainty of the observations I kept no detailed data on these observations and I was later surprised to find that the Azure Kingfisher was not recorded below the Kimberley area of Western Australia.

I was familiar with the Sacred Kingfisher *Halcyon sancta*, which is a common species in the Bickley Valley area. This species was quite distinct from the species recorded as the Azure Kingfisher.

No sightings of the Azure Kingfisher were made in 1975. However, in 1976 the species was again recorded, two being seen on 25 October 1976.

The birds were seen on a fine clear morning at 6.30 a.m. and recorded along with eleven other bird species. A single bird was also recorded on 14 November 1976. These observations were made close to water within the lower areas of the Bickley Valley.

Over this time I regularly observed the Sacred Kingfisher in the area and these were distinct from the Azure Kingfisher, being both larger and of different colouring.

The distinguishing features of the Azure Kingfisher were iridescent blue back and wings, tangerine breast and dark brown bill. The striking difference from the Sacred Kingfisher was the absence of white markings at the shoulders.

### Conclusions

The observations of the Azure Kingfisher are far removed from the presently accepted West Australian distribution of the Kimberley Ranges. Although no migration has been reported for the species, the observations in all three years (1973, 1974 and 1976) of its presence in the Bickley Valley have coincided with the presence of the Rainbow Bee-eater *Merops ornatus*. This species

migrates from northern areas and is found in territory associated with the Azure Kingfisher. There was no evidence of nesting or other indications of the extent of this species in the lower west of Western Australia. However, it may well be that the range of the Azure Kingfisher now extends down the western coast of Australia.

### References

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## Breeding Seabirds on Statis Rock, New South Wales

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In 1970 Robert Edden showed me several photographs of breeding seabirds that he obtained about 1965 at Statis Rock, near Seal Rocks, on the central coast of New South Wales. These depicted the Little Penguin *Eudyptula minor*, Silver Gull *Larus novaehollandiae* and Crested Tern *Sterna bergii*. This Seabird Island is described for the first time.

Statis Rock is situated 50 m offshore at the eastern end of Sugarloaf Bay (32°27' S., 152°32' E.). It is about 225 m long by 100 m wide and consists of two steep, parallel ridges orientated north-south, rising to 12 m elevation at the southern end. Most of the surface is bare rock, but the western ridge supports a limited vegetation, mainly of grasses.

On 3 January 1976 I examined the island through binoculars from the adjacent headland. About ten pairs each of Silver Gull and Crested Tern were breeding. I landed on the island on 3 January 1977. Approximately 100 disused nests of Silver Gulls were scattered along the western side of the island, but only two pairs with eggs were still present. Six pairs of Crested Terns had eggs, but there was no indication of greater numbers earlier in the season. Five adult Little Penguins were located in crevices at the south-western corner of the island. One was on two eggs and another had two young, but the others were too deep to remove from their nests.

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