

# NZ Kingfisher



COMMON NAME: **NEW ZEALAND KINGFISHER** – Lesson, 1830  
 LATIN NAME: *Halcyon sancta*  
 LATIN MEANING: Halcyon Gr. *halkuon*, a mythical bird, long associated with the kingfisher, which nested on the sea. Sancta L. *sanctus*, holy, sacred; throughout the Pacific kingfishers were regarded as gods by the natives and believed to have power over the waves and sea. Vagans L. *vagans*, wandering.  
 MAORI NAME: Kotare  
 CLASS: Avis ORDER: Coraciiformes  
 FAMILY: Alcedinidae SUB-FAMILY: Daceloninae  
 GENUS: *Halcyon*  
 SPECIES/SUB SPECIES: *Sancta vagans*

**DESCRIPTION:**

The crown and forehead is a deep green with a broad black band running from the gape through and below the eye to encircle the nape. There is a broad buff collar across the hind neck; the upper back and scapulars are deep green, the lower back, upper tail coverts and wings ultramarine, the throat and breast buff/white. The mandible is black with the base of the mandible pale yellowish. Iris black and feet dark brown.

**HABITAT / DISTRIBUTION:**

Found throughout New Zealand from coastal regions to forested areas. Absent from high, snow-covered mountain areas.

**BREEDING:**

Kotare are monogamous with both parents sharing in the incubation. The breeding season runs from October to January, with 4–5 white coloured eggs laid. The incubation period is 20–21 days. Young fledge at around 26 days. Nest sites may be on riverbanks, roadside cuttings, coastal cliffs or tree cavities. The nest chamber is usually at the end of a short upward-sloping tunnel.

**SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR:**

Kotare are usually solitary or in pairs, spaced widely apart when breeding and when perching on posts or power lines between feeding flights.

**DIET:**

Opportunist feeders, Kotare will attack every kind of small animal, reptile or bird. On tidal mudflats their diet consists mainly of crabs, on river ways they feed on tadpoles, koura (crayfish) and small fish; in open country and forested areas earthworms, large insects, dragonflies, chafer beetles, wasps, spiders, lizards, mice and small birds are taken.

**PRINCIPAL THREATS:**

Introduced mammalian predators.

**CONSERVATION STATUS:**

Not threatened.



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