

Belted Kingfisher: Loud and proud

BY BRUCE MCCAMMON

Belted Kingfishers are blue-gray birds that are about the size of an American Robin.

For most of North America, this is the only Kingfisher we get to see. The southern Texas area is fortunate to add three other species of Kingfisher (Green, Amazon, and Ringed).

Even one species of Kingfisher can make a day of birding spectacular. They are loud, active and fun to watch fly and feed.

Found perching or foraging along rivers, streams and lakes, Kingfishers are one bird that can be easily identified by their profile, even if seen only as a silhouette.

Their large head supports a straight, thick, pointed bill. With short legs, a rigid, square-tipped tail and a stocky, firm body, the Kingfisher is a stand-



Bruce McCammon is retired, color-blind and enjoys photographing the birds in north central Washington.



out from other birds that feed along water's edge.

Typically, male birds tend to be more colorful. Not so with the Belted Kingfisher. Male and female Belted Kingfishers are easy to separate since the female has a chestnut-colored belly band that is easy to see while the male shows only white on its belly.

Both male and females have prominent, shaggy crests that

are obvious most of the time.

The Belted Kingfisher, per its name, is a fish eater.

These birds will sit near the end of a branch leaning out over water and watch for fish to swim in the area below. When they see a fish, they fly out and dive directly into the water to catch the fish in their stout beak. They return to the branch to swallow the fish.

All this takes place in seconds so you need to be ready for the action when you spot a Kingfisher.

Belted Kingfishers are loud birds with a very distinctive, rattling call. It seems they always want you to know that they are in the area since they call when perched or flying.

You can hear a sample of the call here: <https://www.audubon.org/field-guide/bird/belted-kingfisher>.

Photographing a Kingfisher can be challenging. They are

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wary birds and rarely let a photographer get too close.

Professional photographers will use blinds to conceal their presence as they wait near perches that the birds favor.

The holy grail photo of a Kingfisher is one showing the bird's beak just touching the water as it dives or lifting off from the water with a fish in its beak.

I was happy to just get a nice photo of one sitting on a branch. Hopefully your luck will be better.

Listen for them then approach slowly and cautiously. Be ready to get your camera in place quickly.

Good luck.