

# Feather Fascination!

with local Birdwatcher,  
Jim Butler

True Fisher

I WAS recently at the Daintree River ferry crossing where there is a well-known Azure Kingfisher. Back home in Brisbane, the Azure Kingfisher (18cm) is also common and observable. Amongst the four Brisbane kingfishers it is the only fish-hunter.



The Azure is found in the riparian zones across the entire northern top end of Australia, and down the east coast including Tasmania. They hunt beside fresh water creeks, rivers, lakes, billabongs and dams that have low, overhanging branches. They sit motionless, except for the occasional bob of the head, over water on a shaded branch and wait for their prey – fish, aquatic insects and crustaceans. Perched about a meter above the water they either dive headfirst, catch the prey and return to the branch; or fly off at speed to another favoured perch. They manoeuvre the fish so it can be swallowed head first and whole to avoid injuries from bones or scales.

Azure Kingfishers nest in one metre long tunnels in embankments near water. They burrow out the tunnel using their feet, taking three to seven days. Then the female lays the eggs in the terminal chamber. Breeding is from October to March

and they have a clutch of 5 or 7 glossy white eggs. The eggs are incubated for three weeks with both sexes sharing the caring duties. The chicks leave the tunnel after around 30 days and from then on, they will feed themselves and be on their own.

Humans have 46 chromosomes in their body cells. Birds have a larger number, consisting of two types: macro- and micro-chromosomes. Throughout the world's bird species, the number of chromosomes is very consistent, with around 90% of them having between 66 and 86 chromosomes. Interestingly, the Azure Kingfisher with a total of 122 macro- and micro- chromosomes has one of the largest sets in the world.

View the Azure from the foot bridge at the Gold Creek Reservoir.

– Jim

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Digital Bird Guide: <http://www.moggillcreek.org/>

Image: Azure Kingfishers at  
Brookfield by Ed Frazer