ARIZONA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT
HERITAGE DATA MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

Animal Abstract **Element Code:** ABNXD01020
Data Sensitivity: No

CLASSIFICATION, NOMENCLATURE, DESCRIPTION, RANGE

NAME: *Ceryle alcyon*
COMMON NAME: Belted Kingfisher, Halcyon, Lazy Bird
SYNONYMS: *Megaceryle alcyon*
FAMILY: Alcedinidae

AUTHOR, PLACE OF PUBLICATION: Linnaeus 1758.

TYPE LOCALITY:

TYPE SPECIMEN:

TAXONOMIC UNIQUENESS: There are three species in 2 genera; *Ceryle* and *Chloroceryle*. *Chloroceryle americana* is also found in Arizona but it is rare. There are two subspecies recognized in *Ceryle alcyon*: *C. a. alcyon* from eastern North America and *C. a. caurina* from Alaska and the Pacific Northwest.

DESCRIPTION: Both male and females have a slate blue breast band, white belly and under tail coverts. Female has rust bellyband and flanks, which may be confused with female Ringed Kingfisher (*Ceryle torquata*); note white belly and smaller size. Juvenile resembles adult but has rust spotting in breast band. They are medium sized 33 cm (13 in), stocky and short legged, weighing 127-170g (4.5-6 oz). They have a large head, long pointed bill and ragged crest. One of the few North American birds in which the female is the more colorful sex. The third and fourth toes are syndactylous.

AIDS TO IDENTIFICATION: Both male and females have a slate blue breast band, white belly and under tail coverts. Female has rust bellyband and flanks, may be confused with female Ringed Kingfisher; note white belly and smaller size.

ILLUSTRATIONS: Color drawing (Sibley 2000)
Color drawing (National Geographic 1999)
Color drawing of egg (Baicich 1997, pl 52)
Color drawing of nestling (Baicich 1997, pl 15)
Color photo (Washtenaw Audubon Society *in* http://animaldiversity.ummz.umich.edu/accounts/ceryle/c._alcyon$media.html)

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Color photo (Danzenbaker *in* http://www.avesphoto.com/website/NA/species/KFRBLT-1.htm)
Color photo (I-bird *in* http://I-bird.com/Gallery/GALBeltedKingfisher893.htm)
Color photo (Florida Nature *in* http://www.floridanature.org/species.asp?species=Ceryle_alcyon)

TOTAL RANGE: According to Sibley (2000), and "The Birds of North America" (1994), the Belted Kingfisher summers (breeds) from Alaska through Canada south to South Dakota and Wisconsin. It is found year round through the rest of the United States except parts of California, New Mexico, Arizona, Texas and Florida where it is found in the winter (non-breeding) only. Also NatureServe (2001) says, they breed from western and central Alaska to northern Saskatchewan, central Manitoba, central Ontario, east Ungava Bay in Quebec, Labrador, and Newfoundland, south to southern California, southern Texas, Gulf Coast, and southern Florida. And their non-breeding range is south-coastal and southeastern Alaska, British Columbia, Colorado, southern Great Lakes region, and New England south to the West Indies, Panama, and northern South America (very rare in northern Colombia, scarce in the coastal lowlands of Venezuela and Guyana). Winters sporadically almost throughout the breeding range. Casual in Hawaii. To 2500 m in the Rocky Mountains.

RANGE WITHIN ARIZONA: According to AGFD HDMS unpublished records (2002) they have been found in Gila, Apache, Yavapai and Coconino counties. According to Beatty, the Belted Kingfisher breeds along the upper Verde River, Salt River, Gila River, and Black River and along the smaller streams of the Mogollon Rim and White Mountains.

SPECIES BIOLOGY AND POPULATION TRENDS

BIOLOGY: Their common territorial call is a long, uneven rattle most similar to the Hairy Woodpecker (*Picoides villosus*) rattle but harsher, unsteady, clattering. Also, a higher, shorter, more musical, rapid trill *tirrrrr*. The Belted kingfisher is generally solitary. Favorite perches include branches, stumps, snags, and power lines along waterways, boating piers and docks. Some predators are snakes, mammals, the peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) and sharp-shinned hawk (*Accipiter striatus*). They may avoid their raptor predators by diving below the water's surface. The flight of the kingfisher is strong and direct but sometimes short-lived.

REPRODUCTION: The breeding season begins early April to early May and usually ends by mid-July. Their nest is a burrow in a bank, usually near freshwater but occasionally at some distance when other sites are not available. Prefer to nest in soil that is composed of high sand and low clay. The nest is 1-3 ft. from the top of the bank or cliff. In rare instances they may nest in a hole on shallow earth slope, or in natural cavity in a tree. The burrow usually slopes upwards from entrance. It is 3-6 ft. long, (occasionally up to 15 ft. long) 3.5-4 inches wide and 3-3.5 inches high. The egg chamber is 10-12 inches in diameter and 6-7 inches

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high. It is excavated by both sexes from 3 days to 3 weeks. Nest hollow is usually bare when eggs are laid, becomes line with fish bones and insect remains. They are single brooded but lost clutch may be replaced in new burrow. There are usually 6-8 eggs, sometimes 5-14. They are elliptical to short sub-elliptical. They are smooth, glossy, white and measure 34 x 27 mm. The eggs are incubated by both sexes for 23-24 days. The female will sit through the night with the male taking her place in the morning. The nestlings are altricial and naked. Their skin is reddish. The feathers grow simultaneously in sheath, covering bird. The bill is blackish, mouth pink and no gape flanges. Both parents tend the young and their eyes open at 2 weeks. The feather quills start to appear in the first week. The sheaths break freeing the feathers at 17-18 days. The young leave the nest at 30-35 days. The parents teach the young to hunt by dropping fish into the water for the fledglings to retrieve. About 10 days after fledging the young are forced from their parent's territory.

FOOD HABITS: The kingfisher's diet is 50-90 percent small fish; it also consumes aquatic invertebrates, amphibians, reptiles, insects, young birds, mice and rarely berries. Kingfishers dive directly or hover in the air before spiraling into the water to capture a fish. Then, they return to a perch, beat the fish against a limb, toss it into the air, and catch and eat it. Anything that remains undigested is later regurgitated in pellet form. The kingfisher prefers clear still water for fishing.

HABITAT: Rivers, brooks, ponds, lakes, coasts, streams, tidal creeks, mangroves, swamps and estuaries.

ELEVATION: 1,840-8,400 ft (560-2560 m), AGFD HDMS unpublished records (accessed 2002).

PLANT COMMUNITY:

POPULATION TRENDS:

SPECIES PROTECTION AND CONSERVATION

ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT STATUS:
STATE STATUS: WSC (AGFD, WSCA in prep)
[Candidate, TNW AGFD 1988]
OTHER STATUS: Group 4, NESL (NFWD, NN 2001)

MANAGEMENT FACTORS: Maintaining snags and trees (riparian upland) along the riverbanks will improve perching, foraging and potential nesting habitat. They are sensitive to disturbances and may avoid or vacate habitats that are frequented by humans, particularly when breeding.

PROTECTIVE MEASURES TAKEN:

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SUGGESTED PROJECTS: Studies need to be performed to better define nest-site characteristics, range and abundance. Also additional information about how grazing, cattle, flooding and bank composition benefit or limit nesting habitat, and how presence/absence of native, introduced or sport fish affect foraging opportunities would be helpful (Beatty 1999).

LAND MANAGEMENT/OWNERSHIP: BIA-Fort Apache Reservation; USFS-Tonto, Apache-Sitgreaves and Coconino National Forests; State Land Department; Private.

SOURCES OF FURTHER INFORMATION

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MAJOR KNOWLEDGEABLE INDIVIDUALS:

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

From the Greek *ceryle* meaning seabird, a reference to coastal areas where the bird is often found and where it was probably first encountered by pioneering ornithologists and naturalists. *Alcyon*, also Greek, is a name of a mythical woman who was so grieved after her husband drowned that the gods turned both of them into kingfishers.

Before migratory bird laws were enacted, belted kingfishers were often shot by humans at fish hatcheries and by trout streams, where they were considered significant predators.

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