

Common Name/Scientific name: Forest Kingfisher / *Todiramphus macleayii*

The Forest Kingfisher is also known as Macleay's, Blue or Bush Kingfisher. The preferred nesting site of the Forest Kingfisher is termite nests that are situated in trees, although sometimes they may also nest in tree hollows. They excavate a short tunnel in the termite nest by flying straight at it from several metres away, and striking it with considerable force, using the bill to chip away some of the material with each impact. When enough of a depression has been formed, the birds may grip the edge with their feet and continue to hammer away at it while holding on.



Description: The Forest Kingfisher has a dark royal blue head with pale turquoise on the back. There is a large white spot over the bill. The underparts are white. The male has a white collar which the female lacks. In flight there is a prominent white wing patch. There is a broad black eye strip extending from the bill to the eye coverts. The tail is royal blue above and below is black to dusky grey. The long, straight bill is black and the lower mandible ('jaw'), which is long and upturned, has a pinkish contrasting strip along the bottom. The eyes are dark brown. The legs and feet are dark brown or dark grey. Immature birds are slightly duller with forehead and shoulders scalloped faintly white and breast scalloped faintly black. In young males the neck collar is blue mottled and indistinct.

Feeding & Behaviour in the gardens: The Forest Kingfisher's diet consists of invertebrates, including beetles, bugs, spiders and grasshoppers. It also will eat insect larvae, small lizards, frogs and worms. It typically hunts from low bare branches. Most prey are caught with sally-pouncing, often landing with a thud caused by the breast and leg hitting the ground while seizing prey with the bill. They also engage in sally-hunting, striking the prey from low branches or the air and may also hunt in shallow water. There is a quick return flight to a perch, then the prey is killed by banging it against the branch, often dislodging indigestible portions such as insects' wings. Hunting takes place during the day, but with little activity during the hottest part of the day.

Breeding and Nesting: Early on in the breeding season, the male Forest Kingfisher explores nest sites or even begins preliminary digging at several sites. The pairs may share long-term monogamous bonds and both build the nest. Sometimes the nests are in tree cavities, earth banks or roots of fallen trees; more often they are in termite nests in trees, and they are usually 4 - 12 m above the ground. Both sexes, as well as helpers from the previous season, help in the incubation of the eggs as well as feeding the young. It is even possible that in warmer areas the heat of the sun and the termite nest during the day are sufficient for incubation. Both sexes defend the nest vigorously. There is agonistic (fighting) behaviour by the pair at the start of the breeding season defending their territory and during the breeding season the males spend much time perched on a branch, challenging persistently. The fledglings are fed by the adults for at least a month.

Similar species seen in the gardens: Sacred kingfishers are also occasionally seen in the gardens, and there have been rare sightings of Azure Kingfishers. The Sacred Kingfisher is a little larger with more buff brown underparts and no wing patch.