

**ARIZONA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT  
HERITAGE DATA MANAGEMENT SYSTEM**

**Animal Abstract**

**Element Code:** ABNXD02020

**Data Sensitivity:** No

**CLASSIFICATION, NOMENCLATURE, DESCRIPTION, RANGE**

**NAME:** *Chloroceryle americana*  
**COMMON NAME:** Green Kingfisher; Texas Kingfisher  
**SYNONYMS:** *Alcedo americana*  
**FAMILY:** Cerylidae

**AUTHOR, PLACE OF PUBLICATION:** *Alcedo americana* Gmelin, Syst. Nat., vol. 1, pt. 1, 1788, p.451 (Cayenne = French Guiana).

**TYPE LOCALITY:** Cayenne = French Guiana.

**TYPE SPECIMEN:**

**TAXONOMIC UNIQUENESS:** Formerly in the family Alcedinidae. The species *Chloroceryle americana* is divided into four sub-species of which only two occur far enough north to be found in the United States. These include *C. a. septentrionalis* and *C. a. hachisukai*, the later of which can be found along the rivers and streams of southeastern Arizona.

**DESCRIPTION:** Length 7-8.5 inches (17.78-21.59 cm). Starling sized bird with a long stout bill, but lacking a head crest. Green crown, white throat and collar, green upper parts with white spotting. The male has rusty rufous breast band and the female has a green breast band or dark spotting on breast. Both sexes possess a white collar and belly with undertail coverts displaying dark spots. The bill, legs and feet are black. Juveniles resemble the adult female in appearance.

**AIDS TO IDENTIFICATION:** The Green Kingfisher is smaller and lacks the blue-gray coloration of other kingfishers. The green upper-parts are so dark to appear as black at any distance. Its small size, green back, and lack of a crest distinguish it immediately from other kingfishers. While the male has a rusty breast-band and the female has one or two greenish bands in the Green Kingfisher, in the Belted Kingfisher the female has the rusty breast-band (Peterson 1990). Rattle is higher pitched and less harsh than Belted Kingfishers (Robbins et al. 1983). It rarely hovers above the water in the manner of the larger kingfishers (Scutch 1983).

**ILLUSTRATIONS:** Color illustration (Peterson 1990: p.207 )  
Color illustration (Robbins et al 1983: p.193)

Color illustration (National Geographic, 1999: p.273)

Color photo (Terres 1980: p.572)

**TOTAL RANGE:** South America, Central America and Southern United States. More widely distributed, latitudinally as well as altitudinally, than any other New World kingfisher. Resident from extreme southern Texas occurring up the Rio Grande at least as far as Del Rio, north onto Edwards Plateau, and south through Mexico to South America. Stragglers to southern Arizona and western Texas. Range extends as far south as northern Chile and central Argentina. This small kingfisher is primarily a tropical species found north to Sonora, Mexico, and somewhat regularly to ponds and streams in south-eastern Arizona. The older reports by Coues (1866) are questioned by most authors (Rosenberg et al. 1991).

**RANGE WITHIN ARIZONA:** Southeastern Arizona. Confined to ponds and drainages in Cochise, Santa Cruz and extreme southeast Pima counties. No authentic record exists west of Aravaca.

## **SPECIES BIOLOGY AND POPULATION TRENDS**

**BIOLOGY:** This is the smallest of the three species of kingfisher found in the United States and is essentially a tropical species on the edge of its range in the southwest. These birds may be observed in southern Texas near shaded, forest fringed pools and streams of clear water, where they sit for long periods on a low limb overhanging water until they spot a minnow or other small fish. They then plunge into the water after their prey. At other times, when at considerable distance from water, they feed on small lizards or grasshoppers. Green Kingfishers require less water depth and less perch height than do other kingfishers (Ehrlich et al. 1988). Their voice is a sharp clicking *tick tick tick*; also a sharp squeak or *cheep* (given in flight). Flight is direct and fast.

**REPRODUCTION:** Digs horizontal burrow in bank of stream, about 2-3 feet deep, usually well hidden and near top of bank (usually 5-8 ft above the waterline) under roots of trailing plants. Distinguished from burrow of other kingfishers by its smaller entrance, about 2-3 inches in diameter. Four to six white eggs are laid in a cavity at the end of the burrow around April to June. Eggs may be surrounded by fishbone, scale and shell pellets, but usually no nesting material is added (Ehrlich et al. 1988). Incubation typically takes 19-21 days with young leaving the nest burrow 22-26 after hatching. The male will help the female with incubation, usually during the day. Young are forced from parental territory one month postfledging.

**FOOD HABITS:** Feeds mostly on fish, but will feed on small lizards and insects (grasshoppers) when they are at a considerable distance from water. Plunges into water for small minnows from a low perch, often just inches above the prey; rarely hovers over water. Whereas its larger relatives need deeper water and a long drop, this kingfisher often plunges from a boulder projecting only a foot or so above a shallow channel (Scutch 1983).

**HABITAT:** Riparian: Woodland streams and pools. Green Kingfishers are found along small running brooks with shade and roots over the water upon which they habitually perch. They prefer small, shaded clear streams and quiet backwaters, but also are found around larger bodies of water with dense, low vegetation along the banks.

**ELEVATION:** Typically seen at elevations around 4,000 ft (1220 m) in Arizona, but has been observed up to 7,000 ft (2135 m) in parts of South America. Sites in the Arizona Game and Fish Departments' Heritage Data Management System (HDMS) ranges from 450 ft (137.25 m) on the Havasu National Wildlife Refuge, to 4,675 ft (1426 m) on The Nature Conservancy's Cottonwood Spring Preserve.

**PLANT COMMUNITY:**

**POPULATION TRENDS:** Since 1975, there have been nearly 120 reports from scattered localities in southeast Arizona. Nesting was confirmed along the San Pedro River in 1988 and is suspected along Sonoita Creek near Patagonia. This species has been dropped from the review list (A.B.C.R. 1996). During the 1980s there was a significant and inexplicable range expansion into Santa Cruz and Cochise counties in southern Arizona. Within ten years of this expansion the breeding populations in Arizona again declined for no apparent reason (Perscom Corman 2001).

**SPECIES PROTECTION AND CONSERVATION**

**ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT STATUS:** None

**STATE STATUS:** None

**OTHER STATUS:** None

**MANAGEMENT FACTORS:** Threats: degradation and loss of native riparian habitat through stream diversion, groundwater withdrawal, erosion, and overgrazing. Management needs: reduce riparian and upland grazing to maintain and enhance cottonwood-willow regeneration, bank stability, and to decrease sediment load during runoff; reduce diversions and groundwater withdrawal to maintain perennial stream flow.

**PROTECTIVE MEASURES TAKEN:**

**SUGGESTED PROJECTS:**

**LAND MANAGEMENT/OWNERSHIP:** USFWS - Havasu NWR; BLM - Tucson Field Office (San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area); City of Tucson; TNC - Cottonwood Spring Preserve and Patagonia-Sonoita Creek; Private.

**SOURCES OF FURTHER INFORMATION****REFERENCES:**

- American Ornithologists' Union (AOU). 1957. Check-list of North American Birds. Fifth Edition. AOU, Port City Press, Inc., Baltimore, MD. p. 310.
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- Peterson, R.T. 1990. Peterson field guides: Western Birds. Third Edition. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston. pp. 206-207.
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- Skutch, A.F. 1983. Birds of Tropical America. University of Texas Press, Austin.
- Terres, J.K. 1980. The Audubon Society Encyclopedia Of North American Birds. Alfred A. Knopf, NY.

**MAJOR KNOWLEDGEABLE INDIVIDUALS:****ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:**

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