



## KINGFISHER

**Peaceful, gentle and calm; the definition of the Kingfisher's habitat, which you would expect from the bird that gave the word 'halcyon' to the English language. Damian Waters searches for this colourful character.**



### Field Signs

The first indication you may get of the presence of a Kingfisher is a streak of blue, flashing low along a river accompanied by a high-pitched whistle. When a Kingfisher moves it goes like lightning. The good news for a photographer is that the Kingfisher spends a large portion of the day sitting on perches looking for small fish, its favourite prey. Kingfisher are usually found on slow flowing, fish rich rivers during the breeding season, but also occasionally ponds and lakes. During the winter they tend to migrate to estuaries and the coast.



### Staying out of sight

The type of river favoured by Kingfishers usually has plenty of scrub, bushes and trees which provide great cover to photograph from. Kingfishers are easily disturbed so a hide or good camouflage gear is essential. Owing to the rarity of Kingfishers they have Schedule 1 protection, meaning that it is a criminal offence to disturb birds close to their nest during the breeding season.

### Eye to Eye

The wonderfully vivid colours of a Kingfisher are often enough alone to give you a high impact image, but their habit of perching can be used to your advantage. If you know a Kingfisher is present on a stretch of river you could put your own perch out, a nicely shaped stick or bulrush, and hope that the bird uses it. If the perch is in a good spot then all you have to do is wait. The advantage of this is that you can essentially pose the Kingfisher against a nice background. The bright colours of the Kingfisher's feathers can be hard to deal with in full sun, so try the cooler light of dawn or dusk, or an overcast day. If the perch is in a good location a Kingfisher will hunt from it by diving into the water below and then return to the perch to feed. If you are lucky this will be repeated time and time again.

### Additional resources

**RSPB Facts** - [www.rspb.org.uk/wildlife/birdguide/name/k/kingfisher/index.asp](http://www.rspb.org.uk/wildlife/birdguide/name/k/kingfisher/index.asp)

**BTO Web** - <http://blx1.bto.org/birdfacts/results/bob8310.htm>

**Damian Waters** - see more excellent images from Damian at his website: [www.drumimages.co.uk](http://www.drumimages.co.uk)



### TECH TALK

- Avoid disturbing the bird by choosing a longer lens – 300mm upwards.
- A shutter speed of 1/250s will freeze the action – boost ISO if needed.
- If the light allows and you have a clean background, apertures around f8 can create a nice result.
- Be careful not to lose the detail of the feathers in harsh light.



### FIELD TIPS

- Kingfishers are birds of habit, so a good perch will be visited again and again allowing you time to get it right.
- Kingfishers are one of the easiest birds to tell male from female; in the breeding season the male has an all black bill while the female's lower bill is orange/red.

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