

The Belted Kingfisher is a common, but declining resident of stream- and lake-sides in the Hudson River Valley.

Conservation Status

Breeding Bird Survey data indicate a decline in this species throughout the state in the past four decades. This decline was reflected in reduced distribution in the recent NYS Breeding Bird Atlas. Partners in Flight lists the Belted Kingfisher as a Species of Regional Concern in Bird Conservation Regions (BCR) 13, 14 and 28 and as one of Regional Stewardship in BCR 28.

Identification

It is medium-sized, with a stocky body, a long, straight bill, a large head covered by a shaggy double-pointed crest, a blue-gray back, white underparts, a white collar, and a blue-gray breast band. The female has an additional reddish band and sides. The call is a fast, harsh rattle.



Habitat

This species is found in the vicinity of streams, wooded creeks, rivers, ponds, lakes, and estuaries where prey are clearly visible. Areas where streams form small rippled waves can be a major source of prey and multiple individuals can be found there. On lakes, it prefers sheltered coves or shallow bays. It perches in trees, on branches hanging over the water, posts, and utility wires. At night, it roosts high in leafy trees near the water. In some areas availability of foraging sites may be more limiting than the availability of nest sites. The surrounding landscape may include a wide array of terrestrial communities, but availability of suitable nesting sites is likely a decisive factor determining local abundance. Water quality, cover, and the availability of suitable nesting sites appear essential for breeders. Kingfishers are also sensitive to disturbance and may avoid or vacate habitats that are frequented by humans, particularly when breeding.

Nesting

The nest is usually near its fishing territory in a burrow dug by both sexes in the earthen bank of a creek, river, lake, pond, gravel or sand pit, or embankment of a road or railroad. Availability of suitable nesting sites—earthen banks where nesting burrows can be excavated—appears critical for the distribution and local abundance of this species. In some regions, human activities such as the digging of sand and gravel pits have created nesting sites that have benefited populations and enhanced opportunities for range expansion.

Food

Its diet is mostly fish, but it also eats aquatic invertebrates, insects, amphibians, reptiles, young birds, small mammals, and even berries. Typically it preys on fish that inhabit shallow water or swim near the surface. Clear water and an unobstructed view of prey are essential for successful foraging. Birds may detect prey from a bare overhead branch, telephone wires strung along a shoreline, or pilings of piers. Alternatively, they may forage by hovering over the water surface.

Threats

- Disturbance during nesting season.
- Although seemingly less susceptible to environmental contaminants compared to other birds, possibly threatened by toxins in the aquatic environment.

Management Recommendations

- Maintain water quality
- Create vegetative buffers along water edges that can provide cover and hunting perches

Adapted from Hamas 1994.

For additional, information, see the following references:

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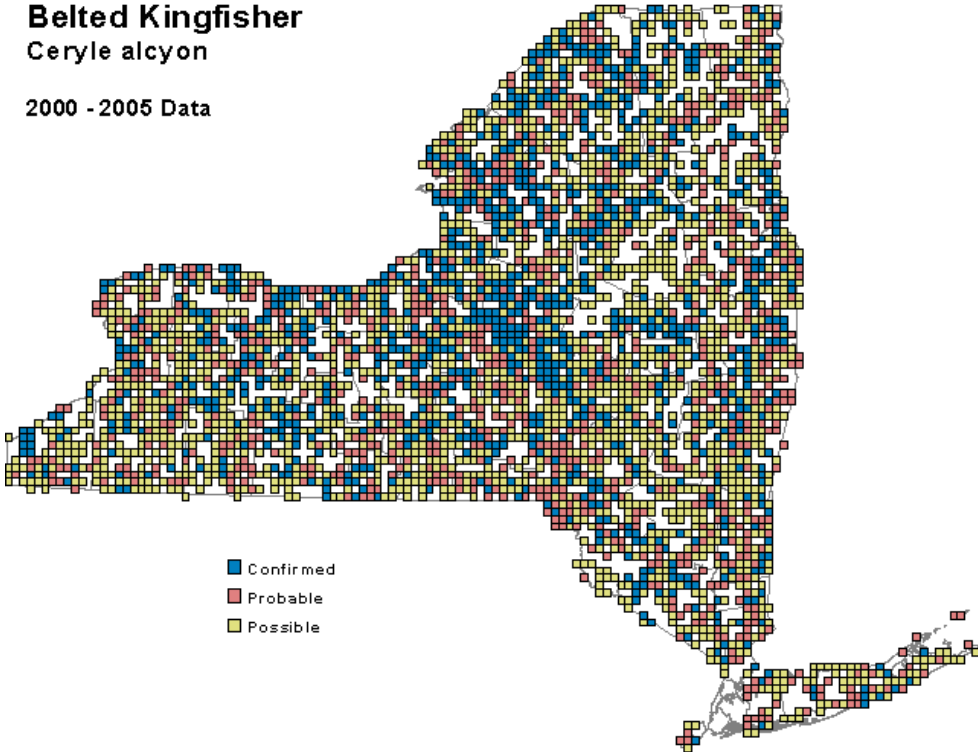
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NYS BREEDING BIRD ATLAS COMPARATIVE DATA

Belted Kingfisher
Ceryle alcyon

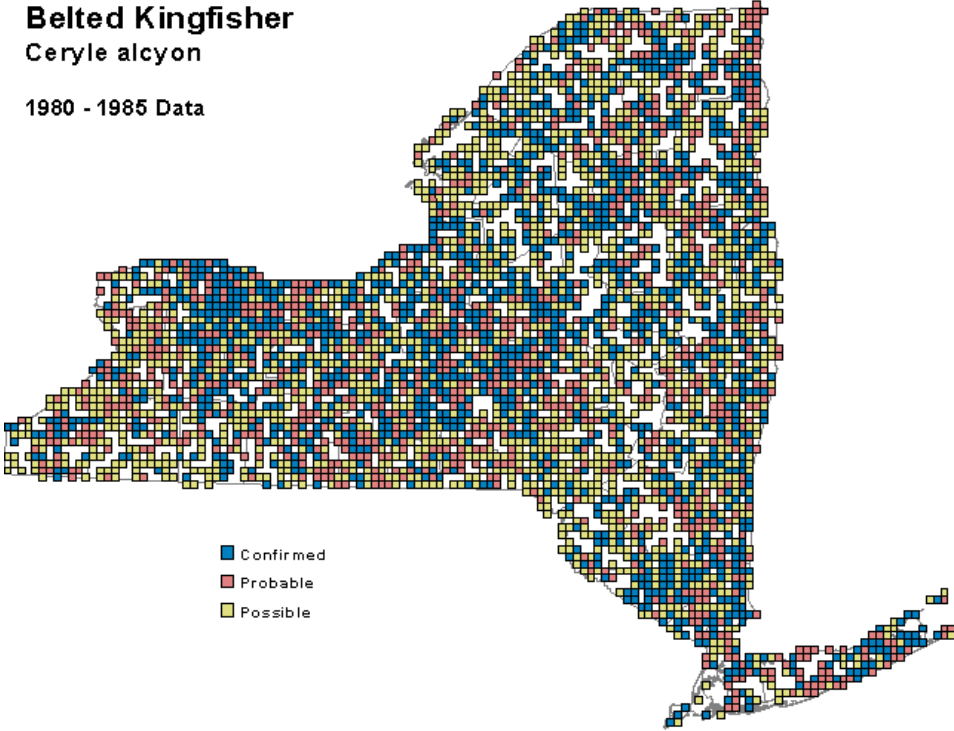
2000 - 2005 Data



- Confirmed
- Probable
- Possible

Belted Kingfisher
Ceryle alcyon

1980 - 1985 Data



- Confirmed
- Probable
- Possible