

THE KOOKABURRAS

Continued from the September Edition

#2 THE BLUE-WINGED KOOKABURRA

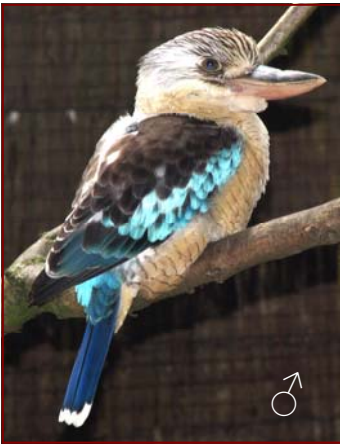


Photo: "Arpingstone"

The Blue-winged Kookaburra (*Dacelo leachii*), is a very large species of Kingfisher with a total length of around 40cm. It is smaller than its close relative the Laughing Kookaburra, lacks the dark mask, has more blue in the wing, and usually has a light-coloured eye. It is sexually dimorphic, the cock having a blue tail, and the hen a rufous tail with blackish bars.

The distribution of the Blue-winged Kookaburra is from southern New Guinea, the moister parts of northern Australia, down to southern Queensland and across the north to Western Australia then down the coast as far as Shark Bay. The species is common throughout its range.

Blue-winged Kookaburras eat a wide range of foods, mainly insects, reptiles and frogs during the wetter months, and small vertebrates, snakes, worms and small mammals and birds during the rest of the year. They dive for their food with their beak open, with the prey being grabbed from the ground. Their beak is grooved near the tip of the upper mandible, to help them hold their prey. The prey is beaten against a branch then swallowed. Casts of undigested material are regurgitated, and can be found underneath favourite perches, roosting and nesting sites.



Photo: Wikipedia Commons

They commonly nest quite high (up to about 25m) in natural tree hollows, and sometimes in arboreal termite nests, or even in a hole made in the soft wood of a Baobab tree. The floor of the nesting hollow is usually lower than the entrance hole, with an average nest length of 50cm. Both sexes share incubation and feeding duties, which can take one to two months. As in the case of the Laughing Kookaburra the young from the previous year's clutch often help with feeding the young.

Blue-winged and Laughing Kookaburras compete for food and territory in those areas where their ranges overlap. It would therefore seem the two species, despite coming from common ancestral stock, evolved in isolation.

Reference: *Wikipedia*

Series to be continued.