

Birds in the Backyard



White-throated Kingfisher (*Halcyon smyrnensis*)

Found solitarily or in pairs across most of the Indian subcontinent, it can be distinguished from other kingfishers with a white throat by its chestnut brown head, neck, and abdomen. It has a long quivering call. It is not as dependent upon water as some other kingfishers, and feeds on arthropods, lizards, frogs, and rodents, apart from fish.



Green Bee-eater (*Merops orientalis*)

This is a small bee-eater, with a black eye-stripe, pale blue chin and throat, black gorget, and long central tail feathers. It is found in small flocks, across most of the Indian subcontinent. It is often seen sallying into the air to catch insects and uttering trilling calls. This species roosts communally.

Kingfishers and bee-eaters belong to the Order Coraciiformes. Both regurgitate pellets of indigestible remains of their food (pellet casting), making it possible to study their diet. The two species described here make tunnel nests in mud banks. The Green Bee-eater also frequently sand-bathes. Quarrying sand along river beds and using cement and concrete around lakes and along river banks are expected to adversely affect species like these, apart from the other ecological damage that they cause.

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Photo credits: Shubha Bhat (kingfisher), T N C Vidya (bee-eater)