

Birds in the Backyard

Pied Kingfisher (*Ceryle rudis*)



Widely distributed across the Indian subcontinent, the Pied Kingfisher has white and black plumage, a long, black bill, and black eyeband, crest, and gorget (single band in females, double in males). Unlike most other kingfishers, the Pied Kingfisher uses hovering as a major hunting technique. Since hovering is highly energy-consuming and is usually achieved only by very small birds, research has been carried out (in Israel) on sustained hovering and stabilization of the head in pied kingfishers.

Pied kingfishers nest in cavities in mud banks. The breeding pair may be assisted by “helpers” – males that do not breed during that season but help protect the nest and feed the young. Studies (in Kenya) on

the genetic relatedness between these helpers and the breeders, the number of young ones that the helpers assist in raising, and the ecological conditions that prevail, have allowed researchers to try to understand why the species shows cooperative breeding.

Trivia: A pied kingfisher has been reported to show bait fishing, dropping pieces of bread and hunting the fish that were attracted to them! There is much interesting work that can potentially be carried out on this species in India.

By: T N C Vidya

Photo Credit: Satyajit Ganguly, Gurgaon