Copyright Australia Zoo 2014 | www.australiazoo.com.au

Amazing Animals
Fact sheets

Kingfishers

Kingfishers have chunky bodies, short necks and tails and strong, long beaks. Kingfishers are carnivorous - they perch above the banks of freshwater streams to catch small fish, crustaceans, reptiles, amphibians and aquatic insects. The most famous kingfisher is the Australian Laughing Kookaburra, with its iconic laugh. Kingfishers are essentially tropical and subtropical land birds, and are closely related to the hornbill.

Laughing Kookaburra

According to an Aboriginal legend, the kookaburra's famous chorus of laughter every morning is a signal for the sky people to light the great fire that illuminates and warms the earth by day. The legend captures the imagination, but the true function of the familiar cacophony is to advertise the territory of this bold bird. The Laughing Kookaburra is the largest of the kingfisher family, but unlike most of its relatives, it is sedentary and occupies the same territories the year round. Before spring breeding season, when family groups adjust their boundaries, an observer can actually locate the territories by listening to the noisy choruses at dusk as each group calls in turn and awaits the replies of neighbouring groups.

Habitat

Laughing Kookaburras live in woodlands and open forests. They do not need free water to exist and occur in almost any part of eastern Australia with trees big enough to contain their nests and open patches sufficient to provide hunting grounds. You can see Laughing Kookaburra north of Cape York Peninsula, inland to western fringes of Great Diving Ranges and southwest to Eyre Peninsula.

Diet

Kookaburras are not particularly selective feeders - their diet of snakes, lizards, rodents and the odd small bird is probably best known, but they live mainly on various insects and other invertebrates. Their method of hunting, perch and pounce, is typical of kingfishers. The bulky birds settle motionless on a vantage point staring fixedly at the ground below. Sighting prey, they flutter down on to it, seize it in the bill, and fly back to a perch to eat it.

Breeding

Laughing Kookaburras birth rate is low to keep pace with their longevity, and the population turnover is slow. Kookaburras form permanent pairs and take so long to rear their young to independence that more than one clutch a season is unlikely. Instead of being forced out of the territories on reaching maturity, most young stay to help parents defend the boundaries and rear/protect further offspring. Their nesting season starts in September and finishes in January. They nest a large cavity in almost any object big enough to contain an adult, usually a hole in a tree or termite mound. Incubation begins with the first egg laid of up to four. Incubation and feeding of young is carried out by all members of the group.

Australia Zoo Laughing Kookaburra profiles

Tok

Tok is a very funny fella to work with, as he is always laughing at one thing or another!
Tok was bred here at Australia Zoo in 2001 with a large group of other Kookaburras. Tok and his brother Tik grew up very quickly, with all seven other kookaburras feeding the little ones several times a day. At about four weeks of age, both of these featherless critters were removed from the nest to be hand-raised. This was to help the birds become more comfortable around people so that they could be used in the Wandering Wildlife program. Fortunately for us, Tok showed a keen interest in flying and very quickly completed his free flight training. Tok loves doing his part in the show, and more importantly he loves keeping the Crocoseum clear of other kookaburras, because the Crocoseum is Tok's territory and no other kookaburra is permitted to enter!

Visit us: www.australiazoo.com/our-animals/amazing-animals