

Belted Kingfisher

Ceryle alcyon

Several factors are required to produce suitable breeding habitats for Belted Kingfishers. This species obviously requires permanent water in creeks, rivers, ponds, lakes, and quarries. These bodies of water must also provide accessible prey, primarily small fish and crayfish. Kingfishers readily capture these prey in riffles and shallow runs of creeks and rivers, and along the shallow margins of ponds and lakes. Breeding pairs prefer relatively open bodies of water. They normally avoid small streams bordered by dense brushy vegetation and creeks flowing through dense woodlands. Suitable nest sites are also critical for this species. Kingfishers normally nest in burrows dug in sandy or gravelly streambanks, although they will occasionally utilize quarries, large sawdust piles, or similar habitats as far as 0.5 mile from water. Records of unusual nest sites include pairs breeding in a drainpipe and in a hollow tree (Peck and James 1983). Hence, lakes and streams with suitable aquatic habitats must be bordered by eroding streambanks or nearby quarries where the adults can construct nest burrows. Channelized streams with sloping grass-covered banks do not meet these requirements, and nesting kingfishers can be very scarce or absent along extensively modified streams.

Despite these relatively strict habitat requirements, Belted Kingfishers are widespread summer residents in Ohio. The Atlas Project produced records from 617 priority blocks representing 80.8% of the statewide total. Summering kingfishers were recorded from every county and were fairly evenly distributed across the state. They were most widely distributed in the Glaciated Plateau region with sightings in 91.4% of the priority blocks, reflecting the presence of numerous streams, ponds, and lakes in the northeastern counties. Kingfishers were recorded from 74.7–82.6% of the blocks within the other physiographic regions. They became locally scarce within intensively farmed areas such as Van Wert and adjacent counties in northwestern Ohio. Nesting pairs were locally scarce in the Unglaciated Plateau region, primarily in areas where shallow rocky intermittent streams prevailed. They also became scarce in large urban areas.

Breeding Bird Survey data indicate breeding kingfishers are nearly equally numerous in all portions of the state, although the numbers reported on these surveys are relatively low. Casual observations reveal breeding pairs are probably most numerous along large and fairly clean rivers such as the Scioto, Little Miami, Muskingum, Grand, Sandusky, and Maumee; these rivers normally host abundant fish faunas and have numerous eroding streambanks for nest sites.

The status of breeding kingfishers has not appreciably changed during this century. Hicks (1935) cited breeding records from every county, noting that they were rare to abundant but locally distributed. Their numbers have remained reasonably stable in subsequent decades, although local

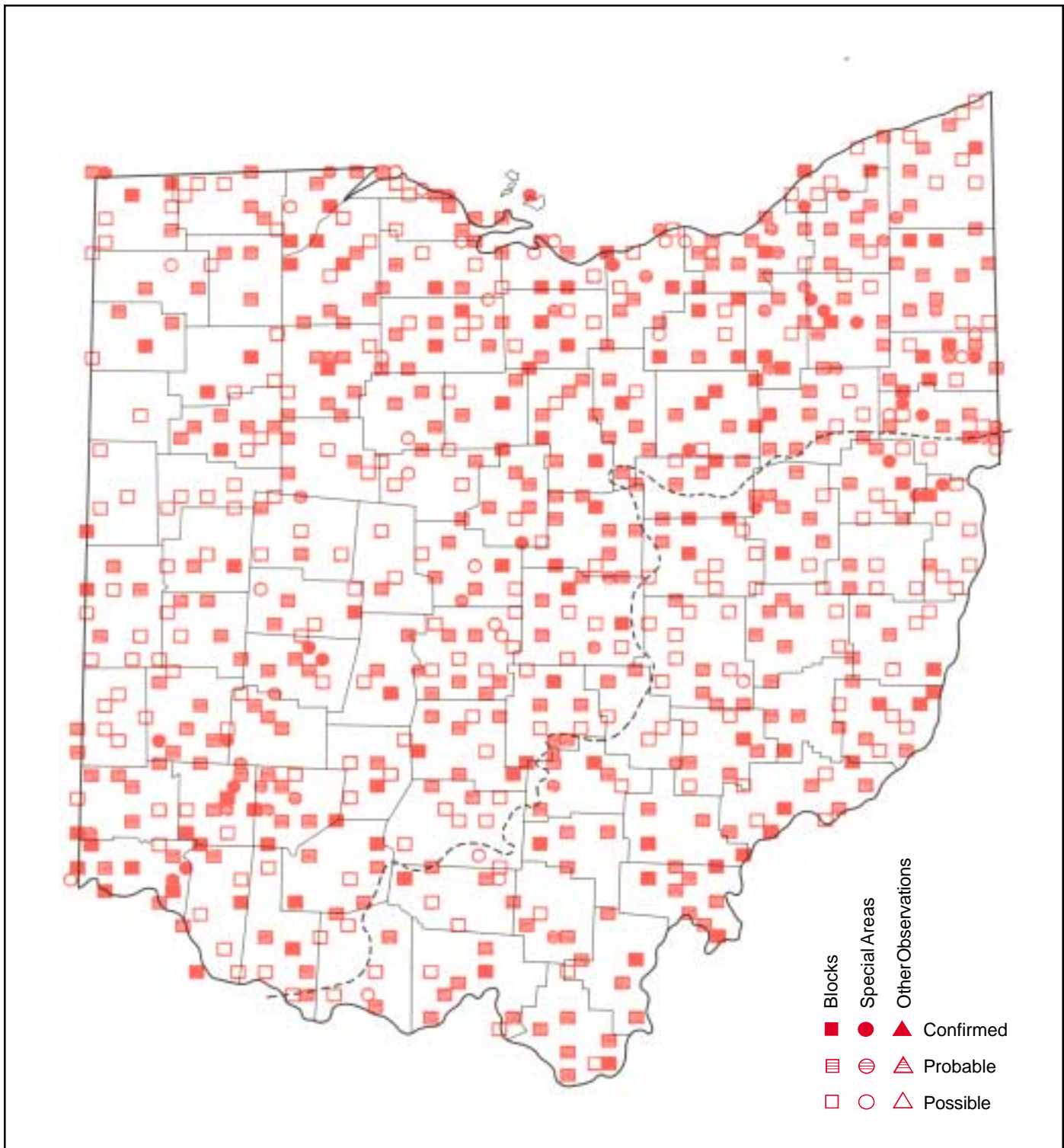


Mike Williams - ODNR Photographer

declines have been evident in watersheds subjected to extensive channelization or a significant deterioration in water quality.

Most nest construction occurs during April, although re-nesting attempts may be responsible for these activities through late May and early June. Since kingfisher nest burrows are normally 3.5–6.0 feet long (Peck and James 1983), there is scant information on some aspects of their nesting chronology. The few published egg dates extend between May 20 and July 4 (Trautman 1940, Williams 1950), although observations of fledged young indicate the earliest clutches are probably laid during the second half of April. Nests with young have been reported between mid-May and mid-July. Recently fledged young have been discovered as early as June 9–10, but most appear between June 15 and July 5. Late nests have produced fledglings through August 6.

Atlas Project data primarily consisted of records of possible and probable breeders. Individuals and pairs in suitable habitats provided most of these reports. Breeding kingfishers proved to be fairly difficult to confirm. Of 110 confirmed records, 50 pertained to recently fledged young, 32 to active nests, and 21 to observations of adults carrying food for young. The “30” code was not used for this species, and the remaining records were scattered among the other confirmed codes.



Analysis of Block Data by Physiographic Region

Physiographic Region	Total Blocks Surveyed	Blocks with Data	% with Data	Regional % for Ohio	Ave. # Individ per BBS Route (1982–1987)
Lake Plain	95	71	74.7	11.5	0.4
Till Plain	271	210	77.5	34.0	0.2
Ill. Till Plain	46	38	82.6	6.2	0.2
Glaciated Plateau	140	128	91.4	20.8	0.2
Unglaciated Plateau	212	170	80.2	27.6	0.5

Summary of Breeding Status

No. of Blocks in Which Species Recorded		
Total	617	80.8%
Confirmed	110	17.8%
Probable	290	47.0%
Possible	217	35.2%