The Azure Kingfisher - *Alcedo azurea* - has an azure-blue to royal-blue back and head, underbody is buff to deep rufous-red. Bill is large and black, chin is buffy white. A white streak on the side of the neck can be seen from behind and looks like 'eyespots'. There is a pale buff patch between bill and dark coloured eye. Legs are bright orange, feet are red. 16 to 19 centimetres.

Male and female adults are similar in appearance, juveniles have dull colouring. Immature birds are similar to adults but the crown is faintly scalloped mid-blue on deeper blue; lower back and rump are mid-blue; breast and belly are paler, more cinnamon-brown. Sides of neck, breast and flanks are black. Immatures appear to moult into adult plumage after one year.

Lives on well-vegetated banks of creeks, swamps, lakes and mangroves. An adult pair keep a permanent territory along 200 to 500 metres of waterfront with perches along the water's edge. Eats fish, water insects and crustaceans. Spends much of the time on a perch rarely more than a metre above the surface intently watching the water below. When prey appears the kingfisher drops onto it, grabs the prey in its bill and returns to the perch to eat the prey head first.

Breeds from September to January in south-eastern and eastern Australia and October to April during the wet season in the north. The nest is a tunnel, excavated with their bills by both birds, in a stream bank. The tunnel is about one metre long enlarged into a small chamber at the end and loosely lined with fish bones and scales and bits of crustacea. Four to seven eggs are laid; lustrous white, rounded, about 23 millimetres by 19 millimetres. Both parents incubate the eggs for 20 to 22 days and the young fledge in three to four weeks.

Three variants in Australia.

- *diemenensis* found in Tasmania is largest and heaviest with a violet-blue crown.
- *azurea* in eastern and south-east Australia is described above, this is lighter coloured than other variants.
- *ruficollaris*, found in northern Australia, is smallest with a proportionally larger bill, colour is deeper with extensive blue-violet along the sides of the breast and flanks.