

Hovering Cerulean Kingfishers *Alcedo coerulescens*

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The Cerulean Kingfisher *Alcedo coerulescens* is a rather common kingfisher in coastal areas of Java, Madura, Bali and the western Lesser Sundas (MacKinnon and Phillipps 1993, White and Bruce 1986; van Balen in prep.). Its diet consists mainly of water crustacea, insects and vertebrates (Sody 1989) and the species is exclusively seen on perches near mangrove creeks, mudflats, fishponds, etc., from which it dives after prey. However, it is frequently seen diving from a hovering position at 2–4 m above the water surface, where it hangs completely still for several to 30 or more seconds. Often the hovering is broken off without a dive, after which the bird veers back to a perch.

The Cerulean Kingfisher frequents open habitats, where it often sits on low perches. Hovering expands the species's fishing territories to areas where these perches are scarce; moreover, during windy weather with choppy water surface, hovering seems to enable the birds to prey on fish above open water (Fry *et al.* 1992). Its small size may make it more suitable for hovering, whereas larger species in the same habitat (e.g. Stork-billed Kingfisher *Halcyon capensis*) may have problems because of a less favourable wing-load or other anatomical reasons.

Many members of the family Alcedinidae are forest dwellers, where hovering is made unnecessary by the availability of perches. Other species are able to take food items other than fish from the ground (*Halcyon* spp.). Hovering has therefore been described only for a few species of kingfishers, i.e. the largely piscivorous species that inhabit open areas, such as the cerylid kingfishers (Fry *et al.* 1992). Hovering as a feeding technique was only briefly mentioned for the Cerulean Kingfisher by Holmes

and Nash (1989). Biological differences between Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis* and Blue-eared Kingfisher *A. meninting*, a greater proportion of fish (Fry *et al.* 1992) and more open habitat for the first species (van Balen and van Balen 1992) is expressed in occasional hovering reported for this and no hovering for the latter.

Despite the intensive utilization of large part of the coastal belt of northern Java and southern Madura, with hardly any natural habitat left in the endless stretches of shrimp and salt ponds, devoid of vegetation and perches, the Cerulean Kingfisher is still very common. Perhaps its hovering technique allows it to utilize these new food sources and habitats. The rather recent and successful expansion of the species in south Sumatra and Lampung (van Marle and Voous 1988) may have been supported by the local boom of shrimp ponds in recent years.

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More birds feeding on arils of acacia seeds

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The feeding of Plain Sunbirds *Anthreptes simplex* on the aril seeds of *Acacia* was reported by Ford (1995). These arils are often bright in colour and contain high concentrations of fat and protein (Glyphis *et al.* 1981). The present paper describes the observation of white-eyes feeding their young with acacia arils.

On the morning of 24 April 1991, following a tempest the night before, I found a young (pre-fledging) Oriental White-eye *Zosterops palpebrosus buxtoni* that had fallen from its nest in a large lengkung *Euphorbia longan* tree in front of my house at Bantarpeuteuy, Bogor, West Java. The bird had a lame leg, and therefore I had put in a bird cage suspended in a tree in my back garden. Immediately, a flock of eight

loudly protesting white-eyes appeared and perched during a few minutes on a branch close to the cage. Two parent birds stayed behind and appeared to have rows of four or five, bright orange, worm-shaped, 1 cm long objects in their bills. They left and returned to the cage several times and in vain offered the food to the young bird through the narrow cage mesh. After I had opened the cage door, the young bird disappeared quickly to join the parents. On inspection of the food remains near the cage, I realised that what had appeared to be worms were actually the arils from an *Acacia auriculiformis* tree that was fruiting copiously in my garden.

The feeding of arils has never been reported before for white-eyes nor for any other Javan birds (Sody 1989).