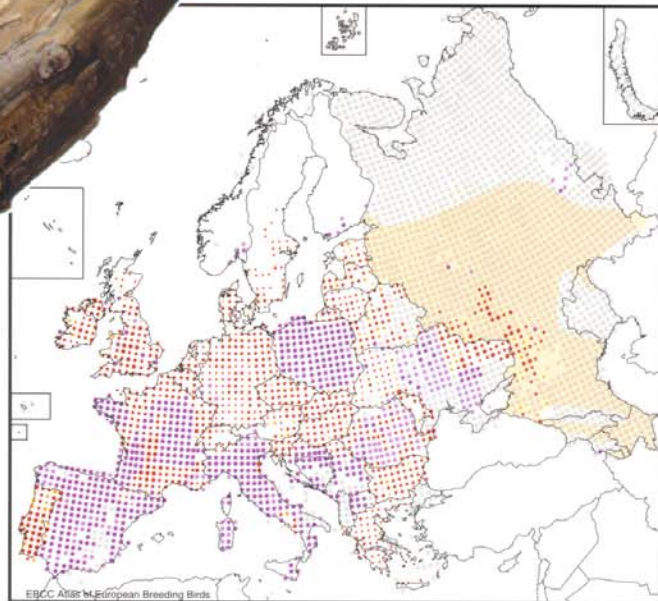
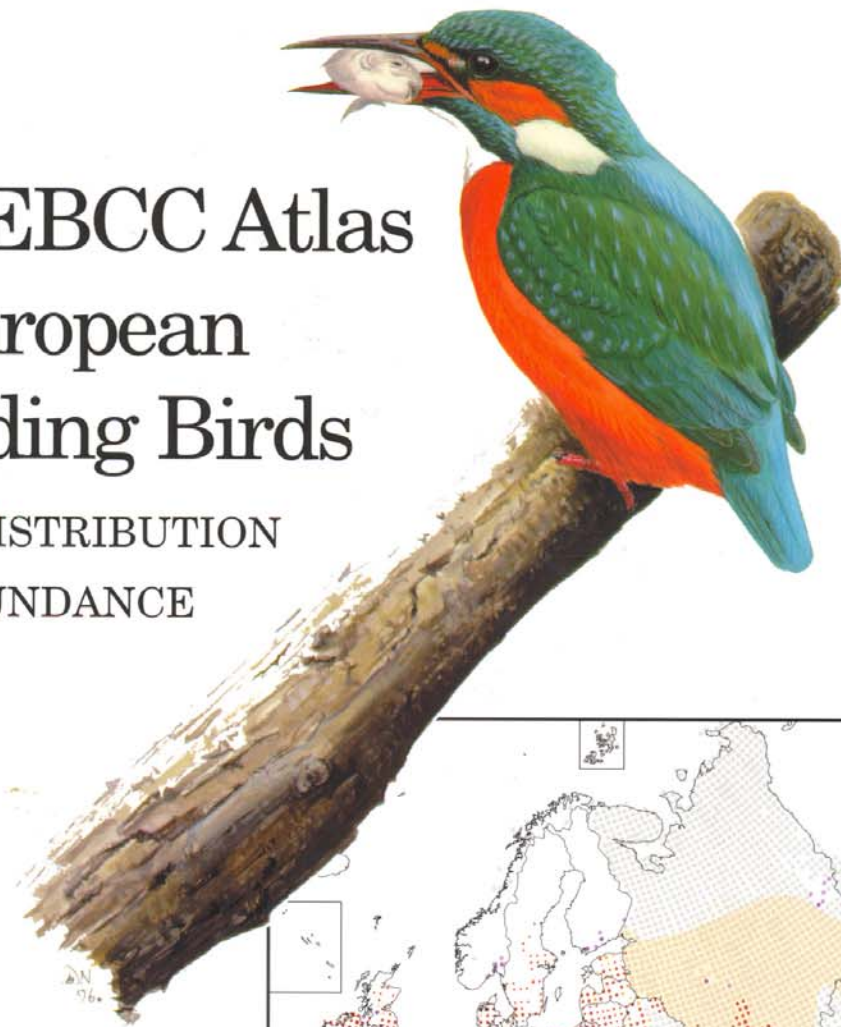


The EBCC Atlas of European Breeding Birds

THEIR DISTRIBUTION
AND ABUNDANCE



Edited by
Ward J M Hagemeijer
Michael J Blair

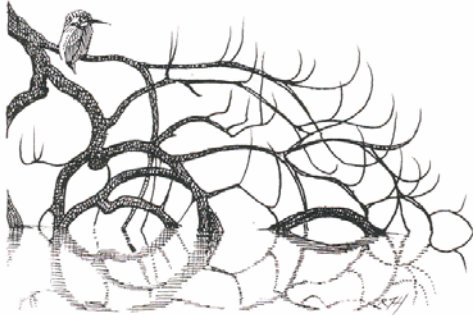


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With an introductory
summary, species
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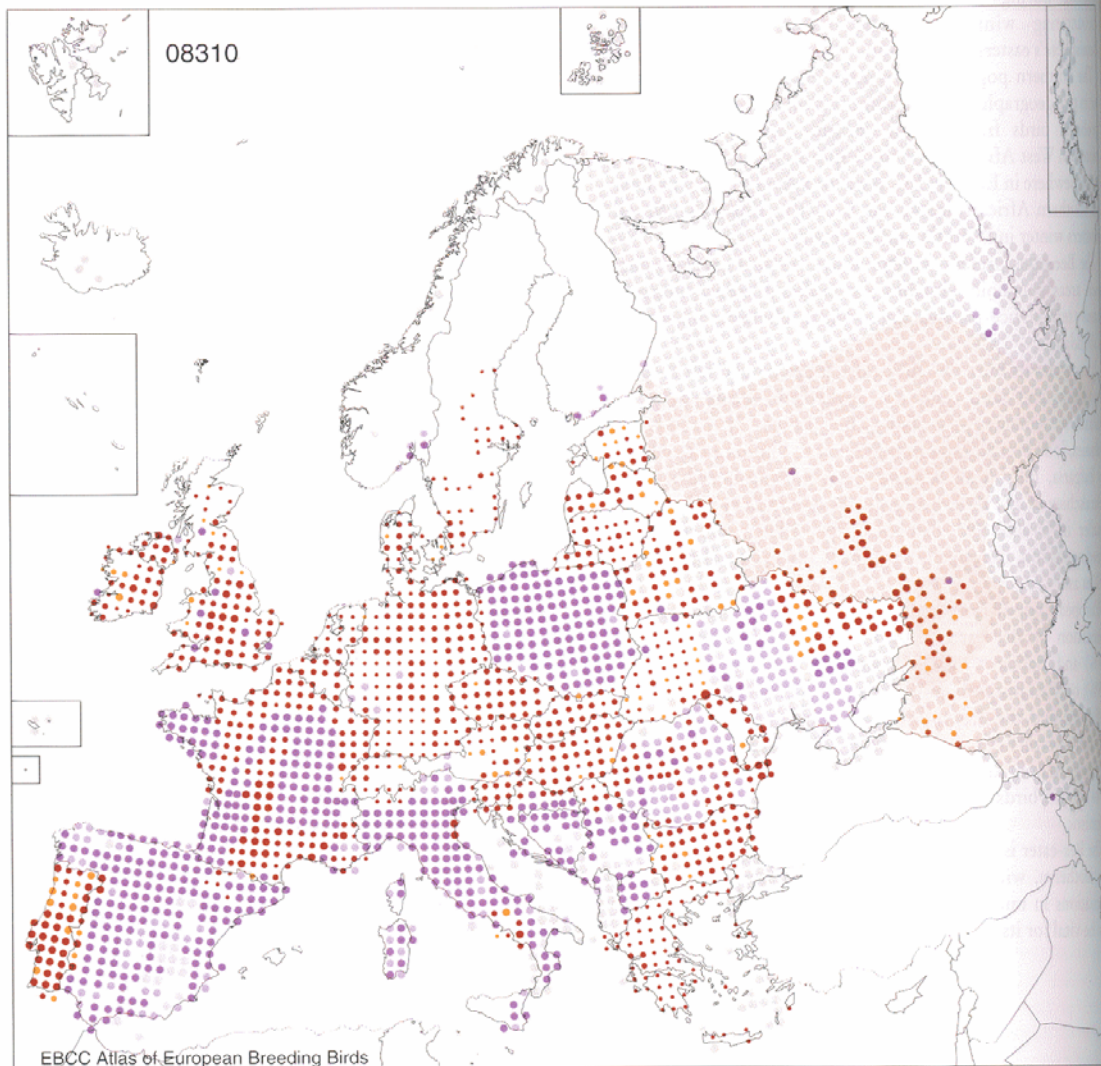
Alcedo atthis

Kingfisher

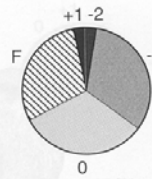
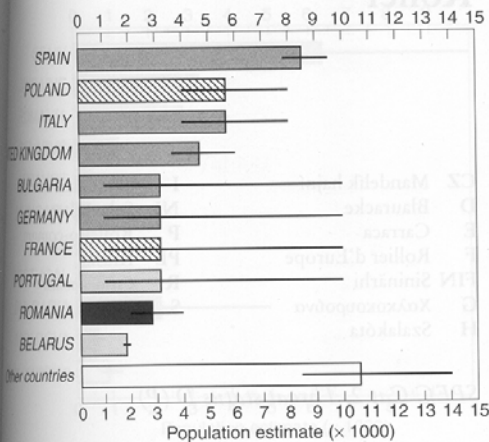


CZ	Ledňáček říční	I	Martin pescatore
D	Eisvogel	NL	Ijsvogel
E	Martin Pescador	P	Guarda-risos-comum
F	Martin-pêcheur d'Europe	PL	Zimorodek
FIN	Kuningaskalastaja	R	Зимородок
G	Αλκυόνα	S	Kungsfiskare
H	Jégmadár		

SPEC Cat 3, Threat status D



Alcedo atthis



% in top 10 countries: 79.8
 Total number of populated European countries: 34
 Total European population 47,302–66,752 (52,500)
 Russian population 10,000–100,000 (31,623)
 Turkish population 100–1000 (316)

The Kingfisher inhabits the whole Indo-Malayan region, West and Central Africa, West and Central Africa, Guinea and the Palearctic from Japan to the Atlantic coast, including North Africa. It avoids steppe, desert and high-altitude or high-latitude (tundra, taiga) ecosystems. As a European breeder, it is absent only from Iceland, some Mediterranean islands like Malta and the Balearics, and above 900m asl, save perhaps in the Caucasus. It is very scarce in N Scotland and in Scandinavia occurs only below 500m. In the Balkans, it occurs only in a few Swedish lowland Baltic areas. Only two subspecies, the nominate *atthis* and *ispida* occur in Europe.

The basic habitat requirement is the availability of clear, fast-flowing water rich in fish shorter than 10cm (Hallet-Libois 1985). Furthermore, it rarely catches fish from the hover, but so needs overhanging perches and branches from which it can perch and dive for prey. It therefore occurs along the banks of streams, rivers, canals, ditches, lakes, ponds and reservoirs and even in bays, estuaries or along the seashore. In the breeding season, the Kingfisher requires suitable banks in which to excavate a nesting chamber close to the water. It prefers sandy or clay banks, more than 1m high and possessing a vertical or concave aspect. Occasionally its nesting chamber is between the roots of fallen trees.

Breeding pairs generally are well-spaced along rivers at an average density of c1–3 bp/10km stretch in favourable years. Circumstances may make several pairs crowd together: in 1989, 4bp were recorded on a 650m-long islet in the River Meuse (France) (Libois & Hallet-Libois 1994) (4bp in 1995). In contrast, breeding holes more than 1km apart can belong to one pair or to a bigamous male (pers obs). Territory size is highly variable, depending not only on food and nest-site availability, but also on the general population level and probably on individual behavioural traits. As determined by radio-tracking in Belgium, the home range sizes of three nesting birds were respectively 1.6 (male 1, 45 days of survey), 1.4 (mate of male 1, 15 days) and 13.8km long (male 2, 70 days) (pers obs, A. Loncin, pers comm). Consequently, densities are low everywhere, never reaching 1000 bp/50km grid square and probably not exceeding a few hundred per square at best.

Numbers fluctuate heavily from year to year according to the climatic conditions (rainfall, temperature) prevailing in the preceding breeding season (Libois & Hallet-Libois 1989), as far as they influence reproductive success (Libois 1994). Numbers also depend on the severity of winter frosts. It is therefore difficult to assess actual numbers precisely on a large scale. Similarly, accurate population trends are elusive unless determined over a long period of time. In one Belgian census area, the 8bp remaining after the severe 1984/85 winter increased to 43 in 1990 but reduced to 25 in 1991 (pers obs). Large fluctuations therefore seem characteristic. Winter losses can be offset by an annual production of 2–3 broods and the female's mean lifetime reproduction rate of 9.7 fledglings, even given a mean annual mortality of 71–73% (Bunzel & Drücke 1989).

Loss of suitable feeding and nesting habitat through water pollution, drainage and irrigation schemes is the main threat to the species; it causes sharp local declines which may be significant, depending on the scale of change.

Eastern and continental populations are mainly migratory, moving southwards after the breeding season. Central European birds are partially migratory, whereas western populations are dispersive or sedentary. Immatures disperse in all directions; exceptionally, some return to breed where they hatched (pers obs). In W Europe, dispersion distance usually is under 200km. Long-distance movements are well-oriented to the S or W (Euring databank). British populations appear to be relatively isolated because very few have been recorded on the Continent (Morgan & Glue 1977).

Roland Libois (B)

This species account is sponsored by Vogelbescherming Nederland, Zeist, NL.

