

The symbolic significance of kingfishers in the nature-human nexus

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“... I catch fish in style and am a principled eater! This has been a royal family legacy, unlike those gluttonous beings that have no manners and just prey on food wherever.”



– In “Family Legacy”; [The Kingfisher Story Collection](#) [1]

The perspective paper titled “Kingfisher: contemplating the connection between nature and humans through science, art, literature, and lived experiences” provides a captivating exploration of the multifaceted relationship between humans and nature using kingfishers as a focal point [2].

By highlighting the endangered status of the Tasmanian azure kingfisher, exclusive to Tasmania, and underscoring its vulnerability exacerbated by climate change and the lack of conservation measures, the paper delves into the symbolic significance of wildlife, with kingfishers being the representative. The recognition of kingfishers’ symbolic importance is proposed as a driving force for inspiring action to address climate change and biodiversity loss, fostering a profound connection between humans and the natural world.



Kingfisher: contemplating the connection between nature and humans through science, art, literature, and lived experiences

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ABSTRACT

Due to rapid urbanisation, the separation between humans and nature is a critical issue that leads to the eco-deficit culture and hinders efforts to alleviate climate change and biodiversity crises. In this essay, using the most recent scientific findings, we argue that the kingfisher, as a symbolic representation of nature, can act as a bridge that connects humans and nature through many pathways. In science, the kingfisher can be used as an indicator species to evaluate the environmental alterations of the wetland ecosystems, facilitating conservation efforts. In addition, the kingfisher's behaviours embedded in the indigenous communities' knowledge systems to predict environmental variability can be valuable resources for developing community science. The images, memories, and feelings associated with the species can also connect humans' mental realms with the world of other sentient beings, gradually building humans' perceived values of the natural world. With these benefits, with the kingfisher being a symbolic representation, wildlife can play a crucial role in restoring the lost bond between humans and the natural environment. Establishing a stronger connection between humans and nature is expected to significantly impact the transformation of human value systems from eco-deficit to eco-surplus mindsets. Moreover, for the kingfisher to play its role in connecting humans and the natural environment, conservation must be prioritised before some kingfisher species become extinct (e.g. Tasmanian azure kingfisher, Javan blue-banded kingfisher, Mangareva kingfisher, Sangihe dwarf kingfisher, etc.).

Keywords: community science, conservation, creative arts, eco-surplus culture, environmental consciousness, extinction risk, human-environment nexus, literature, natural dissociation, wildlife

In assessing environmental changes in wetland ecosystems, the authors underscore the importance of kingfishers in community science, particularly where indigenous knowledge intersects with environmental protection, offering valuable wisdom for addressing global issues like climate change. The paper also highlights the educational potential of creative arts, such as literature and metaphors, in enhancing environmental awareness. Kingfishers' images, memories, and emotions are portrayed as foundational elements for environmental and humanities education, contributing to restoring the forgotten connection between humans and the natural world.

The overall narrative advocates for a stronger bond between humanity and the natural environment, emphasizing the important role of this reconnection in transforming prevailing eco-deficit mindsets into eco-surplus values. The paper plays a crucial role as a compelling call to urgent conservation actions, portraying kingfishers as indispensable symbols of sentient nature.

References

[1] Vuong QH. (2022). *The Kingfisher Story Collection*. <https://www.amazon.com/dp/BOBG2NNHY6>

[2] Vuong QH, Nguyen MH. (2023). Kingfisher: contemplating the connection between nature and humans through science, art, literature, and lived experiences. *Pacific Conservation Biology*. <https://www.publish.csiro.au/pc/PC23044>



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