

TO CROSS OR NOT TO CROSS?

It is common knowledge that birds select mates of the same species by reference to calls, actions, plumage and soft part colours, as displayed in courtship. Oh yes? Has anyone asked the birds? Does anyone know what in fact a love-lorn male (or female) is prepared to accept in order to satisfy the breeding urge, which in every reproductively mature animal demands to be fulfilled?

It is well-known that caged birds (and mammals too) will attempt to breed with the most unlikely, but propinquitous, mates. Why then should it be so improbable that a lonely kingfisher should mate with a closely allied species which has only a slightly different courtship display and a different, but related, call? One breeds in holes in trees and the other digs holes in banks you say, but both are holes.

Before we make definitive statements about what other creatures will or will not do, we must know exactly what motivates them, but unless we are kingfishers (in this case), we cannot ever be sure.

(Dale Hanmer's article on aberrant Woodland Kingfishers in the last Safring News seems to have aroused a fair amount of interest and I hear from Dale that there is yet more comment in the Pipeline. The author of this note has requested, and received, anonymity. Ed.)

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