



Jesse H. Jones Park & Nature Center

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The Green Kingfisher, *Chloroceryle americana*, is small and lacks the blue-gray coloring of the more common Belted Kingfisher. Green Kingfishers are usually found in tropical South Texas; however, in recent years there have been a few records of Green Kingfisher sightings on Lake Conroe and Spring and Cypress Creeks.

This year's first sighting of a Green Kingfisher on Spring Creek at Jones Park was documented by Mike Howlett and John and Gloria Tveten from a pontoon boat on March 5, 2005. Since then, there have been numerous sightings, including a bird further up Spring Creek at Pundt Park that is thought to be different from the birds at Jones Park.

On September 28, 2005, Al Barr (Mercer) was fortunate enough to get pictures of both male and female Green Kingfishers on Spring Creek at Jones Park. "Dark green above and white below, the male has a rust-colored breast band and the female has a band of green spots," writes John Tveten in *The Birds of Texas*.

Jerry Walls (Jones) states, "We can only assume the pair nested this past spring, and if this assumption is true, then this would be the eastern-most Green Kingfisher nesting record in the United States."

Green Kingfisher at Jesse Jones Park

By John Jones

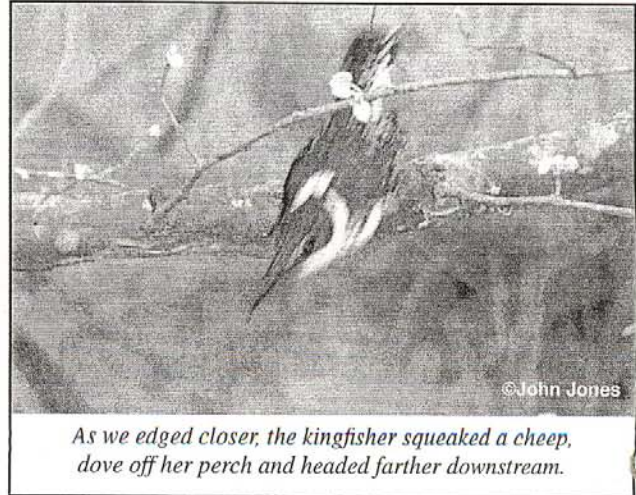
During the 2005 NatureFest at Jesse Jones Park, Mike Howlett, Al Barr and John and Gloria Tveten spotted a Green Kingfisher while on an early morning boat ride on Spring Creek — an almost unbelievable sighting since this little bird is well out of normal range. Gloria and I went on the next boat trip but failed to see it. Since then, there have been other sightings of this small kingfisher, including a bird further up Spring Creek at Pundt Park that is thought to be different from the birds at Jesse Jones Park. During the year Al Barr managed to get photographs of both male and female Green Kingfishers on Spring Creek from his canoe and kayak.

This year our luck changed and the highlight of NatureFest '06 for Gloria and me was seeing the Green Kingfisher on the boat ride on Spring Creek. We have seen this small kingfisher numerous times in South Texas and in Central and South America, but seeing this tropical bird in Jesse Jones Park in Harris County is pretty special. We didn't see it while going down the creek but on our return trip, thanks to Mike Howlett's eagle eye and boat handling, I was able to get a nice photo of the female. As we edged closer and closer, the kingfisher squeaked a cheep, dove off her perch and headed farther downstream, flying just above the water.

The Green Kingfishers are usually found near forest-shaded streams of clear water. They need the clear water since they fish by sight. They sit for long periods on a low limb overhanging the water until they spot a minnow or other small fish, then plunge headfirst into the water after their prey. Several sections of Spring Creek fit this criterion perfectly. For nesting, they require a high sandy bank for their nest hole and again, Spring Creek meets this requirement, although our many "controlled waterways" do not. Both the male and female dig a nest tunnel of about 2 to 3 feet long, near the top of a high bank above the water. The small entrance hole of about 2 to 3 inches in diameter is usually concealed behind trailing vegetation.

Since the male and female have been in the same area throughout the year, there is speculation that they may be nesting there in Jesse Jones Park. If so, this would be the farthest

east nesting for this species in Texas. Therefore, we jokingly volunteered Al Barr to document this possibility since he has the skills, the kayak and all of the necessary photo gear. This will be a daunting task however, since the Green Kingfisher usually hides its burrow entrance.



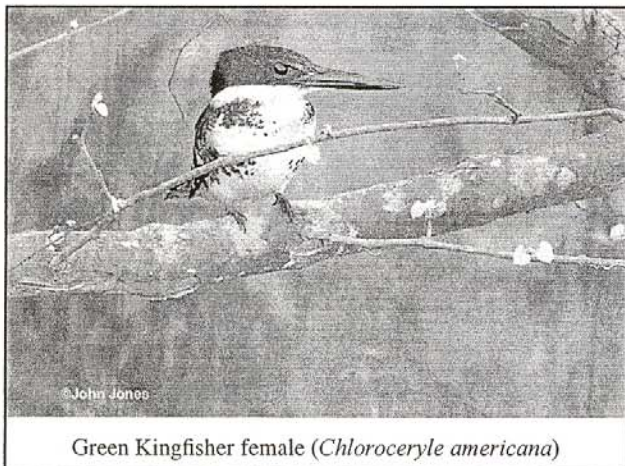
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The Green Kingfisher is the smallest of the three species found in the United States. The others being the large Ringed Kingfisher that is found in South Texas and the Belted Kingfisher that is relatively common in our area and throughout much of North America. At eight inches, the small Green Kingfisher is half the size of the Ringed Kingfisher and much smaller than our common Belted Kingfisher. Although it is a small bird, it is instantly recognizable as a kingfisher because of its large head and oversized bill. And since it is small, it preys on smaller fish and can fish in shallower water than its larger cousins. They will occasionally vary their diet by nabbing aquatic insects, and if the water isn't clear due to rains, etc., they will feed on small lizards or grasshoppers and other insects until the water clears.

Both the male and female Green Kingfishers are a dark glossy green above and white below. They also have white markings on the wings and tail and a white collar around the neck. The male has broad rufous breast band while the female has a spotted green breast band. Unlike the harsh rattling calls of the Belted Kingfisher, the Green Kingfisher's call is a quiet staccato clicking, like pebbles tapping together.

The normal range for this tropical bird is from Argentina and Uruguay in South America to South and South Central Texas. According to the *TOS Handbook of Texas Birds*, Green Kingfishers do not like cold weather and tend to retreat south during a colder than normal winter and often do not return for several years.

Whether these interesting little birds are actually nesting in Jesse Jones Park or just visiting, they are quite a thrill to see.



Green Kingfisher female (*Chloroceryle americana*)