

AMERICAN KESTREL

Falco sparverius



The American Kestrel is perhaps the most colorful, smallest, numerous, and most widespread North American falcon. Of the 13 kestrel species that occur throughout the world, only one is found in the Western Hemisphere, where 17 subspecies are recognized. Found from Alaska to Tierra del Fuego. This colorful falcon is sexually dichromatic; the males has blue-gray wings and a rufous tail with a single broad subterminal black band, while the wings and tail of the female are rufous with black bars across their lengths. The female is about 10% heavier than the male.

They inhabit open areas covered by short ground vegetation where it hunts mostly from perches, frequently from utility wires along roadside, but also by hovering. The hovering bird faces into the wind with head apparently fixed in space, while the wings alternately flap and glide and the tail constantly adjust to each eddy in the breeze. The kestrel is attracted to human-modified habitats, such as pastures and parkland, and often is found near areas of human activity.

The American Kestrel nest in tree cavities, woodpecker holes, crevices of buildings, holes in banks, nest boxes or, rarely, old nests of other birds. They have a highly adaptable behavior and lives just about everywhere, as long as there is some open ground for hunting and conspicuous places on which to perch.

The American Kestrel is a small falcon ranging from 9-12 inches tall, with a wingspan of 20-24 inches and weight ranging from 2.5-6 ounces. They have rufous back and tail with two dark mustache marks on face. They have a curved bill with "tooth" on upper mandible, long pointed wings, long tail, legs and toes rather short and "eyespot" on back of head. The male has blue-gray wings and a lightly spotted chest and belly. The larger female has rufous wings barred with back, and streaking on the chest. Juveniles are similar to adults.

Breeding season is March-June depending on where you are geographically. For up to six weeks

before egg laying, females are promiscuous, mating with two or three males. Once a female settles with one mate, the pair mates frequently until egg laying. They will lay 3-7 eggs (usually 4-5) over a period of 2-3 days. Eggs are white, cream or pale pink with an average size of 35 x 29 mm. The female does most of the incubation but males have been known to occasionally sit. Incubation lasts 29-32 days and hatchlings are non-competitive. Once chicks have hatched, females feed from males. The female in turn feeds the young for the first 20 days. After that the chicks beg for food for themselves from the males and feed themselves. In about 30 days chicks leave the nest. The survival rate of chicks is about 50% under natural conditions. They remain a family for some time.

Their diet consists of large insects, small mammals, reptiles, amphibians and birds.



COOL FACTS

- Although hover-hunting is conspicuous, this foraging method actually is used rather infrequently. It is used most often when suitable perches are not available or when winds are strong enough to create updrafts favorable to hovering.
- In the winter in many southern parts of the range, female and male American Kestrels use different habitats. The females uses the preferred more open habitat, and the male uses areas with more trees. This situation appears to be the result of the females migrating south first and establishing winter territories. The males then are forced into the less preferred areas.
- Nestling kestrels back up, raise their tails, and squirt feces onto the walls of the nest cavity. The feces dry on the cavity walls and stay off the nestlings.



“KOLA WAKON OF WILDLIFE”

Roughly translated it means “Sacred Friend of Wildlife”. This is what every Wildlife Rehabilitator, every person who rescues wildlife, everyone who transports and every Veterinarian that works with wildlife are to the wild kingdom.

In any State, you can call your local Game & Inland Fisheries, local Veterinarian, or animal shelter and they might have some phone numbers for local Wildlife Rehabilitators.

If you have any questions you may call Pearl Beamer, State & Federally licensed Wildlife Rehabilitator within the state of Virginia about wildlife. Pearl specializes in Raptors, Crows and Loons. 757-855-2922 (7am-7pm)



AMERICAN KESTREL

Falco sparverius

