

American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*)

Identification:

Both male and female kestrels have colorful plumage and bold patterns on their head that easily distinguish them from other birds of similar size.

Each bird is approximately 9" in length and has a wingspread of approximately 22"

Male:

blue-gray wings

rufous back and underparts

underparts are lightly streaked and spotted

tail feathers rufous in color with one thick black subterminal band

row of translucent dots on the trailing edge of the wing

Female:

rufous brown wings

reddish brown back and underparts with dark broken barring

horizontal barring (thin black lines) on tail feathers

What You Can Do To Help:

- Learn to identify the American Kestrel both visually and aurally.
- Keep track of locations where you have seen kestrels throughout the season. Relay this information to DOS through the website.
- Participate in the DOS Kestrel Breeding Survey. As a survey volunteer, you survey a small block of Delaware by car, twice a month reporting any Kestrels seen. Help us increase our understanding of this bird in Delaware with sighting reports.
- Build and monitor Kestrel nest boxes. (For construction plans and site placement suggestions, please visit the DOS web site.)

DOS Kestrel Project
PO Box 4247, Greenville, DE 19807
www.dosbirds.org/kestrel



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Kestrel Project

What is it?
How can you help?

DOS KESTREL PROJECT NEEDS YOUR HELP!

MISSION: DOS is embarking on an ambitious project to study the American Kestrel in Delaware.

We will attempt to determine the current Kestrel population distribution in Delaware, identify important habitats and develop strategies to stabilize the population.

HABITAT: One of the reasons for the declining kestrel population may be loss of proper habitat. Kestrels generally require open areas and perches for breeding, nesting and feeding. This includes old fields with widely scattered trees, pastures, open spaces, agricultural lands, barnyards and forest clearings. It has also been documented that kestrels will occupy golf courses, orchards and urban areas.

NESTING HABITAT: Kestrels do not build their own nests. They utilize natural tree cavities, cavities previously created by other species, snags, nest boxes, or crevices in roofs, walls, or ledges. Nests are generally located along forest edges and tree lines adjacent to open fields to facilitate access to suitable foraging habitat. However, they will also nest along power lines and highways. Typically, 1 breeding pair requires 250 acres of habitat. Pairs are usually separated by distance (\approx 1/2 mile) and/or geographical features (e.g. big hill).

FOOD: The kestrel's diet is primarily comprised of insects, small mammals, and small birds. In the summer, when insects are abundant, kestrels will generally feed on grasshoppers, moths, caterpillars, beetles and crickets. In the fall and winter, when insects are less prevalent, kestrels will feed on small mammals (rats, shrews, mice, and gophers) and birds (up to the size of a meadowlark and speed of tree swallows). It has also been documented that kestrels will feed on bats, lizards, amphibians, earth worms, and spiders. Most hunting for food is done by perch. Kestrels are frequently seen diving down from power lines, fence posts or snags. Most prey are taken on the ground, however, some prey items will be caught in flight.



Becky Augustine

MANAGEMENT: American kestrels are often limited by suitable habitat for nesting and hunting. To improve habitat conditions management may include:

- Maintaining/installing open habitat (old fields, grasslands, agricultural lands, grass buffers).
- Maintaining/installing field borders, hedgerows, and forest edges. Maintaining snags.
- Adding perches to open areas. Minimizing use of pesticides and herbicides (pesticides/herbicides have been known to affect kestrels and/or species which they depend on for food).
- Due to increased predation by Coopers Hawks, place nest boxes far away from wooded areas.

STATUS: Recent counts suggest that, overall, kestrel populations in North America are considered healthy. However, survey data indicate that kestrels may be declining in the Northeast. The status of Kestrels on the Delmarva is unknown and is something the Delmarva Ornithological Society (DOS) and Partners are currently trying to assess. As such, DOS could use your help documenting kestrel presence and the habitat utilized by kestrels in our region.