



## **The American Kestrel**

*Falco sparverius*

**The American Kestrel is a bird of prey. It is the smallest falcon in North America. Also known as the Sparrow Hawk, or Grasshopper Hawk due to their diet, and Killy Hawk after their distinct call, their range extends from Canada to the southern United States. During the winter months the northern population of Kestrels may migrate south to Central America and parts of South America. Kestrels are very adaptable in their choice of habitats, which include grasslands, meadows, woodlands, urban areas where there are places for perching and where prey are plentiful, wetlands, and The Great Swamp.**

**An American Kestrel is about the size of a robin. They have pointed wings and a long tail; they are an average of 9 to 12 inches in length with a wingspan of 20 to 24 inches and they weigh 4 to 6 ounces. Males have rusty red-brown backs and a blue-grey head and tail; their under parts are cream-colored with dark spots. Females are mostly brown with dark bars on their backs, wings, and tails. Most males and females have black markings on their faces, eye rings and yellow legs and feet. Kestrels are primarily silent birds but when having a dispute or when they feel threatened they have a high-pitched call, kee-kee-kee or killy-killy-killy.**

**Kestrels bob their tails up and down as they perch on posts, wires and tree branches while hunting for their prey. They have powerful eyesight which allows them to see their prey from long distances. They can see ultraviolet light, allowing them to detect urine trails which aid in their hunt for prey. Kestrels can hover in flight and stay in a fixed position, rapidly beating their wings while keeping their heads still as they scan and dive vertically to catch their prey in their powerful talons. They will then return to a perching site to enjoy their meal. Kestrels stash prey in hidden places for use later.**

**Kestrels feed on grasshoppers, a favorite, and also relish beetles, dragonflies, moths, and caterpillars, spiders, frogs, voles, mice, bats, and small birds.**

Kestrels mate from mid April through June. They nest in tree cavities, crevices, woodpecker holes, cliffs, and nest boxes supplied by conservationists. Pairs may bond together for years and return to the same nesting sites each year. The female lays 4-5 cream-colored eggs with brown-colored spots 24 to 72 hours apart. The incubation period is 29-31 days. The female incubates the eggs, but the male will help. He will bring the food nearby the nest and call to the female to come and get it. The eggs hatch over a 3- or 4-day period. Both parents care for the young. The chicks grow rapidly, reaching adult size in 28 to 35 days, with fully developed wings. They are ready to leave the nest but may remain in their parents' care for a few more weeks. Young Kestrels begin to mate at about 1 year old. Life span is 3 to 6 years.

The American Kestrel has a long history of use in falconry, which is the art of training a bird of prey to hunt in cooperation with a human.

Predators are great horned owls, coyotes, bobcats, red tailed hawks, crows, and ravens. Other factors that threaten the Kestrel are loss of habitat through development, pesticides and collisions with vehicles. Their population has been declining since 1966 due to these threats.

**Conservation Status: Least Concern**

In many traditions the American Kestrel is a symbol of power, freedom, agility, grace, and light.