

Kestrel Nest Box Tips

American kestrels are small falcons that are natural predators of smaller bird species, insects, mice, and voles that damage fruit crops. These birds are cavity nesters and therefore providing nest boxes in suitable habitat have been shown to attract American kestrels and increase the number of nesting kestrel pairs in an area. Here are some suggestions:

- Nest boxes should be placed in open fields, meadows or along hedgerows next to open areas. They should be placed away from wood lots as these attract predatory birds such as Great Horned Owls and hawks (Cooper's, Red-tailed, and Sharp-shinned) that can prey on American Kestrels or detract them from nesting. A grassy habitat should be near the box so kestrels can use it for foraging food.
- Kestrels have a hunting territory of at least half a mile to one mile and will not allow another kestrel pair to nest closer; you need to leave that much space if installing more than one nest box. Kestrel nest boxes should be firmly attached to a support structure, such as a tree or post, 10 to 30 feet above the ground and spaced at least half a mile apart.
- The support structure should have a sheet of aluminum secured around it to prevent squirrels from climbing and using the box. Keep in mind that squirrels can jump up to five feet vertically and 10 feet horizontally. These will also serve as predator guards to detract animals that may prey on eggs and kestrels such as cats, raccoons and snakes.
- Box openings should face the southeast if possible.
- Place 2 to 3 inches of sawdust or wood shavings in the bottom of the nest box. Kestrels do not make a nests so this provides a substrate for egg laying.
- Boxes should be installed no later than February 1st, to allow kestrels to find nest sites when first returning north.
- Since starlings may use the box, check the box once a week and remove the nest and eggs of any starlings present. Starlings are unprotected by law and thus you are permitted to do this. Starling eggs are white with a blue-green tint, but other species such as bluebirds (bright blue eggs) and tree swallows (white eggs) may also use the nest box. Other native species that may use the box are Northern flickers and house wrens. Be sure you can identify the eggs, but when in doubt, wait for one of the parents to return for positive identification.
- Another predatory bird that may inhabit the nest box is the Eastern Screech Owl. These owls are also cavity nesters that prey on many pests for farmers. Therefore, you may be lucky and attract kestrels and Screech owls to the same box in one calendar year. Owls prefer orchard habitat and are fierce hunters.
- Clean out the kestrel box after each nesting season and replace the wood shavings for next season's nesting pair.

American Kestrel



Photo: Courtesy of J. Willwerth, Brock University

Nesting Facts

Clutch Size

4–5 eggs

Number of Broods

1–2 broods

Egg Length

1.2–1.5 in

3–3.8 cm

Egg Width

0.9–1.1 in

2.4–2.8 cm

Incubation Period

26–32 days

Nestling Period

28–31 days

Egg Description

White to yellowish or light reddish-brown, mottled with violet-magenta, gray, or brown.

Condition at Hatching

Feeble, with sparse white down over pinkish skin; eyes partially open by first or second day.

Kestrel eggs:



Photo courtesy of J. Willwerth, Brock University

Nesting Facts taken from The Cornell Lab of Ornithology

http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/american_kestrel/lifehistory