

American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*)

Description: North America's smallest falcon, and one of its most colorful of all raptors. The male's slate-blue head and wings contrast elegantly with his rusty-red back and tail; the female has the same warm reddish on her wings, back, and tail. Relatively small and long tailed, with two sharp face stripes. Female is all red-brown above with narrow dark bars, including on tail. Male has red-brown tail with black tip, red-brown back contrasting with blue-gray wings.

Trend: Declining

Habitat: In winter in many southern parts of the range, female and male American Kestrels use different habitats. Females use the typical open habitat, and males use areas with more trees. This situation appears to be the result of the females migrating south first and establishing winter territories, leaving males to the more wooded areas.

Ways You can help with Conservation: Numbers have been declining since 1966 due to habitat loss, reduced prey availability, and loss of nesting cavities. Warmer temperatures in the southern portion of the range may also be impacting nesting success. Kestrels eat mostly large insects (grasshoppers are a favorite prey) and small mammals (including voles, mice, and sometimes bats), small birds (sometimes up to the size of quail), lizards, frogs, earthworms, spiders, crayfish, and available prey.

Don't use rodenticides which are dangerous to all owls, hawks, and raptors. When rodents are poisoned, they often become less fearful, making them easy prey for raptors which then become poisoned after eating the rodent.

If you own or manage a large tract of land, consider managing it as grassland or meadow. The shift towards more intense, monoculture farming practices has reduced the available habitat for American Kestrels and many other grassland birds. Traditional, diverse farming practices that include areas of fallow fields and natural buffers can support a wide diversity of wildlife.

NHBA is working with birders at Duke and NC State Universities to place Kestrel nest boxes at 10 locations in the Piedmont. This project will also work with farmers and managers of open park lands to manage habitat for kestrels.



Male American Kestrel photo by David Zieg



Photo by Jason Ganz



Female feeding chick by Christopher Ciccone