

WOODWORKING FOR WILDLIFE

AMERICAN KESTREL



The American kestrel is our smallest falcon and is common in agricultural areas characterized by scattered woodlots, scattered trees, shelterbelts, meadows, highway rights-of-ways, pastures and hay fields. This species is valuable because of the large numbers of rodents and insects eaten. Kestrels are frequently seen perched on powerlines along highways or hovering above grassy roadside ditches in search of their prey. An adult kestrel is about the size of a mourning dove.

Locate the box along a fencerow between crop fields, in a meadow or in similar open country. Place the box 10 to 30 feet high on a tree, utility pole, the back of a billboard or sign or on your own post. Kestrels like a high perch near their box

so pick a site within 100 to 200 yards of utility wires or a tall tree. The 3-inch-diameter entrance should face in a south or easterly direction. The flight path to the entrance should be branch free. Cover the bottom 2 or 3 inches of the box with wood shavings or pine needles.

Place boxes in the fall or late winter. Starlings may be a persistent problem. Check the boxes weekly to remove starling nesting material. Neither the screech owl (a desirable occupant) nor the kestrel carries in nesting material. Occasional nest checks will generally not cause the kestrel to abandon the nest. Kestrels nest from March through June.

A ladder is best for nest checks. This makes it harder for raccoons to follow your scent trail to the nest. If raccoons, squirrels or other non-avian predators and competitors are a problem, place 3 feet of metal flashing under the box. This guard may prevent their climbing to the box.

You'll be rewarded when you spot the first white, pinkish-white or cinnamon egg that's evenly covered with brown spots. Kestrels normally lay five such eggs.

