

AMERICAN KESTREL

updated March 2017



Range	North America and South America
Habitat	Open areas like grasslands, moorlands, rain forests, and mountains
Diet (wild)	Large insects, small mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians
Diet (captivity)	Bird of prey diet
Description	Length: 8–12 inches; wingspan: 20–24 inches; weight: 4 ounces. Roughly the size and shape of a mourning dove, although it has a larger head; longer, narrow wings; and long, square-tipped tail. Kestrels are sexually dimorphic. Males have blue-gray covert wings and are smaller than females. Females are barred on the back and tail with rusty colored wings. Both males and females have white cheeks, a short hooked beak, a gray crown, and two dark mustache marks. They both have dark spots (ocelli) on the back of their heads, thought to look like eyes.
Lifespan	Wild: 8–10 years. Captivity: 12–14 years
Reproduction	Female will lay 4–6 eggs over a 2–3 day period. The female does most of the 29–30 day incubation. Males will hunt and the female will feed the young. Young fledge around 28–31 days and reach sexual maturity around a year. A nest is most often in a cavity made by a woodpecker, but they will also nest on a cliff or in a man-made nesting box. The nest is far removed from other kestrels. Mating season depends on which region the bird is in: kestrels in the United States breed around April–June.
Behavior	Kestrels are diurnal. When searching for prey, kestrels will either watch for it from a tall tree or hover over the ground. They will rarely chase their prey; instead, they swoop down and pin it to the ground. When communicating to each other they make a “klee klee klee” sound. Kestrels are mostly solitary birds except during mating season. They adapt very well to different types of habitats and can be found in the suburbs and cities nesting on building ledges.
Our animals	1 male. Arrived at PPZ in 2005. Wild born; injured and rehabilitated at MSU, but not releasable
Cool stuff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kestrels are the smallest and most common falcons in North America. They are also one of the most colorful. • Unlike larger falcons, the “sparrow hawk” has adapted to humans and nests even in our largest cities where it preys chiefly on house sparrows. • Despite their fierce lifestyle, American kestrels end up as prey for larger birds such as northern goshawks, red-tailed hawks, barn owls, American crows, and sharp-shinned and Cooper’s hawks, as well as rat snakes, corn snakes, and even fire ants. • Unlike humans, many birds can see ultraviolet light. This enables kestrels to make out the trails of urine that voles, a common prey animal, leave as they run along the ground. Like neon diner signs, these bright paths may highlight the way to a meal—as has been observed in the Eurasian kestrel, a close relative. • Kestrels hide surplus kills in grass clumps, tree roots, bushes, fence posts, tree limbs, and cavities, to save the food for lean times or to hide it from other animals. • According to research, only four out of 10 kestrels reach their first birthday.

Phylum
ChordataClass
AvesOrder
FalconiformesFamily
FalconidaeGenus
Falcospecies
F. sparverius,