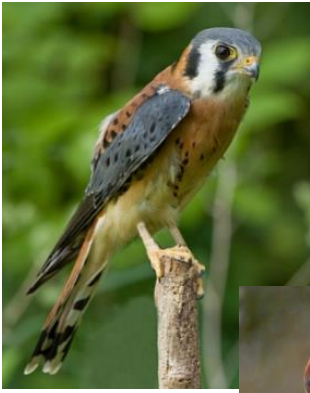


# Common Name: American Kestrel

Scientific Name: *Falco sparverius*



**Male specimen**

Photo by Greg Hume



IUCN Red list Status: Least concern

AZA Conservation Program: *Falco sparverius*

**Class:** Aves

**Order:** Falconiformes

**Family:** Falconidae

## Female Specimen

C:\Users\Owner\AppData\Local  
\Microsoft\Windows\INetCache  
\IE\E947PLO8\5313505647\_c86

## Habitat:

Open or semi-open sites in both rural and urban areas with raised perches available including woodland clearings and edges, grasslands, farmlands, and deserts.

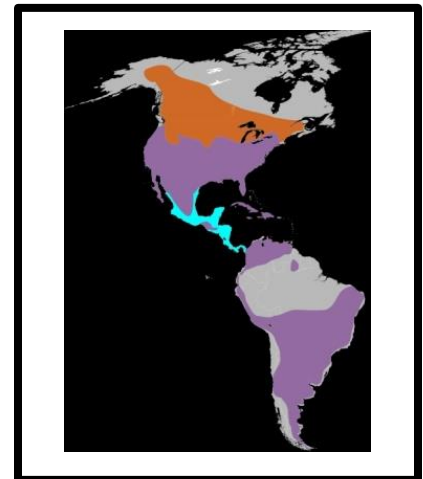
## Threats in the Wild:

Although larger raptors prey on them, humans imperil a greater number of kestrels in numerous ways: direct hunting, collision with vehicles, clearing trees in agricultural fields thus reducing nesting sites, and environmental contamination from pesticides and other chemicals that the kestrels ingest from their prey.

## Physical Characteristics:

This kestrel is one of the smallest raptors in the Americas but exhibits wide variation in size and weight across its range. Another common name for this species is Sparrow Hawk. Females are about 15% larger than males and colored somewhat differently. Specimens range from 22-31 cm (8.7 to 12.2 in) in length with wingspans of 51-61 cm (20 -24 in). Females typically weigh 86 -165 g (3.0 to 5.8 ozs), and males weigh slightly less. Tail length is 11-15 cm (4.3 to 5.9 in).

Males are rusty colored with slate-blue wings. Females are rusty overall with black barring on the wings and back. Both sexes have black slashes on the face called malar stripes. Kestrels can see in the ultraviolet light spectrum which enables them to spot the urine trails of mice and voles which glow in the UV light.



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## Reproduction:

Kestrels prefer to nest in cavities with a closed top and small entrance in trees or in cacti but will also use nests abandoned by other birds and artificial nest boxes. They do not excavate their nest sites and rely on woodpeckers or nature to create them.

They are known as secondary cavity nesters

In migratory populations, the male arrives before the female and scouts for nest sites. Males perform climbing and diving displays along with “klee” calls to attract a partner. Females, which mature in the first spring after fledging, choose their mate. Females are often promiscuous for one to two weeks after arriving at the nesting area. This behavior is thought to stimulate ovulation. Still, pair bonding is quite strong and sometimes permanent. Males will share food with the females for four to five weeks before mating and continue for one or two weeks after the eggs hatch.

Females lay from three to seven eggs at one to three-day intervals and provide 80% of the incubation which lasts about a month. Egg size is 32mm by 29mm or about 1.3 in to 1.1 in. Hatchlings can sit up after five days, grow to adult weight in about 15 days, and leave the nest after about 30 days.

## Longevity:

Kestrels generally live for 8 to 12 years. The oldest known kestrel died at 17 years of age living in captivity. It is shorter in the wild, because they serve as a prey and predatory species, at less than 5 years. The oldest banded kestrel documented died at almost 12 years of age.

## Diet:

Kestrels take a variety of small prey including grasshoppers and other insects, mice, voles, lizards, snakes and birds. They prefer to hunt from perches but will hover with rapid wing beats facing into the wind while looking for prey. Most prey is caught on the ground, but kestrels will occasionally catch birds or insects in the air.

## Miscellaneous:

Vocalizations: Kestrels have three different sounds, the “klee” often heard when the kestrels are excited, the “whine” associated with both feeding and copulation, and the “chitter” used during interaction between the sexes and heard during copulation. The larger females have lower-pitched calls than the males.

