

The American Kestrel is a declining breeder in the Hudson River Valley and is fairly common in winter. It is often seen perched on fence posts and overhead wires in open areas.

Conservation Status

Breeding Bird Survey data for New York indicate a continuing decline in American Kestrel populations. Partners in Flight lists it as a Regional Concern in Bird Conservation Region 13. Results from the second NYS Breeding Bird Atlas indicate that the kestrel's distribution is declining statewide, including in the Hudson Valley. Causes of decline appear to be loss of suitable habitat, primarily due to suburban development and reforestation.

Identification

This small falcon is about the size of a robin. The male has a rusty back, blue-gray wings and crown with a rusty cap, 2 distinctive black facial stripes, and lightly spotted underparts. The female is similar, with a rusty back, wings, and breast streaking, but it does not have the blue-gray markings of the male. This species vocalizes frequently, with a loud, repeated “killy killy killy” when excited or alarmed.

Habitat

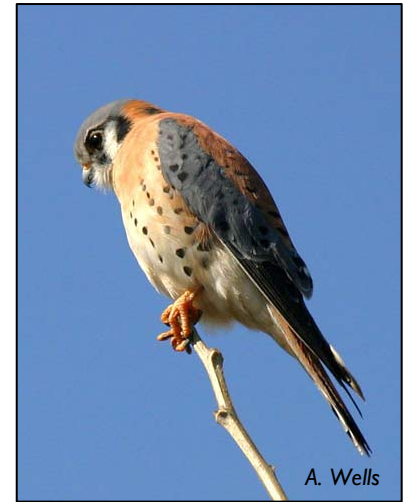
Kestrels prefer a variety of semi-open habitats, including meadows, grassy fields, pastures, early old field successional communities, open parkland, agricultural fields, as well as highway and power line rights-of-way. They inhabit both urban and suburban areas. Woodland edges, widely scattered trees, snags, and perches in the form of trees, shrubs, utility wires or telephone poles are essential components of the kestrel's habitat.

Food

Kestrels hunt mostly from perches, frequently from utility wires along roadsides, but also by hovering, especially when suitable perches are lacking. Their main food in the summer is large insects, in particular grasshoppers and crickets. The young are fed primarily grasshoppers. Wintering birds readily eat small mammals such as mice and voles as well as sparrow-size birds.

Nesting

This falcon nests in woodpecker-excavated and other natural cavities in large trees, crevices in rocks, and nooks in buildings and other structures. It prefers cavities surrounded by large open areas covered with short ground vegetation with adequate hunting perches nearby. It will use nest boxes, but competition from non-native European Starlings is a problem. See recommendations on next page on how discourage this.



Ideal American Kestrel habitat contains open fields with scattered perches.

Threats

- Habitat loss due to reforestation.
- Habitat loss due to suburban development.

Management Recommendations

The American Kestrel must have all the following habitat elements in close proximity to nest successfully: open vegetation, perches, food supply, and available nest sites. The following recommendations address these requirements:

- Maintain grassy and open field areas by mowing and/or managed grazing.
- Preserve snags and widely scattered trees and other perches close to open fields.
- Preserve large live and dead-standing hardwood and softwood trees conducive to natural cavities in and adjacent to open field areas.
- Preserve snags and building structures conducive to nesting cavities.
- Install nest boxes in open field areas. Leave them standing year-round. See the reference USDA 1999 for excellent nest box plans.
- Place nest boxes a good distance from buildings and human habitations, orient them with a southern exposure and monitor them to help prevent starlings from using them.



Grassland habitat in NY

This management summary was adapted from Smallwood and Bird 2002 and USDA 1999.

For additional information, see the following reference:

Ardia, D. R., K. L. Bildstein. 1997. Sex-related differences in habitat selection in wintering American Kestrels, *Falco sparverius*. *Animal Behaviour* 53:1305–1311.

Bird, D. M., R. S. Palmer. 1988. American Kestrel. Pages 253–290 in *Handbook of North American birds*. Vol. 5: diurnal raptors. Pt. 2 (R. S. Palmer, ed.). Yale Univ. Press, New Haven, CT.

NatureServe. 2008. NatureServe Explorer: An online encyclopedia of life [web application]. Version 7.0. NatureServe, Arlington, Virginia. Available <http://www.natureserve.org/explorer>.

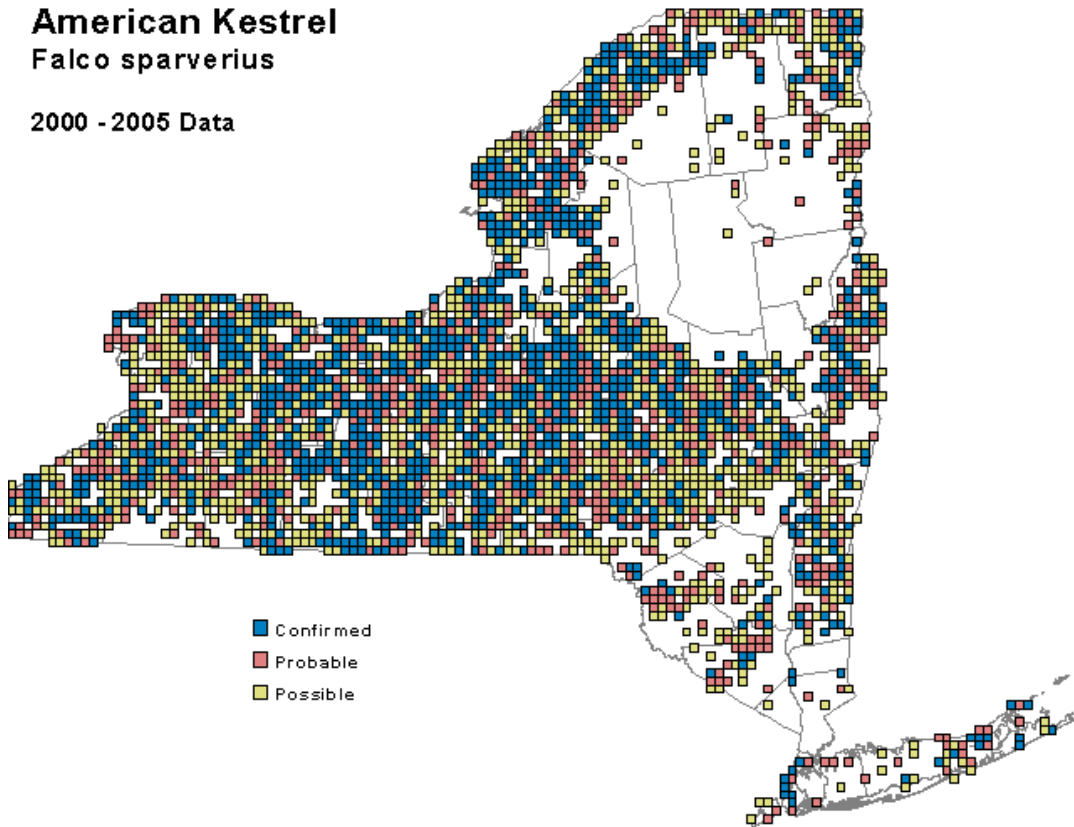
Smallwood, J. A. and D. M. Bird. 2002. American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*), *The Birds of North America Online* (A. Poole, ed.). Ithaca: Cornell Lab of Ornithology; Retrieved from the *Birds of North America Online*: <http://bna.birds.cornell.edu/bna/species/602>.

USDA. Natural Resources Conservation Service. Wildlife Habitat Management Institute. 1999. American Kestrel. Fish and Wildlife Habitat Management Leaflet Number 3. [ftp://ftp-fc.sc.egpv.usda.gov/WMHI/WEB/pdf.kestrel\(1\).pdf](ftp://ftp-fc.sc.egpv.usda.gov/WMHI/WEB/pdf.kestrel(1).pdf).

NYS BREEDING BIRD ATLAS COMPARATIVE DATA

American Kestrel *Falco sparverius*

2000 - 2005 Data



American Kestrel *Falco sparverius*

1980 - 1985 Data

