



The American Kestrel is declining in New York State and the northeastern U.S. You can help bring back this beautiful bird of prey by protecting the habitat it needs to live — here is what you need to know to get started!

WHAT THEY LOOK AND SOUND LIKE

This small falcon is about the size of a robin. The male has a rusty red back, blue-gray wings, a crown with a rusty cap, and lightly spotted underparts. It also has “side burns”—2 black stripes on its face. Females do not have the blue-gray wings of the male, but have rusty-colored wings with black bars. Females also have creamy white underparts with heavy streaks. Kestrels call often, making a loud, repeated “killykillykilly” sound when excited.

WHERE THEY LIVE

Kestrels are found throughout New York State except in heavily forested areas, such as the Adirondacks and Catskills. There are scattered populations in the lower Hudson Valley and on Long Island. They are most common in meadows, grassy fields, pastures, and farm fields but also live in cities and towns. The edges of woods, widely spaced trees, snags, and perches such as trees, shrubs, telephone wires or telephone poles are important parts of good kestrel habitat.

The American Kestrel is a cavity nester; it nests in holes in dead trees rather than building nests. They will also nest in rocks and on buildings and prefer to nest in areas surrounded by large open areas with short grasses and other non-woody plants, with plenty of hunting perches nearby. Kestrels will also use nest boxes that are placed on buildings, trees, or posts.

WHAT THEY EAT

Kestrels hunt mostly from perches, but also by hovering, especially when there are no perches in the area. In the summer they eat large insects, such as grasshoppers and crickets. In the winter they eat small mammals such as mice and voles and small birds.

WHY THEY ARE DECLINING

Kestrels are becoming harder to find since their habitat and nest sites are harder to find. Their habitat has been lost due to development and the reforestation of fields and open habitat.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Keep fields open by mowing once a year. The fall is best, after birds are done breeding.
- Leave standing dead trees and snags for nesting and perching.
- Leave some large live trees and other perches close to open fields for perching and hunting.
- Install nest boxes in open areas (such as fields). Leave them standing all year.
- Place nest boxes 10-20 feet above the ground on a building (far from other buildings), tree, or other structure where it won't be disturbed. Place the nest box so that it faces as close to south as possible and monitor it to prevent European Starlings from claiming the box.

Learn more about kestrels at ny.audubon.org or by visiting your local Audubon Center.



Photo: Shawn Carey

