



American Kestrel

(*Falco sparverius*)

DID YOU KNOW:

The American Kestrel is the same size as a robin and is the smallest falcon (a kind of raptor) that lives in our area. Although small, its wings span 2 feet. Our grandparents called kestrels "sparrow hawks" because they hunt small birds.

EATING HABITS:

In the summer, kestrels eat a lot of insects like grasshoppers, beetles and cicadas. In the winter, kestrels hunt songbirds and mice. As with all birds of prey, they have sharp talons and beaks. Kestrels sit on high perches or hover high in the air, using their excellent eyesight to spot prey.

THE YOUNG:

Kestrels usually raise four or five babies twice a year. Mom kestrel stays with the young constantly for about 10 days after hatching to keep them warm and to feed them tiny pieces of food brought to the nest by the dad. When they leave the nest about a month after hatching, the young follow the parents.



HABITAT (HOME):

Kestrels live in open areas with big trees, like pastures, vacant lots and city parks. Mom kestrel lays eggs in tree cavities and in openings in buildings. If kestrels do not find nest cavities, they will not live in that area. We can help by building kestrel nest boxes.

DEFENSIVE HABITS:

The feather patterns on the back of the kestrel's head look like two eyes and a beak. When a predator tries to sneak up on a kestrel from behind, it sees the fake face and thinks it has been discovered.

UNUSUAL FACTS:

- Unlike most birds of prey, the male kestrel's feather color differs from the female's. The female has brown wings and a tail with black horizontal stripes. On the other hand, the male's wings are grey and the tail is rusty red with a black band at the end.
- Kestrels often bob their tails when perching on a tree branch.
- Kestrels hover, searching for small animals on the ground and then drop to the grass. They prefer to hover where there is a strong breeze to provide lift.

