

KESTREL HOUSE

Plans and Instructions

United States
Department of
Agriculture

Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service
Davis, CA 95616

The American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*) is our smallest falcon and the most brightly colored of our hawks. It is the only small hawk with a facial mask and rusty red back. Also known as the Sparrow Hawk or Kitty Hawk, it is about the size of a robin or mourning dove.

The Kestrel is often seen hovering (hunting) over a field or meadow and frequents poles and wires along roadsides. Its principal diet is insects, grasshoppers, and mice.

NESTING SITES

Historically, Kestrels have been cavity nesters but will also use secluded buildings and crevices. Removal of dead trees and old buildings and increased competition with Starlings have reduced nesting sites. Fortunately, Kestrels take well to houses you can build.

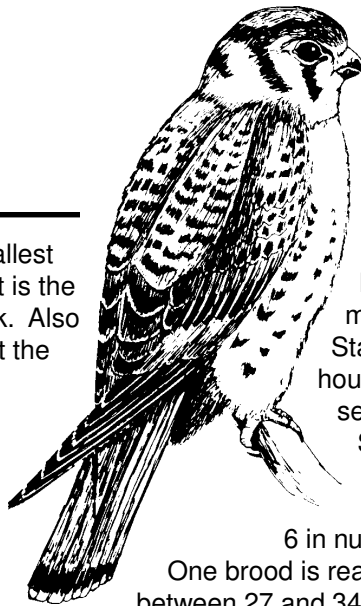
PICKING A HOUSE SITE

Good locations for Kestrel houses are open fields and meadows or along fence rows. Houses can be mounted on utility poles, buildings, lone trees, or your own post. The house should face south or east. Pick a location where a tall tree or pole and wire is within 100 to 200 yards, as Kestrels like high perches near the house. The house should be 10 to 100 feet from the ground and the entrance should not be hindered by twigs or branches as the Kestrel prefers an uninhibited exit from the house. The best time to erect a Kestrel house is November through January.

When picking your house location, keep in mind that the house needs to be cleaned and checked periodically. Therefore, do not erect it where it is impossible to reach later-with a ladder or from your vehicle. An alternative to ladders is to put up your own post (an eight foot-long 4 x 4 attached to a twelve-foot-long 2 x 4) with six-inch bolts to enable you to swing the house down. It is often difficult to find a tree or pole facing the right direction which isn't miles from your car! With your own post, you can dig a hole wherever you find an ideal spot. The only tools you'll need later are a wrench and a screwdriver for opening the box). The height of the box can be 10 to 15 feet from the ground (see diagram on this page).

MONITORING THE HOUSE

It is very important to check the house weekly in the spring to keep Starlings and other undesirables out of the house. Kestrels take no nesting materials into the house, so 2 to 3 inches of wood shavings or coarse sawdust should be put into the house. Straw or dry leaves are acceptable. Screech owls also will use a Kestrel house and are desirable tenants. They also bring no nesting material,



so any nesting material found in the house will almost certainly be Starling material and should be removed.

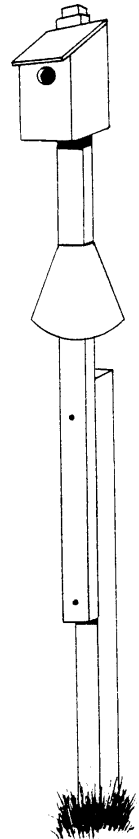
Starlings are persistent, so check the house at least weekly during the nesting season. (Starling eggs are pale blue, Screech Owl eggs are white, and Kestrel eggs are white/cinnamon colored with spots of brown and 4 to 6 in number.) Incubation is about 28 days.

One brood is reared during the season. Birds fledge between 27 and 34 days.

CAUTION—Don't overdo the checking as this will inhibit the Kestrels.

BUILDING A HOUSE

Kestrel houses are easy and fun to build. Ideal materials are rough redwood and cedar because they are long lasting. Wood which is subject to warping can be stained or painted a natural color; avoid very dark colors that will absorb excessive heat.



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KESTREL HOUSE

Plans

Guide

1. Entrance hole is 3" in diameter and 9-10" above floor.
2. An inside perch should be placed 3" from bottom of entrance hole. Use half of entrance cut-out and attach with screw.
3. Use a screwdriver or auger to make indentations in side the front and under the entrance hole to enable the young to climb to exit.
4. Trim off 1/2" of corners of bottom panel for water drainage.
5. Two 1/2" holes should be drilled at top of both sides for ventilation.
6. CONSTRUCTION TIPS: For easier construction, the roof should be put on last. First step is the side being nailed to back; then front to side; then floor; hinged side is next before the roof. The roof and top of front could be beveled 5 degrees for a tighter fit.
7. A six foot board, 1" x 10" can be used with no waste. For the roof, a 1" x 12" board 13" long should be used.
8. Hinged side is shorter by 1/4" to allow side to swing

