

AMERICAN KESTREL NESTING BOX PROGRAM

by Paul Roberts, Medford

The American Kestrel is our smallest and most colorful falcon. Found throughout North America, this valuable insect and rodent predator was formerly quite common. Numbers have declined significantly throughout the U. S. over the past decade, however. A shortage of nest sites is believed responsible. The kestrel is our only hawk that nests primarily in tree cavities, such as old woodpecker holes. The felling of mature trees for firewood and construction has destroyed suitable sites in otherwise excellent habitat, producing a severe "housing shortage."

The kestrel is a hawk of open country, preferring farmlands, meadows, and abandoned fields. It has also adjusted well to urban and suburban life, nesting in mature trees along highways and feeding along right-of-ways and parkland. Massachusetts has ample habitat to maintain a sizable kestrel population. What the state lacks are adequate nest sites. Fortunately, the kestrel will nest in artificial holes, i.e. nest boxes. Kestrel nesting-box programs have been very successful in restoring populations of this species in Virginia and Pennsylvania. You can help to bring the kestrel back in Massachusetts.

Kestrel boxes are surprisingly simple to build. All you need is six feet of one-inch-thick board that is ten inches wide plus thirteen inches of one-inch-thick board that is twelve inches wide. Complete construction directions are provided in the accompanying figure supplied by Kestrel Karetakers of 3549 Devon Drive, Falls Church, Virginia 22042 (telephone: 703-533-2114).

In general, ideal locations for the boxes are on large isolated trees in the open, along fence rows, or on posts in treeless areas. Boxes should be placed fifteen to twenty feet off the ground, facing south or east. In our latitude, breeding adults return March and early April, so nesting boxes should be erected by mid-March. The female lays three to five eggs, which take twenty-eight days to incubate. Most young leave the nest by July and will return to the same general area to breed the following spring.

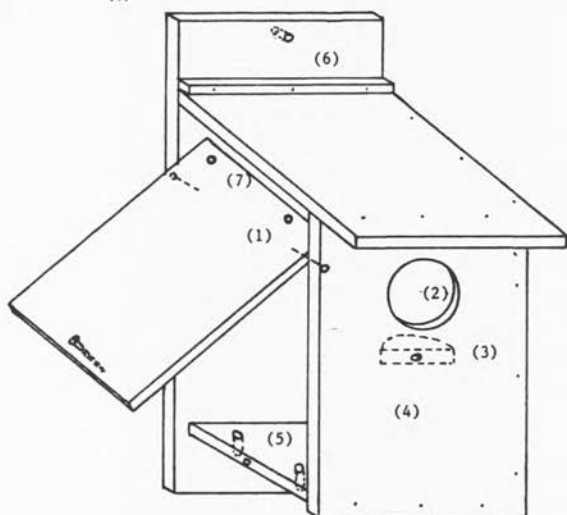
Nesting-box construction can be an excellent service project for a scout troop, a school shop course, a 4H club, or any individual handy with tools.

The Brookline Bird Club is encouraging people to build kestrel nesting boxes and has appropriated funds to help pay for construction materials for these boxes. If you are interested in building the boxes or know of any organization that is, please contact Paul M. Roberts, 254 Arlington Street, Medford, MA 02155. or call 617-483-4263 after 8:00 P.M. He will provide information on the availability of funding for construction materials or additional information on American Kestrels and the nesting-box program.



BUILDING A KESTREL HOUSE

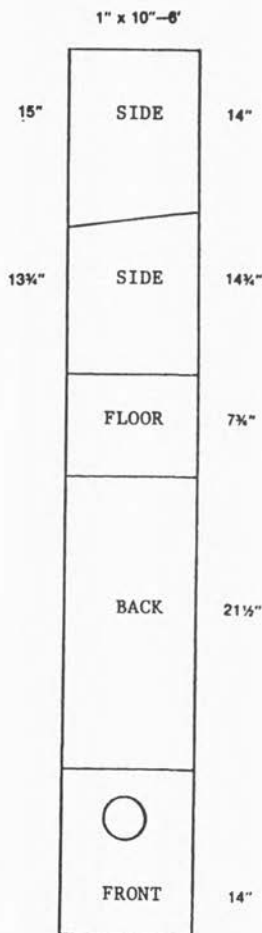
HOMES FOR OUR SMALLEST FALCONS



GUIDE

- 1) Nails act as hinges to swing side open for cleaning and monitoring.
- 2) Entrance hole is 3" in diameter and 9"-10" above the floor.
- 3) An inside perch should be placed 3" from bottom of entrance hole. Use half of entrance cut-out and attach by screw.
- 4) Use a screwdriver or auger to make indentations inside the front under the entrance hole to enable young to climb to exit.
- 5) Five ¼" holes should be drilled in floor for water drainage.
- 6) A cleat above roof is optional but may hold the roof in place better and prevent rain seepage.
- 7) Two 3/8" holes should be drilled at top of both sides for ventilation.
- 8) A 6-foot board, 1" x 10" can be used with no waste. For the roof, a 1" x 12" board 13" long should be used.

Construction tips. The roof should be put on last. The first step is nailing side to back, then front to side, then hinged side and lastly, the roof. Note that the hinged side is ¼" shorter than the other side to allow side to swing open. The roof and top of front could be beveled 5° for a tighter fit. Use raw wood. Do not paint or treat it with preservative. Do not construct an outside perch. It will only attract starlings.



Place 3" of sawdust or shavings on the bottom. Kestrels do not bring nesting materials into the box. When attaching the box to a tree, use only one nail or wood lag on the top and one on the bottom. Additional nails will split the backboard as the tree grows.

If you must look in the box while the hawks are nesting, use a ladder and not a pole climber. Any scent left on the trunk will attract predators such as raccoons who will follow the trail to investigate.

This article is based on information published by the Hawk Mountain Sanctuary Association and Kestrel Karetakers.

THE THIRD NEW ENGLAND REGIONAL HAWK MIGRATION CONFERENCE will be held at the Holiday Inn in Holyoke, Massachusetts, on April 4 and 5, 1987. Sponsored by the New England Hawk Watch, the theme of the all-day conference is the full life cycle of hawks. In addition to an overview of New England's hawk migration (Seth Kellogg, editor HMANA Newsletter) and the weather that affects it (Mel Goldstein, Ph.D., Director of the Weather Center, Western Connecticut State University), additional presentations will focus on current research on hawks being conducted in New England. Topics covered range from a survey of potential breeding areas for raptors (Nancy Martin-Ellison, Vermont Institute of Natural Science) to a review of our knowledge of raptor wintering grounds (Hawk Mountain Sanctuary staff). There will be papers on the breeding ecology of Northern Harriers (Pat Serentino, Research Assistant, University of Rhode Island); the Bald Eagle project in Maine (Mark McCullough, University of Maine Wildlife Department); the reintroduction of eagles at Quabbin (Jack Swedberg, Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife); the Osprey project in Connecticut (Gerald S. Mersereau, raptor specialist); characteristic behavior of raptors (Lillian and Donald Stokes, authors); the Turkey Vulture (Carol Smith, Director of Wildlife Programs, Audubon Society of New Hampshire); raptor rehabilitation (Mark Pokras, D.V.M., Tufts University School of Veterinary Medicine); raptor banding (Michael Olmsted, raptor specialist); and a personal computer program for migration data (Ed Mair, author and computer specialist).

Clay Sutton, director of the Cape May Bird Observatory, will be the featured banquet speaker, giving an illustrated presentation on the raptors of western North America. The conference will also offer a special art exhibit of renditions of native raptors by noted young New England artists. On Sunday, April 5, a field trip to Mt. Tom, Bray Tower, will be held to witness the early spring hawk migration.

The Holiday Inn is reached by following Route 91 north toward Holyoke from the Mass. Turnpike (Route 90) and taking exit 15 east from 91. Advance registration is recommended - the conference is limited to 300. The registration fee is \$5, and the banquet is \$15. For complete conference information and registration materials write: HAWKS, P.O. Box 212, Portland, CT 06480.

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