22 May 2009

American Kestrel Nest Survey NYC - Issue #6 (2009)

Most (but not all) NYC Female Kestrels watching young young from a favorite perch!

Hello All,

It is not surprising that we received so many fine reports in just a few days...most NYC kestrel eggs have hatched, and the adults (particularly the female) is fairly conspicuous sitting watch over the nest cavity from a favorite perch nearby.

Just a reminder - on Monday morning, 25 May, we will be doing a *FREE* American Kestrel nest site tour - during the morning and early afternoon, we will visit three kestrel nests on Manhattan Island so that you can get a good idea of the sites they choose to raise a family. Just send me an email: rdcny@earthlink.net (or call 718-828-8262) for more info.

In this issue we feature the East 91st street nest with some landscape photos in color (from 250 feet or so above) and infrared (ground level), as well as many comments from our kestrel spies. Also, and very important: there is $50 reward posted for anyone who finds the kestrel nest near Inwood Hill Park in northern Manhattan. See details in this newsletter. Our congratulations to James O'Brien for finding a kestrel nest on the west side of Jackie Robinson Park in upper Manhattan.

(above) Male American Kestrel entering the west 116th street nest - another cornice; late April 2009.

Kestrel Reports from the Field:

From: David Kaufman
Subject: Re: NYC Kestrel Newsletter #5
Date: May 18, 2009
HI Bob,

I meant to send you this information a little while ago. A colleague of mine spotted a kestrel on the roof top of a building on 157th right near Riverside. There is a short stretch where Riverside splits into 2 and this is the beginning of that stretch. This report is about 3 weeks old. I apologize for not reporting it sooner. I will ask him tomorrow if he has seen any recent action.

Regards,

--Dave Kaufman

From: Anita Randolfi
Subject: Kestrels on 9th street
Date: May 19, 2009

Dear bob,

Here's another report on the E 9th St. kestrels. This morning about 11am I walked over and they were nowhere to be seen. No nest activity. But this afternoon from 2:50 to 3:30pm they were in full sight. The female was sitting atop the antenna, again facing the nest. She was there for about 15 minutes and then flew into the nest. About 4-5 minutes later she flew out heading north, but I lost her. A very few minutes later the male appeared at the nest and looked inside. He was there only a minute or two and few away to the north. That's the last I saw of them. There is a large willow tree in the garden directly across from 700 E.9th. Both birds flew toward the tree and never came out the other side as far as I could tell. They might have been sitting in the tree. I spent awhile looking, and engaged a gardener in looking, too, but there was no sign of them. It's as if the tree eats them.

Anita Randolfi

From: John Wittenberg
Subject: Kestrels
Date: May 19, 2009

I watched a Kestrel snatch a small bird off the path at around 111th street inside in Riverside Park last night. Seemed to just lower itself on the what I think was a sparrow and then lift off.

John

From: "billy34_us@
Subject: Kestrels - Upper West Side
Date: May 19, 2009

I've checked for them often, and miss my "W104-W105 St" kestrels, who I suppose have moved elsewhere this year. I'm very glad to learn of the other nesting kestrels in NYC.

Bill

From: vojimbot
Subject: Re: NYC Kestrel Newsletter #5
Date: May 18, 2009

Have you seen my posts of the pair on 153rd and Edgecomb?
Hi Bob,

I was up there for a while this afternoon. The female was perched on the water tank above the nest with some prey. After a while she took off with the prey, which appeared to be a small bird. She tried to land on the corner of the building to the south on the west side of Broadway, the one with the brown metal fence. She seemed to miss the landing at the corner, where we've seen her perch in the past, and she moved farther from the corner. I then saw her on that fence. I suspect she may have dropped her meal.

Carol

I continue to see a male and female pair in and near Baker Field and Inwood Hill Park, but I have never been able to locate a nest. The male spends a lot of time on top of the building directly across Seaman Ave. from my apartment.

I have not seen kestrels on Governors Island in 2 recent trips. But I'll keep an eye out for them.

Annie Barry

The building [the male likes to perch atop] is 579 W. 215th St. I see the part of that building that stretches to Seaman Ave (it's L shaped).

Note: if anyone can help us find the nest near Inwood Hill Park in upper Manhattan - we have received many reports from this area for the last three years - they (you) win $50 from Bob.

Anita Randolfi

dear Bob,

I had a full day and didn't manage to get over to the 9th nest until 7:20pm. I sat in the garden but there was no sign of the kestrels till about 7:40. Then, I saw both birds dash over to the nest to chase some starlings. After chasing the starlings they disappeared into the willow. I really don't think they were very upset by the starlings ... the chase seemed very relaxed, like they just wanted to remind the starlings that they were around and checking. I spent some time looking for them in the willow, and there were certainly birds up there, but I could not really see the kestrels. I left around 7:50. Crossing to the east side of Av C, I looked back at the antenna and
there she was sitting up there ... facing the nest as usual.

Anita Randolfi

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**American Kestrel Nest Site**

**East 91st street - Manhattan**

2008-2009

(above) Street level view of East 91st street Kestrel nest in Infra-red; compare to photo taken from above on next page.

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**Animal Behavior:**

**6 Heads Are Better than 2** - A study of the gregarious *house sparrow* [the favorite prey species of NYC American Kestrels] suggests that individuals in larger groups are swifter at solving new problems than those in smaller groups - findings that add a behavioral dimension to the ecological costs and benefits of group living. Using wild-caught birds that were then acclimatized to experimental aviaries, Liker and Bokony investigated whether group size affected the success rate at which birds figured out how to obtain seeds from a familiar feeder when access was blocked with a transparent lid. The larger groups, which contained six birds, were able to dislodge the lids roughly 10 times as quickly as smaller groups of two birds - a pattern that was consistent across all individuals in the groups. Also, birds from urban environments were faster than birds from rural backgrounds. Increased success at problem-solving in larger groups may reflect a wider diversity of experience and skill among the individuals in the group and may constitute an adaptive advantage in complex habitats.

(above) Looking down at the East 91st street Kestrel nest - this is really urban! Same nest as infra-red photo.

(below) Male Kestrel with prey (bird) about to be delivered to the Front Street (Brooklyn Bridge) nest site

Robert DeCandido for Deborah Allen, Chad Seewagen, James O'Brien and Bobby Horvath (+ Sadie, Chris and Cathy) - and kestrel spies extraordinaire, everywhere.