4 March 2010

American Kestrel Nest Survey NYC - Issue #2 (2010)
First Kestrel reports of the season - 2010!

We are going to turn the tables with this issue and begin with historical information first: from 1922 comes a wonderful description of the courtship activities of a pair of kestrels in Albany, New York on the state education building. Here in NYC in late Feb- early March 2010, we are already receiving reports of kestrels back at certain nest sites - so the historical article is a good overview of what to look (and listen) for. Is this early for kestrels to be courting (one copulation witnessed on 28 February)? Ask us in a few years as we compile data. Meanwhile, some amazing stories from as far away as Coney Island, Brooklyn and even Oregon (Greater NYC).
Notes on the Mating Habits of the Sparrow Hawk [1922]. --For several years, Sparrow Hawks (*Falco s. sparverius*) have been more or less constantly in evidence in the vicinity of the State Education Building at Albany, New York. In the spring of 1922, a pair established their hunting headquarters on the tops of some marble columns which are a few feet below and a hundred feet away from my office windows. On these columns and on the edge of the roof some thirty feet above, the activities here recorded were carried on. The notes were jotted down on a calendar pad when the observations were made and are given practically as then written.

**April 6.** A pair of Sparrow Hawks rested for several minutes on the top of the columns, within two feet of several pigeons.

**April 7.** Mated once on the edge of the roof.

**April 14.** On top of the columns and mating. Preliminary to mating, the birds faced one another and slowly bobbed their heads and tails, the female keeping up a continuous slow call. Mated five times at intervals of five minutes and in each instance the male dropped his tail to the left of the up-turned tail of the female.

**April 15.** Mated three times in fifteen minutes, the female calling continuously while the male calls loudly only when approaching the female. The call of the female is a low pee-'ep, pee-'ep, pee-'ep. After mating, the female sometimes continues to call and flutter her wings while the male rests nearby with drooping wings and head drawn down on the shoulders.

**April 17.** Raining. Female called most of the afternoon. After mating, the male sometimes mounts high in the air and performs some remarkable evolutions -- spirals, short dashes and a rapid drop ending on the back of the female.

**April 18.** Raining. Female continues to call. Mated once at 10:34 A.M.

**April 19.** Female took a young squab from nest in stucco work near top of column and flew to roof. Pigeon attacked the Hawk and followed for a few yards until the Hawk turned and struck out two or three of the pigeon's feathers.

**April 21.** Mated once at 4:20 P.M.

During the last week in April, the Hawks moved to the opposite end of the Education Building and hunted Sparrows that were nesting behind the wire screen covering the window in a nearby church. The frightened Sparrows flew wildly up and down within the limits of the window frame, followed closely in every movement by the Hawks on the outside.

**May 4.** Mated at 7:30 P.M.

Judging from these few observations, the female takes the initiative in mating. Her calls are continuous for many minutes at a time and are often accompanied by fluttered wings and definite approach towards the male. The male was observed to call only when actually dropping down to the female. ---- Sherman C. Bishop, *New York State Museum*.

*From: The Auk 42: 268-269 (April 1925).*
From: Anne Lazarus  
Subject: American Kestrel  
Date: February 17, 2010 (Wednesday afternoon)  

Today at about 3:30PM on Houston Street near the Film Forum between 6th and 7th Ave, Elaine Abse and Anne Lazarus saw an American Kestrel on the lamp post. It was flying low back and forth to the lamp post.

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From: Kenneth Hicks  
Subject: Re: NYC Kestrel Newsletter #1 - 2010  
Date: February 18, 2010  

Bob,

I have not seen the 91st Street [Manhattan] Kestrels yet this year. Has anyone made a report of a sighting?

Ken Hicks  
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Male American Kestrel perched on a railing in Manhattan in February 2010 (© Anders Peltomaa)
Hi Bob, --- I'm momentarily back in the city, after field work in Mexico and Central America last fall and winter. I haven't seen any kestrels in Inwood yet, but did see one on 14th St last week (Wednesday 2/10), between 6th and 7th Ave. It landed on the roof of the Salvation Army building there. Don't know if it was male or female, I didn't have binoculars with me.

Was just reading the 2009 Farmer & Smith article in the Journal of Raptor Research describing declines in the Northeast for AMKE. In it, I read on page 270 the following: "A gradient from east to west is apparent in trend estimates for northeastern North America, with stronger declines occurring at coastal hawkwatch sites (Fig. 1). This pattern may indicate that negative influences on populations are strongest in areas from which kestrels migrate near dense human populations along the Atlantic Coast."

Could it be that these kestrels have simply moved into the city and no longer migrate? [Yes we believe most breeding kestrels in NYC don't migrate - but many young ones of the year do.) A change of lifestyle is not necessarily the same as a change of status. The trend of raptors moving into cities seems to continue. I'm wondering what your thoughts are on this - [OK: This is the first study of urban kestrels in North America - we are just learning how many pairs are here in NYC - and likely every other city in the eastern USA at least. As an aside, in Berlin, they have over 300 pairs nesting annually, mostly in nest boxes...John - really good question - let's see what the data tell us in the coming months and years. But our kestrels are a long-standing (since 19th Century)breeding population - so they are old-timers as residents here in NYC.]

John

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NYC American Kestrel flyers, from left to right: Dutch, Chinese and Spanish. We have them in 11 languages including Hebrew, Russian, Korean...If nothing else, NYC is diversity - and what better way of getting reports about local kestrels from folks in ethnic neighborhoods throughout the city? Many people who are not part of the birding community have sent us great info - from Chinatown to Little Italy- and all those wonderful neighborhoods in Queens too. Anyone have a web site that wants to post these for free download - do let me know - Thanx. - rdcny@earthlink.net
Hi Bob,

Kestrels are indeed back, around 68th and Broadway (really never left actually). From my window, I saw one adult dive-bombing a Red Tailed Hawk on Saturday which was perched in Kestrel territory on nearby water tower b/t 69th and 70th. It made about 15 dives at it before the Buteo departed for greener pastures. I've regularly seen (3-4x week) kestrels around the area.

Robert E. Adamski, P.E., BCEE, F.SAME, F.ASCE
Gannett Fleming, V.P., Municipal Infrastructure Programs

From my window that looks north to 15th St. I saw a kestrel flying yesterday.

I will try to have the camera out and ready so that I can get a shot next time!

Sandra
From: Matthew Wills
Subject: Brooklyn Kestrels
Date: February 24, 2010

I've yet to see a kestrel this year, even though Brooklyn has offered up red-tails, peregrines, merlins, Cooper's, and a goshawk.

From: KA Peltomaa
Subject: Male Kestrel at Amsterdam Ave today
Date: February 26, 2010 (Friday Snowstorm)

... I took an afternoon walk by the nest sites on Amsterdam and CPW/85 today, Friday. Nothing at CPWest, but at the Amsterdam Ave I found the male perching in the aftermath of the snowstorm. Light, to moderate snow was falling at times heavy wind gusts, but he was keeping his post, guarding their territory.

- Anders

From: Robert DeCandido
Subject: Bronx Kestrels
Date: February 28, 2010 (Sunday morning)

In the Bronx, I watched a female kestrel on an aerial (rooftop antenna) - she has been perched here every morning through the winter (Parkchester Bronx). I then saw the male fly in, copulate with her and re-locate a few inches away. So we have a new early date for kestrel copulations but I am sure they copulate even earlier (warmer days of January) - same as NYC Red-tailed Hawks.

Nest site and surrounding habitat of a pair of Manhattan kestrels. The building has been renovated in the intervening year, and kestrels can no longer nest here. Nest Box?
Hi Bob,

....I believe I hear my Kestrels again!!! They may be back above my window [on Amsterdam Avenue]. Could they have chicks this early? It sounds like the high pitch cry of them or is it the Mom calling the Dad?

.... I knew I recognized those calls. I'll be keeping you posted since they are around early. Do u know why this could be [Our experience has been that second-time nesters begin several days earlier than the on their first attempt - but you are also more attuned to your kestrels too.] ? Just interested to know to share knowledge-lol. Any idea where last year's babies went? [Good Question - we need some radio telemetry and satellite tel. transmitters to track them.] I miss them (Lola, Paco, Chucho n Pancho). Those were my names for them, at least for the four I knew. Gotta think of new names-lol. Oh n my daughter just had a baby boy n I'll have more babies (chicks) coming. I'm a happy grand mama!! [Congratulations from the 200+ people on the NYC Kestrel list.]

Blessings Maggie

Kestrels - National

Banding a male kestrel in Oregon - see Don McCartney's email on the following page.
Hello Dr. DeCandido,

I am thrilled that you will be publishing your newsletter for another year. For me it provides a window into a completely different and fascinating ecosystem for Kestrels. I have a 100-box Kestrel trail that was started with one box in 1998 [in rural Oregon], and through the 2009 season, a total of 1,351 falcons have fledged from these boxes.

The high desert of central Oregon provides us with some additional opportunities. One is banding for migration studies (that is my wife holding two newly-banded young falcons). In turn, the banding presents the opportunity for the education of interested people of all ages. They literally get a hands-on introduction to these to these magnificent raptors (photo).

Again, thank you for your newsletter, as it is much appreciated!

Don McCartney

OK all you kestrel spies: which one is the male and which is the female? And how can you absolutely tell the male is a young one just about to make his first flight?
Hi Robert,

....[Kestrels boxes] could be inside the fire escape with the hole in between the metal bars.

On one of my big kestrel projects that I started in 2003, I had 9 nest initiations the first year and 80 last season. Because I band all of my kestrels, I know how many adults return from year to year, do they use the same nest box and how many nestlings return to nest in the boxes. Good luck with your work and if there is anything I can do to help with your kestrels, don't hesitate to contact me.

Steve