American Kestrel Nest Survey NYC - Issue #10 (2010)

Some Female Kestrels seen outside of their nests

The busy season is about to begin for Kestrels here in NYC. Anders Peltomaa is reporting the first adult female perched outside of her nest at the Amsterdam Avenue nest site in Manhattan. See Page 7 for details. Young kestrels can fly from their nest as early as 20 May in NYC, with the peak fledging season beginning in early to mid June. If you see a female kestrel perched in your neighborhood in the next few weeks, you can be certain there is a nest very close by (within 50 yards).

Above: Kestrels still occasionally nest in "natural" settings such as this tree cavity in Brandywine Creek State Park in Wilmington, Delaware. Here an adult female is feeding her chicks a small bird - photograph by Kim Steininger. For more of Kim’s photos, see Page 8 where there are also links to her web site.
From: Eric Powers  
Subject: Kestrels on West 96th St and Broadway (Manhattan)  
Date: May 10 (Monday)

Here's several shots...of good enough quality to see male [top left and right] vs. female [bottom right], and that he caught a small bird [top right]. The picture of the cornices shows where the nest is...the slot that is exactly centered above the window [bottom left]...you can't see any sign of the nest from this angle nor from any white wash, which is partly the reason why it took me so long to actually find the nest.

E  
www.YC2N.com

From: Sharon Kass  
Subject: Kestrel Nest on 96th street!!!!  
Date: May 9 (Sunday night)

Hi Bob, Eric, all,

Yes I watched the West 96street nest for the 4 years I lived across the street. The building was indeed the NE corner of Broadway and 96th Street. The nest was on the side facing 96th street and was about midway or slightly east of midway along the roof. There was always lots of whitewash on the fire escape directly under the entrance. I think the nest was not right near the entrance because I sometimes saw the parent enter and then walk inside west a bit along the edge (I could see a little between the cracks). The parents used the antenna over the diner for copulating but I think that's gone now. The chicks often played on the roof top of the SE building across the street. I have (poor) video of the chicks sliding down a slant over and over - perhaps for fun?

I'm glad to hear the site is active again!

Sharon
Above: Kestrel nest in the south facing cornice at 96th street and Broadway in May 2010. This nest was active in the early 2000's when Sharon Kass lived across the street - and made the first NYC videos of local kestrels. Then the nest went unused for three years (2007-09). The Upper West Side of Manhattan has the highest concentration of nesting kestrels in NYC - we don't know why (yet). Note construction work on the building almost next door - similar construction work has caused nest failures at other locations in NYC.

From: Urbanbirds-Mailbox <urbanbirds@cornell.edu>
Subject: NYC Kestrel Newsletter #9
Date: May 10 (Monday)

Dear Mr. DeCandido, fabulous newsletter. I'd love to do a post on the Celebrate Urban Birds Facebook page on your efforts using use the photo on P 6, the accompanying text, and refer people to your materials. Can you give me permission to use that photo? Facebook posts are pretty ephemeral, but I really like the photo and the explanation of the value of the details in older architecture and the value of green spaces, which is behind all the research questions for the Celebrate Urban Birds observation. Kestrels are not one of the fifteen species we ask people to look for but House Sparrows are, and so some of the history in your newsletter about the history of House Sparrows would be relevant for a Facebook post, too…I would credit the author of the article…T. Gilbert Pearson, and again, to where would you want people to refer in order to follow your group, receive newsletter, or get more info on urban kestrels?

Christianne

From: Kenneth Hicks
Subject: Upper East Side Kestrels
Date: May 11 (Tuesday)

I have periodically checked the nest site on 91st Street near Third Avenue and have seen no activity there. On Saturday morning, while working outside, I heard the call of a kestrel and when I looked up I saw him/her on the top of the water tower on the southwest corner of Lexington and 93rd Street. I then hear more cries and saw a second kestrel that flew west on the north side of the tower and then returned east on the south side. Calling continued. Then both kestrels started up Lexington in a northerly direction. In the bright light, I find it hard to distinguish male and female, so I don't know if this was a territorial display or something more romantic. Seems a little late for that sort of thing.

On Sunday (9 May), I saw a kestrel flying west over the 92nd Street Y. That would be closer to the 91st Street nest site.

Ken Hicks

Good Question - it could be (a) they have just begun nesting at either 91st street or nearby. In NYC, we have young fledging as late as mid July...so if you figure about 30 days for the eggs to hatch and another 30 days for the young to fledge - it could be this pair is just at the beginning to nest stage...OR you could be seeing another pair - in the past, kestrels have nested on 104th street just west of Third Ave (and elsewhere on the Upper East Side). You could be seeing kestrels drifting south to sit on a favorite kestrel perch...My guess is that there is a pair that is near (or at) its 91st street nest. Do note - kestrels are extremely secretive in the early stages of nesting. Females are hidden in the nest bracket on the building, and males don't hang around the nest area. It gets easier to find active nests when the eggs hatch and the young are about two weeks old. Then the female will sit outside the nest, about 50-100 feet away from the nest entrance. That is the best time to watch kestrels to discover the nest - eventually the female (or male) will fly to the nest with food to feed the (3-5) youngsters...and this will happen several times during the day.
From: Don & Carol McCartney  
Subject: Kirby the Kestrel (Minnesota and Oregon)  
Date: May 13, 2010 (Thursday)

Kestrel fans,

This week the NYC Kestrel Newsletter mentioned that the first bits of scientific evidence have emerged that Kestrels sometimes hunt at night. And some supporting evidence appeared in the Wednesday Bulletin. During a game of the major league Minnesota Twins with rain steadily falling, a Kestrel drew plenty of attention as it swooped through the air, snaring insects lured by the bright stadium lights.

"When its acrobatic acts were shown on the video scoreboard, the crowd went crazy. One close-up shot featured the bird eating a large moth clutched in its talons.

"There's even a Twitter account with the username TargetFieldHawk and the name Kirby the Kestrel. One post says: I know I'm technically the smallest falcon, but I'm a Minneapolis moth's biggest nightmare"

This is some fun trivia, but this did take place at night, with the aid of bright stadium lights.

You have to see this video of Kirby hunting at night and in the rain!:

http://blogs.citypages.com/blotter/2010/05/target_field_ha.php

Talk about Citizen-Science! The several hundred thousand people who watched this video, or saw Kirby hunting in person (!) all made a discovery new to science...
From: Elaine Maas
Subject: Kestrel Nest Cam, Israel
Date: May 13, 2010 (Thursday)

I've been getting your newsletters ever since I went on a CP bird walk with you back in March. Thanks so much.

I have a question I am wondering if you could answer or if someone else can.

I have gone on this website from the Kestrel newsletter - http://www.battaly.com/nehw/AmericanKestrel/news/

And from there to the 3 webcams in Tel Aviv that have been showing barn owls and kestrels chicks. We have been watching since Monday in my classroom.

Today (13 May), the mother kestrel has not returned to her nest since her last appearance about 3 hours ago (12 noon our time). This seems terribly unusual. For the last 4 nights that I have been watching, she has always stopped hunting around 1pm our time, and nested with her chicks for the rest of her night. We have watching her with her wings over them like a blanket, in fact. The chicks are sleeping alone without her now as I write. I don't think the mother is night-hunting like the kestrels referenced in the new Yankee Stadium. It seems much too long for her to be away

My afternoon Biology classes are curious as am I as to the fate of abandoned chicks in such a nesting box, particularly one with a video cam for all to view.

There's a biology lesson here, of course, for my students. Even so, it's hard to watch after seeing such strong and alert chicks this whole week.

There's another lesson underlying this -- what is the responsibility of groups that set up nest boxes and web sites? Is there a general protocol to follow under the circumstances. This is the question I wonder about ...

Once again - thanks - Elaine

From: Elaine Maas
Subject: Kestrel Nest Cam, Israel (Part 2)
Date: May 15 (Saturday)

Bob -

Thought I would pass on the good news -

The kestrel chicks (all 4) all alive, alert, noisy, and well, as of this morning. And, I have observed someone dropping bits of food into the nest box twice this AM!

So either, they got our messages .... OR they discovered mom's disappearance on their own. Guess I have the answer to my question about intervention!

Thanks for your help to solve this small international crisis- have a great day.

Elaine Maas
From: KA Peltomaa  
Subject: Anders' AMKE report 5/20  
Date: May 20 (Thursday)

Today I saw the female Kestrel perching on the building opposite the nest site (she was on top of "George's building"). It was nice to see her out and about, and of course to know that we hopefully will see the young ones for this season.

- Anders

===================================

From: Rosemary Kassel  
Subject: KESTREL 93RD & B'WAY?  
Date: May 24 (Monday)

I saw this bird at 93rd & Broadway. I see kestrels out in Coney Island and it looks like it may be one, although it was small--at first I thought it was a female cardinal, but it was going from pole to pole, maybe eating insects, eggs, young birds?

I'm sorry the picture is not better, but it did fly away.

Rosemary Stolzenberg

_Thank You ever so much for the photo and information. The male kestrel you photographed is most likely from the nest on the corner of 96th street and Broadway - See pages 2-3 for more info. And yes we believe a few kestrel pairs nest on Coney Island in Brooklyn...If you see kestrels there, do let us know._

===================================

_American Kestrel Nest - 69th Street & Broadway_  
_Nest Faces west - This View Looking East_  
_25 May 2009_

_Above: View from Carol Wood's terrace of the 69th street and Broadway kestrel nest and habitat. The Upper West Side has the highest concentration of kestrel pairs in NYC. We don't know why...This is also one of the highest nests in NYC at about 125 feet above street level. Starlings nest on the cornice as well._
Kestrels - North America

To see kestrels using a "natural" cavity as their nest, see the web site of Kim Steininger:

http://birdsbykim.com/blog/?p=57
http://birdsbykim.com/blog/?p=228
http://birdsbykim.com/blog/?p=78
Consistent Differences in Feeding Habits Between Neighboring Breeding Kestrels

David Costantini, Stefania Casagrande, Giuseppe Di Lieto, Alberto Fanfani & Giacomo Dell’Omo

Summary - In this study, we analyzed the diet of breeding kestrels (*Falco tinnunculus*) in a Mediterranean area with the aim to evaluate the relative importance of both hunting area and individual feeding behavior as factors affecting prey selection. Differently from the populations from middle and northern Europe which primarily feed on voles, the kestrels breeding in the Mediterranean region showed a wider diet composition. As expected, hunting area features influenced the diet composition and, in general, the kestrels were feeding on what was locally more abundant. However, we detected consistent differences in the diet composition between neighboring breeding pairs which were also maintained in subsequent years. Since the neighboring birds were sharing the same hunting grounds, the differences observed were likely to reflect individual preferences or capabilities in catching some prey type regardless of their actual availability. The presence of differences in diet composition between neighboring pairs and their temporal consistency suggests that the hunting skills, and in general the feeding behavior of kestrels, is likely to represent a trait characterizing a behavioral type.

From: *Behaviour* 142, 1409-1421 (2005)

PCBs in the Eggs of Eurasian Kestrels Indicate Exposure to Local Pollution

Giacomo Dell’Omo, David Costantini, Julian Wright, Stefania Casagrande and Richard F. Shore

Fail-to-hatch kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*) eggs collected at the end of the 1999 and 2005 breeding seasons from nest boxes in and around the city of Rome, Italy, were analyzed by gas chromatography with electron capture detection for their PCB content and for the presence of DDT derivatives and other organochlorines. Among the various PCBs, congeners 153 and 180 were detected in all the eggs and showed the highest concentrations. Eggs collected from the same nest from a polluted location in Rome during two different years showed similar type and number of PCB congeners. These data and the fact that eggs from another nest near a sulphate mine had, atypically, low chlorinated congeners support the conclusion that eggs of this species, whose adults in the Mediterranean and continental Europe perform only short or no migration movements, might be indicative of local pollution. When multiple eggs in the same clutch were analyzed, the PCBs were similar in type but their concentration decreased within clutch, likely in parallel to the laying order.

From: *Ambio* Vol. 452, No. 6: 452-456 (September 2008)

Remember on 31 May (Memorial Day), there will be a field trip to a few kestrel nests in Manhattan. Size of the group is limited. Email me for details and to make a reservation.

*We cannot emphasize this enough - if you see a kestrel perched somewhere in NYC in the next 2-3 weeks, it is likely a female and she has a nest in the immediate area. Do let us know...And soon the busy season for Bobby and Cathy Horvath, NYC raptor re-habbers, will begin too.*

Robert DeCandido PhD

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oNgSeJzLJFe](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oNgSeJzLJFe)