

North American Kestrel

Falco sparverius

Sexual Dimorphism:

The distinct difference in size or appearance between the sexes of an animal.

For kestrels, their coloring is different. See pictures to the left. You will notice the difference in the wings and the head. In many other birds of prey, it's the size.



Our female – Tinker



Our Male - Levi

Key Features

- Smallest of the falcon species, range from 9-12 inches in height.
- Plumage is colorful and varied.
- Males have a reddish-brown body, blue wings and black spots on the back.
- Females have a reddish-brown body and wings, with black lines across the back and wings.

Habitat

- Can often be seen in farm fields and along open roadways, perched on a branch or wire scouting for prey.
- They prefer open country, and their habitat includes unforested mountainsides up to 1300 feet, grasslands, savannas, deserts, farmlands, and even urban and suburban environments.
- Often seen perched on wires or poles and regularly pump their tails to maintain balance.
- Kestrels in the northern part of the breeding range migrate as far south as Central America to Panama, with the northernmost kestrels wintering the farthest south. Kestrels in more southern populations are less migratory. In winter in many southern parts of the range, female and male American Kestrels use different habitats. Females use the typical open habitat, and males use areas with more trees. This situation appears to be the result of the females migrating south first and establishing winter territories, leaving males to the more wooded areas.

Diet

- Kestrels feed on large insects, small mammals, such as mice and voles, sparrow-sized birds, and, in some places, reptiles and amphibians.
- At The Grove, we feed them mice, rat pinkies, insects.
- Unlike humans, birds can see ultraviolet light. This enables kestrels to make out the trails of urine that voles, a common prey mammal, leave as they run along the ground. Like neon diner signs, these bright paths may highlight the way to a meal—as has been observed in the Eurasian Kestrel, a close relative.

Young

- American Kestrels are monogamous.
- Pairing begins approximately four weeks prior to egg laying. The male establishes a nesting territory and is joined later by the female, who may move among several territorial males before choosing a mate.
- They are almost exclusively cavity nesters and will use a natural hole in a tree, a woodpecker's hole, a nest box, a cavity in a bank or cliff, or an enclosed space in a building.
- Kestrels lay four to five, white to reddish-brown spotted eggs each year. Incubation generally begins with the second to last egg laid, and lasts about one month.
- While the female incubates the eggs, the male provides her with food. When the young are born, both parents tend them until they are ready to leave the nest at 28 to 30 days old. Fledglings continue to be dependent on their parents for food for two to three more weeks.

Interesting facts

- Kestrels often hover in flight before swooping sharply to the ground to capture prey.
- Sports fans in some cities get an extra show during night games: Kestrels perching on foul poles, tracking moths and other insects in the stadium light beams and catching these snacks on the wing. Some of their hunting flights have even made it onto TV sports coverage.
- Birds can see ultraviolet light. This enables kestrels to make out trails of urine that voles, a common prey mammal, leave as they run along the ground.
- They hide surplus kills in grass clumps, tree roots, bushes, fence posts, tree limbs, and cavities, to save the food for lean times or hide it from thieves.
- Formerly known – and still colloquially known – as the Sparrow Hawk.
- Most numerous and most widespread North American falcon.
- There are 13 species of Kestrels in the world, but the American Kestrel is the only one in the western hemisphere.

TINKER AND LEVI'S STORY

On February 5, 2015, Tinker, our female kestrel arrived at the Grove. We picked her up from Illinois Raptor Center. We spent time working with her to train her to walk around on our hand. On January 20, 2017, we were offered another young kestrel that we named Levi. Both were not even a year old when they arrived. Both had wing injuries that could not be fixed causing them to be non-releasable birds.



Above are pictures of Levi being examined by Jane at Illinois Raptor Center. Before handing him over to us they must have blood drawn, and a physical exam to make sure he is healthy. They also trimmed nails and put on anklets for leash training.

After working with Levi for about 6 months for hand training we decided to let him into Tinker's cage. We had introduced them while they were both out with our animal care team and volunteers for walks and they did very well. However introducing them in Tinker's cage was a different story. This had been Tinker's home for over a year and we anticipated some behavioral issues.

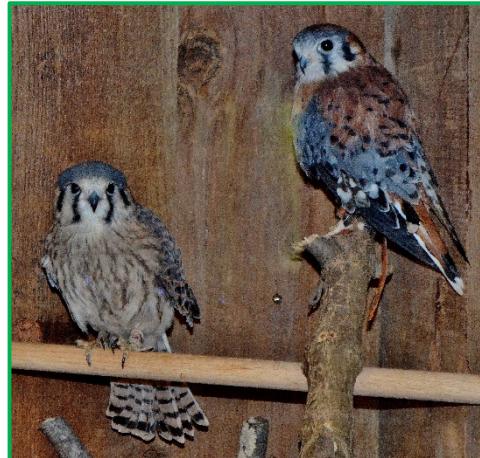
This is Levi and Tinker meeting while out on a walk with our staff. Levi is on the left. Notice the coloring on his head. He has more red brown color on top than Tinker.



At first we put him in a couple of hours a day, and then returned him to his own small cage. Some of our volunteers from the zoo had been trained on behavior monitoring and we had detailed records of what they were doing. On the 4th day, we let him stay overnight, and though Tinker didn't seem to like it, they seemed tolerate each other. As time went on though they seemed to get closer and now they just roost at night right next to each other. We are very happy with our little kestrel couple and how they are getting along. We have recently enriched their habitat with some pine branches and they seem very pleased. Below are some pictures of them at various stages of their friendship. Come on out to The Grove and see little Levi and Tinker in their home.



The picture above shows the two birds meeting on the first day. There was some threatening behaviors but no contact.



The picture above shows the birds after a day or two tolerating each other.



The picture on the left shows how they are now. Getting along and roosting together overnight.