

# BOGDIVERSITY THURSDAY



—*from Head Naturalist Clinton*

## American Kestrel

POST #74—July 13, 2023

As summer rolls on and the BioBlitz has been completed, it is time to jump back into our BogDiversity Thursday post exploration. Today's species of note is quite timely and one of the species we have put in some effort researching in the Sax-Zim Bog. Let's take a closer look at the American Kestrel!

American Kestrels are the smallest species of falcon in North America. They are brightly colored, with males and females sporting different color combinations. Males show bright blue wings and solid orange tails, with a black and white banded tip. Females, much more subdued but just as lovely, have orange wings, with variably striped tails. Both males and females have false eyespots on the backs of their heads (as many small perch hunting birds do!) which makes potential predators think twice about attacking from behind.

This beautiful raptor is in conservation need across most of its range, especially in the Eastern US, where populations have been declining significantly. But where there is a decline, there is

research hoping to figure out why! American Kestrels are cavity nesters, which means they need dead trees and something to make a hole in that tree. But these trees also need to be around an open area for hunting, so not just any hole in a tree will do. Kestrels also need plenty of food to support two adults and up to five chicks in a nest! Insects play a big role as a food source for these birds, but voles, snakes, and even young birds make up part of their diet. Basically, this is a species that needs a diverse ecosystem to do well!

In the Sax-Zim Bog, we have been supporting American Kestrels through providing nesting boxes across the landscape. Our project has grown from 14 initial boxes, to a whopping 52 on the landscape presently! We have banded well over 400 chicks and participated in at least two projects that are working on understanding American Kestrel life History. One project, headed by the MN DNR, utilizes our MOTUS Tower to track migration from adult kestrels. The second project, which is nearing completion, is being completed for a Master's Project by Halle Lambeau! She is looking at nestling kestrels and fitness at nests in different parts of Minnesota and Wisconsin. We lucky to have had the project grow and develop since the first boxes were placed by Frank and Kate Nicoletti!

This post also comes on the tails of completed banding for the 2023 season! We finished banding nestling American Kestrels in the Bog, yesterday, July 12! Our last round featured three successful nests, and we examined a nest that failed. All of our efforts in banding are supported first and foremost by our Kestrel

Box Volunteers! Without this crew of folks giving their time, we wouldn't have any idea about nesting times, fledging dates, or who might be using our boxes. Their efforts are huge and appreciated!! We are lucky to have such a great crew of folks interested in kestrels and conservation of this species.

If you would like to learn more about our American Kestrel Project, check out our Bog Blog! Here, you can find articles wrapping up every season so far (with this season's post to come soon!). The link to those articles is here:

<https://saxzim.org/category/scientific-research/>

More information about kestrels can be found below!

(Photos by Head Naturalist Clinton. All birds below are wild and handled and banded with proper State and Federal Permits.)



Kestrels are perch hunters and are commonly seen along roadways, utilizing powerlines as perches. This female surveys the fields and roadsides for snakes, voles, grasshoppers, and more.



This handsome male American Kestrel is using another manmade feature to perch hunt! It is very rare to see American Kestrels stay all year round in Northern Minnesota, but in the southern part of the state, it is not uncommon at all to find American Kestrels braving the cold and snow of Minnesota's winters.



A full house! American Kestrel chicks spend around 28-30 days in their nest box after they hatch, before they fledge. Once they reach the late-20's in days of age, the boxes get pretty packed! These females are ready to leave any day!



Halle and Head Naturalist Clinton with the final two chicks banded of the 2022 season! Halle's project is currently wrapping up and we can't wait to see what she learns about American Kestrel nestlings!



In nature, nests fail. This is a full clutch of 5 eggs from a failed nest. In our area, we expect a couple of nest failures in a season often for unknown reasons. These kestrels obviously abandoned the nest, but we don't know really know why they leave.