
Installing American Kestrel nestbox

Posted by moss - 03/08/2008 09:47pm

On Friday I installed an American Kestrel (small falcon species) nest box in an eastern cottonwood. In the U.S. kestrels have experienced dramatic population decline over the last five years. Giving them increased nesting options could help boost the local population. This is part of a volunteer effort led by a friend Bob Mayer (also the photographer and ground support) to improve breeding opportunities for cavity nesting bird species in local urban woods. Bob obtained permission from a variety of organizations and agencies to allow me to hang the box. The kestrels will be arriving any day now from their wintering grounds. Fingers are crossed that we'll attract a breeding pair.

Rig it up

http://farm3.static.flickr.com/2255/2317823115_4cde4534b6.jpg

Cottonwood grove

http://farm4.static.flickr.com/3036/2318632260_eb6d99d7d1.jpg

Positioning the opening facing east

http://farm3.static.flickr.com/2288/2318633168_973a284a10.jpg

Securely installed

http://farm3.static.flickr.com/2016/2317826599_49d00c0de0.jpg

Mission accomplished, de-rig

http://farm4.static.flickr.com/3262/2317828811_c1931cfa6b.jpg

-moss

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Re:Installing American Kestrel nestbox

Posted by Baker - 03/09/2008 10:56am

Great job! I'm going to use my tree climbing skills to install/replace Barred and Screech Owl boxes this summer too.

Where did you get your box design? They look a bit different than the Kestrel boxes we've built and installed. Ours were designed by a biologist from the PA Game Commission.

I'm sure you know this, but I always caution/remind clients that new boxes may not be taken by birds right away. Even if you are replacing an existing box, sometimes it takes 2-3 years for new boxes to become inhabited by the species you are trying to attract. It seems that birds like the older more weathered boxes better. In the mean time, be vigilant - evict squirrels, starlings, and any other species (who try to move in to the boxes) right away.

Best of luck, Kestrels are one of my favorite birds to observe. I once saw one take a ring-neck snake, fly into the air, accidentally drop it, and recapture it before it hit the ground! They're like little jet fighters!

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Re:Installing American Kestrel nestbox

Posted by moss - 03/10/2008 10:45pm

Baker wrote:

Where did you get your box design? They look a bit different than the Kestrel boxes we've built and installed. Ours were designed by a biologist from the PA Game Commission.

It's a multi-purpose kestrel or screech owl box, it was purchased from Massachusetts Audubon Society. Here's their nesting box page with general recommendations and box dimensions for various species:

Nest box specs

For this location there are no squirrels, it's in a stream floodplain with mostly cottonwoods, willow and a few ash trees in an otherwise open marsh and wet meadow. It's heavily patrolled by red-tailed hawks during the day mostly looking for terrestrial rodents and mourning doves etc., squirrels don't have a chance in there. We realize that we probably won't get nesting occupancy the first year. We're planning on putting up more boxes. There are screech owls in the area but the one tree that has good cavities is starting to fall apart so we'd like to give them some options. Screech will move from

cavity to cavity on different nights to roost so multiple boxes would be very good for them. Even if we don't get kestrel nesting we'd be happy to provide a screech with a roof for the night every now and again.

In general we won't be doing any evictions of "undesirables", the idea is to increase the cavity nesting and roost options, we'll let the birds sort it out. For bluebird nesting boxes people often do a lot closer management and kick out house sparrows but this is a "let it be" scenario. There will be annual clean out and basic maintenance.

Thanks for the comments and feedback!
-moss

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Re:Installing American Kestrel nestbox

Posted by Baker - 03/11/2008 07:11am

No, I thank YOU, Moss. I'm sure the birds will appreciate it too. Great job all around!

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Re:Installing American Kestrel nestbox

Posted by wildrice - 03/21/2008 04:15pm

Moss,

We are installing Owl Boxes.

We are intersted in practical research that can be used. Do you have any resource mng plans for these besides home habitat?

We where thinking of putting a small camera in one of the boxes if it is placed next to the nature center becuase we can run a line into the building and view from inside.

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Re:Installing American Kestrel nestbox

Posted by moss - 03/24/2008 06:05pm

wildrice wrote:

Moss,

We are installing Owl Boxes.

We are intersted in practical research that can be used. Do you have any resource mng plans for these besides home habitat?

We where thinking of putting a small camera in one of the boxes if it is placed next to the nature center becuase we can run a line into the building and view from inside.

There's no further resource management plan besides providing nesting habitat and maintaining the box. We'll document any nesting and fledging that occurs. If we do get kestrels nesting and hatching young (as opposed to screech owl) we'll notify Mass. Wildlife (state agency) to see if they or any researchers they're aware of want to band the chicks. We haven't thought too far in that direction yet, first things first.

-moss

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Re:Installing American Kestrel nestbox

Posted by Baker - 03/25/2008 07:54am

Wildrice,

I know this request was directed to Moss in particular, so I hope you will both forgive me for butting in.

There are organizations like The Owl Research Institute that may be able to offer more information on research tracking etc.

www.hawkmountain.org

www.owlinstitute.org

www.raptorresearchfoundation.org

...and many more.

Depending on the species you are providing housing for, these organizations may be able to offer some suggestions or criteria. Here in N.E.PA we have 4 main species of cavity nesting owls: Barn, Barred, Eastern Screech, and Northern Saw-whet. Each has different habitat requirements/preferences. The same species elsewhere may have completely different preferences depending on the prey base. By studying prey base, researchers are able to discover what is going right or wrong for a species in a particular area. The research may also shed some light on the prey population in the area. Check those pellets!

For instance, Screech Owls may like a box placed in a wooded area, (UNDER a living limb) bordering a wetland OR a grassland. They may eat small snakes, mice, meadow voles, grasshoppers and other insects, or even small bats. We've seen these little guys using natural cavities in trees that are completely covered with poison ivy!

Barred Owls are wetland birds, almost exclusively. Sharing habitat with Broad Winged Hawks. B.O.s have a prey base of approx. 238 different items, eating fish, mammals, reptiles, birds, insects, and amphibians! A requirement for them is to have longer branches very near the box opening so the young can "branch out". They leave the nest cavity quite some time before they can fly, and it may be weeks before they are able. Without these branches, the young may fall to the ground and become prey for raccoons, coyotes, or even feral cats.

I would be interested in hearing more about your project. I'm always excited when I learn about projects that matter. Kudos to you, for making the effort to help with wildlife education. Can't wait to see the webcam!

Best of luck with your project.

Baker

www.carboneec.org

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