

*Information below is adapted from the Maine NRCS 'Structures for Wildlife Specification'.*

## **DESCRIPTION & HABITAT**

The American Kestrel, also called the sparrow hawk, is the smallest member of the falcon family. The males are easily identifiable by their reddish brown back, slate blue wings and buff underside. Females are reddish brown, have brown streaks on their chest, and black tail bands.

Kestrels breed in a variety of open habitats, including meadows, pastures, grasslands, parkland, agricultural fields, urban and suburban areas. These areas provide open habitat with nesting sites. Insects, mice and voles are an abundant food source. Short vegetation is ideal for kestrels to see and catch prey.



## **NEST BOXES**

The biggest threat to the kestrel is habitat loss. With development and loss of open habitats with nesting areas, the kestrel is becoming less common. There are several ways to help their declining populations. The first is to maintain a natural habitat. This can be accomplished by manipulating the understory to maintain a desirable height for kestrels (e.g., mowing, chopping, grazing). Leave hedgerows, snags (dead trees) standing and leave enough live trees so that normal mortality will provide enough dead trees for nesting sites for the kestrels.

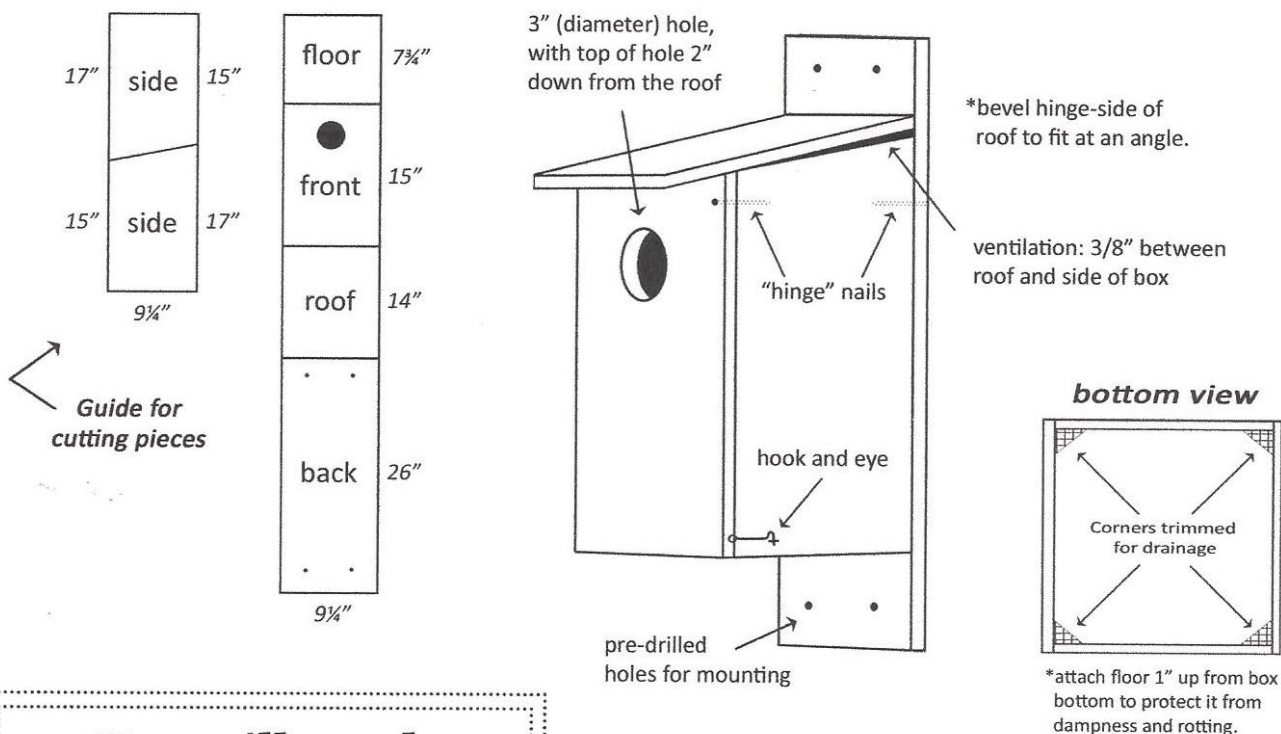
Another way to help conserve kestrels is to build nest boxes. Nest boxes are best located in lone trees or in fields and pastures approximately 50 feet from the forest edge. The boxes should be spaced about 1/2 mile apart. The entrance hole should face south or southeast, with an unobstructed flight path to the entrance. Place boxes 12-20 feet above ground to keep out predators. A predator guard can be constructed by wrapping one or two metal flashing (aluminum) sheets around the tree or pole. The flashing should cover 36" of the tree bole or pole and should be installed around 4-5 feet from the ground. If two or more sheets are used, install the bottom sheet first and then install the upper sheet to overlap the lower sheet. Eggs are laid between April and June, so make sure old nesting material and debris are cleaned out before this time. After cleaning out old nesting material and debris, place three inches of new wood shavings in the nest box.

Nest box design will also work for northern saw-whet owl, screech owl, flying squirrel, gray squirrel, and red squirrel.

## 649 – Structures for Wildlife Implementation Requirements

The following construction plan is provided by the [Wildlife Center of Virginia](http://www.wildlife-center.org).

### Construction of a Kestrel Nest Box



### You will need:

- 1" x 10" x 8' untreated cedar or white pine (1" x 10" boards from the store actually measure 3/4" x 9 1/4").
- Two 6d or 8d nails.
- 20-30 1 1/2" wood screws.
- 2" hook and eye closure.
- Coarse wood shavings (not sawdust).
- Four 3" wood screws or lag bolts for mounting.

Visit us! [kestrel.peregrinefund.org](http://kestrel.peregrinefund.org)

### Instructions

- Cut lumber using a table saw and entrance hole using a hole saw or jig saw. Pre-drill holes in back if using 3" screws to mount box.
- Assemble box as shown, with wood screws. Nail two 6d or 8d nails parallel at top of opening side, so that it swings open. Attach hook and eye at bottom of hinged side to keep it closed.
- Do not use paint or preservatives.
- Place 2" of wood shavings in the bottom of the box for bedding.
- Mount box at least 6 feet off the ground. Try to space boxes at least 1/2 mile apart.
- Install nest box by late February, before the breeding season.

