

American Kestrel

Migratory Species

Crécerelle d'Amérique
Falco sparverius



Wingspan: M : 51 cm à 56 cm / F : 57 cm à 61 cm



The American Kestrel is the smallest of the Quebec falcons. Its characteristic sharp cry alerts us to its presence in fields, despite its small size. As with most falcons, under its eyes we observe vertical black stripes, called “whiskers”.



The male has slate-blue wings and a reddish brown back spotted with black dots. Its rufous chest hosts some black spots and its russet tail has only one black band at its tip. The female’s wings and back are completely rufous and spotted with black. Thin dark stripes are observed on her chest. Her rufous tail shows several small black bands.



The American Kestrel is typically found in open spaces, such as cultivated fields or fallows. The kestrel is also often seen in towns.



The kestrel feeds on small animals, such as rodents, large insects (dragonfly, grasshopper, etc.) and small birds. She is often recognized as she hovers in place to better spot her prey, and this flight is referred to as “the flight of the Holy Spirit”.



A kestrel can live 11 to 14 years.



The American Kestrel, as with all falcons, does not build a “nest” as such, but rather lays the eggs into a sort of depression scratched into the hollow of a dead or living tree, a ledge, or a roof’s edge. The female lays between 4 to 5 eggs, and sometimes even up to 7!



The first flight of the chicks occurs around 29 to 31 days of age. The chicks remain dependant 12 to 24 days more afterwards.



The species is relatively common and its population is growing all over the continent. Nonetheless, as with all falcons, the kestrel is sensitive to pesticides such as DDT, which were previously used in industrial quantities in North America.



The hatching of the eggs of birds of prey is asynchronous; meaning they do not all hatch at the same time. As the eggs are not laid at the same time and the female begins to incubate the first egg right away, the chicks are born a few days apart (1 to 4 days, on average). The chicks in one nest are thus not all the same age. It sometimes happens for the youngest chick to die because it competes less than its brothers and sisters for access to food.