

7 April 2008

Hello All,

Greetings and welcome to the 2008 NYC American Kestrel season. Already we are getting reports of pairs of kestrels hanging around together - and the male bringing food to the female (eg., Sunnyside, Queens via Eric Cohen; also at Ft. Greene Park, Brooklyn via Lisa Darms), or even entering possible nest cavities on Broadway (on 68th and Broadway via Rob Cicchetti; and on 74th Street above the Citterella Market - thanks Jacob Drucker. And note that a pair nested on the corner opposite Zabar's in 2007 - thanks Kellye Rosenheim!) So if you observed Kestrels in 2007, now is the time to begin looking for them again in your neighborhood.

From Travis Molkenbur in Astoria, Queens we received this message on 5 April: "The kestrels are back! They arrived about 3 weeks ago (about mid-March). My twin daughters are doing great. They're 15 months now, its gone so fast!"

From Eric Cohen in Sunnyside, Queens, also on 5 April 2008: " I've been watching a breeding pair of kestrels out my living room window for the past three days. I've seen Red-tailed Hawks around here regularly, but these kestrels are new to me. They like to perch on an antenna on the roof of a building that is visible three buildings away (this is in the middle of the block between Queens Boulevard and 47th Ave., and between 42nd and 43rd Streets, in Sunnyside). We look at them through binoculars. Today we watched the male bring some prey to the female and watched the female gradually devour it, tail last.

So if you see a kestrel again in your neighborhood, chances are they may be about to lay eggs. Last year (2007), most fledgings occurred from mid-May to late June, which means that eggs were laid from mid-March to late April (assuming that it takes about 30 days for the eggs to hatch, and another 30 days for the young to be on the wing).

Just below, we include two photos of the kestrel nest opposite Zabars in Manhattan that Kellye Rosenheim has been watching (and discovered!). That is approximately west 80th street and Broadway. The nest is on the east side of Broadway, and gets afternoon sun. It is very easy to sit in the traffic "island" – on the provided wooden benches – and watch the comings and goings of the adults, especially from about 20 May through 5 June.

Finally, I'll keep this report brief...but see the kestrel flyer in English, and one translated into Chinese by Tom Jin and his daughter at the end of this PDF. Thank You!

Do let us know about your kestrels anywhere in NYC. The information you provide will help us understand the needs (and threats) to this little falcon in NYC.

OK more next week,

Robert DeCandido
Bronx

American Kestrel Nest
Manhattan: Upper West Side
80th Street and Broadway
14 June 2007
Robert DeCandido, PhD



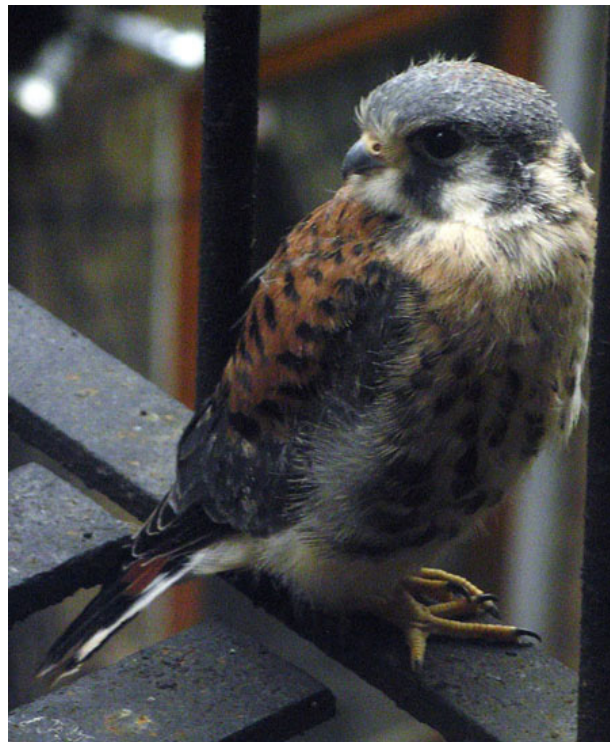
American Kestrel Nest
Manhattan: Upper West Side
80th Street and Broadway
14 June 2007
Robert DeCandido, PhD



Status of the American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*) in New York City

From autumn 2006 through summer 2007 we visited 16 known American Kestrel territories in three of New York City's five boroughs: Manhattan (12), Brooklyn (1) and the Bronx (3). We found kestrel pairs occupying at least 12 territories and located eight nests. Five territories have been occupied since at least 2000. Most, if not all, pairs of American Kestrels do not migrate and remain on territory year-round. Copulations were observed beginning in January, and one female was sitting on eggs by mid-March. In New York City, kestrels can fledge as many as five young, beginning in mid-May. More commonly three young fledge per nest, with some young fledging in mid-July. In 2006 in Manhattan, one pair reared a second brood that fledged in August. The typical kestrel nest in New York City is within a partially rusted metal cornice of a 19th century apartment building, located 20-25 meters above a one-way street. All nests were situated within 70 meters of a vacant lot, community garden, or public park. Heavy pedestrian and vehicular activity below the nest does not negatively affect nesting kestrels. From April-June, food consists primarily of small birds, particularly House Sparrows (*Passer domesticus*), migratory birds such as wood warblers, nestling Rock Pigeons (*Columba livia*) and European Starlings (*Sturnus vulgaris*), and less commonly, small rodents. Beginning in late spring, insects such as dragonflies, bees and moths are captured in flight. The primary threat to New York City kestrels include (a) building renovation; (b) building construction on vacant lots particularly in the South Bronx; and (c) thunderstorms during the fledging period. Overall, we believe the population of New York City kestrels is stable with an estimated 20 pairs nesting annually in Manhattan, and an estimated 25 additional pairs breeding in the other four boroughs.

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Just fledged **American Kestrel (male;** note blue head with small down feathers) from an undiscovered nest in the vicinity of Jane and Horatio Streets in the West Village (Manhattan).

你看過這一隻鳥嗎？



雌



雄

美國茶隼

(Falco sparverious)

茶隼（麻雀鷹）是紐約市中最小的生存獵鷹。牠的別名是 El Cernialo American，它能在所有的五個區中被發現，從哈林區向北到布朗士區，和從中城曼哈坦向南伸展到布魯克林。牠在城市街道上的公寓建築物的壁帶中築巢。在史坦島和皇后區，牠也在垃圾掩埋場附近被放置的盒子中築巢。茶隼以昆蟲，像是蜻蜓和其他的包括老鼠和家雀等小的獵物為食。

可惜的是，最近的科學研究指出，這一類的獵鷹在美國的東北方衰微中。在紐約市，我們對茶隼沒有太多的了解。牠在即將來臨的數年內可能消失如一個城市居民。我們計劃盡可能的來了解有關於都市茶隼的知識，希望這一類獵鷹能在紐約市生存下去。

我們需要您的幫忙！

如果您看到美國茶隼，或者，您知道茶隼巢的位置，請和我們連絡。如果您想要更多的資料，請寄電子郵件或打電話給我們。謝謝！

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如何辨認出美國茶隼呢？在紐約市，這些小的獵鷹喜歡在公寓建築物的頂上，如電視天線或水塔上棲息，在這些高的建築物上牠們比較容易找尋食物。牠們有喜愛的棲息位置。如果您在屋頂上見到這一類的獵鷹，那牠在同一地方棲息的機會是非常大的。



Kestrel perched outside of nest opening, Manhattan

典型的巢位置是在建築物的頂端附近的開口，時常僅僅在屋頂下（像是在壁帶中）如果人們對茶隼巢的擾亂不大，美國茶隼將在城市街道上築巢而且和人相處得好。

下方及右方的圖可見到茶隼巢在建築物壁帶中。



A kestrel nest site in the South Bronx

在鄉間區域中築巢的美國茶隼已經被研究過。然而，在北美城市築巢的茶隼是毫不被人們了解的。在紐約市少數觀察者已經描述，對於這些獵鷹築巢，牠們吃什麼食物，什麼時候離巢，都是鮮為人知的。紐約市的茶隼在秋天／冬天會向南方移動或牠們一整年都待在同一個地方，我們也不知道。還有其他基本的疑問是：牠們的生命有多長？每年有多少新生命誕生？相同的巢位置會年復一年的被使用嗎？對紐約市茶隼的最大威脅是什麼？如果你想要幫助這一即將滅絕的長期城市居民，請注意這一類的獵鷹。

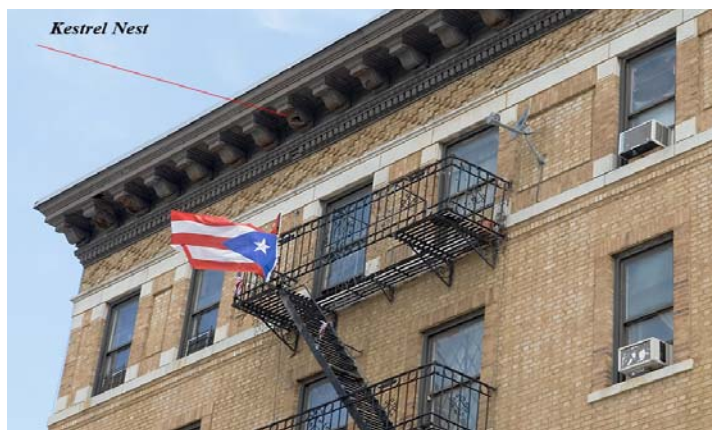
如要報告茶隼瞥見的地方或需要更多有關的資訊，請寄一封電子郵件或打電話給我們：

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Closer view of a nest opening in the South Bronx

We thank the many members of our Kestrel Assessment Team (KAT) including: Richard Aracil, Dr. Keith Bildstein, Dr. David Bird, Andrew Block, Rafael Guillermo Campos-Ramirez, Irv Cantor, Robert A. Cicchetti, Bill Clark, John and Judy Day, Fr. Tom Deely, Dr. Alice Deutsch, Dan Driscoll, Carl Howard, Sharon Kass, Coby Klein, David Künstler, Eve Levine, Richard Lieberman, Barbara Loucks, Chuck McAlexander, Christopher Nadareski, Robert Olley, Dr. Robert Paxton, Dr. Jean-Marc Thiollay, Pat Pollock, Christina Reik, Jorge Santiago, Chad Seewagen, Eric Slayton, Dr. John Smallwood, Junko Suzuki, Steve Walter, Perry Wargo

Have You Seen This Bird?



Female



Male

The American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*)

The American Kestrel (Sparrow Hawk) is the smallest falcon living in New York City. Also called El Cernícalo Americano, it can be found in all five boroughs, from the upper west side through Harlem north to the Bronx, and from mid-town Manhattan south to Brooklyn. It nests in the cornices of apartment buildings on city streets. In Staten Island and Queens, it also nests in boxes placed near abandoned landfills. Kestrels feed on insects such as dragonflies and other small prey including mice and house sparrows.

Sadly, recent scientific research indicates that this falcon is on the decline in the northeastern United States. In New York City, we have no idea how the kestrel is doing. It might disappear as a city resident in the coming years. We plan to study as many urban kestrels as possible in the hope that we can help this falcon survive in New York City.

We Need Your Help!

If you see an American Kestrel, or better yet, if you know of a kestrel nest site, please contact us.

If you want more information, email or call one of us. Thanks!

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How to spot an American Kestrel? In New York City, these small falcons like to perch on TV antennas atop apartment buildings and other high places such as water towers where they can look for food. They have favorite perching sites. If you think you see one atop a building, chances are it will perch in that place again and again.



Kestrel perched outside of nest opening, Manhattan

Typical nest sites are openings near the tops of buildings, often just below the roof (such as in a cornice). American Kestrels will nest on city streets and get along well with people if disturbance to their nest is minimal. See the nest in the building cornice below and right.



Kestrel Nest is here.

A kestrel nest site in the South Bronx

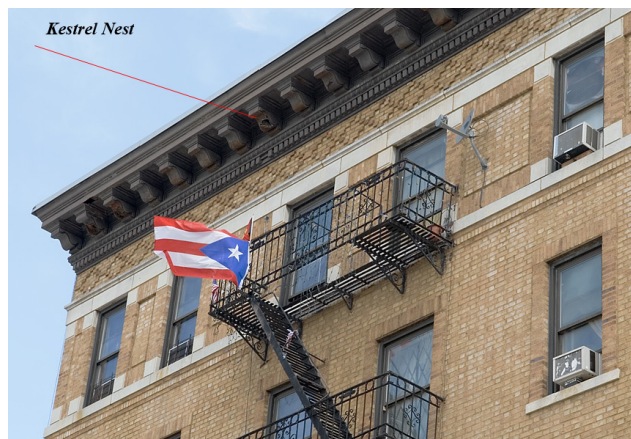
American Kestrels nesting in rural areas have been well studied. However, virtually nothing is known about kestrels that nest in cities in North America. In New York City few observers have described where these falcons nest, what they eat and when young leave the nest. We also do not know if New York City kestrels migrate south in autumn/winter, or if they remain here throughout the year. Our other basic questions are: How long do they live? How many young do they produce each year? Is the same nest site used year after year? What are the greatest threats to New York City kestrels? If you want to help save a long-time city resident from extinction, be on the lookout for this falcon.

To report kestrel sightings or receive more info, send an email or call one of us:

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718-828-8262

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Kestrel Nest

Closer view of a nest opening in the South Bronx

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NYC American Kestrel Newsletter – Issue #2

15 April 2008

Hello All,

Reports regarding kestrels continue to come in from around NYC. Just this week Ben Goloff let us know about a Kestrel nest on west 104th street and Broadway. Also, Annie Barry at Inwood Hill Park is once again seeing a kestrel in the park (as well as nearby Baker's Field), but she is having a heck of a time finding a nest on an apartment building near the park.

Such scenarios are not uncommon - though the American Kestrel is the most common nesting raptor in NYC (yes, more common than the Red-tailed Hawk), finding a nest in your neighborhood is a challenge. It might take a couple years. Right now in mid-April, some females are sitting on eggs which means they are hidden from view 95% of the time. You'll have to get lucky and see the male bring food to an opening on a cornice on a building. The female might take the food and fly a few feet away to consume it, while the male goes to brood the eggs. These are the best signs at this time of the year that you have indeed found a nest. When the eggs hatch, particularly on warm days, the female will usually sit about 25-100 feet away from the nest entrance, and she likes to chase away any intruders to the nest building and vicinity. These include crows, squirrels, red-tailed hawks and sometimes even peregrine falcons. Here is a comment from Chris Nadareski, who has studied (and banded) Peregrine Falcons in NYC for the last 20 years or so: **"I have often observed a pair of Kestrels interacting with the Peregrines at the Met Life Building. There is also a pair that interacts with the Peregrines at the Riverside Church** but I'm not sure where they are nesting." So anyone out there know about these two pairs of kestrels?

Attached is an article (with color photos) about a pair of kestrels on 26th street on the west side of Manhattan. It was written by long-time veteran kestrel watcher Chuck McAlexander in 2007. I've added two photos of what his "street" looks like, and the exact area where the kestrels nested in 2006-07 (and are likely nesting now). NOTE: I apologize for the large size of the attachment (5.5MB), but I had to scan the article and keep the file size large so you would be able to read the text as crisp and not blurrrry. Apologies.

If I schedule a Saturday morning field trip in May to 2-3 kestrel nest sites, would anyone be interested? No charge (as in free). We would go to 2-3 sites in Manhattan and all you would need is a Metro Card and lunch. Let me know if you are interested. And if you no longer wish to receive these updates, just let me know and I will remove your name from the list.

Best Wishes, thanks and do keep those reports about kestrels coming in,

Robert DeCandido

THE LINNAEAN NEWS



LETTER

15 WEST 77th STREET
NEW YORK, NY 10024

Volume 61, Number 2/3

April/May 2007

KESTRELS ON 25TH STREET-2006

Chuck McAlexander

It was an eventful, if not productive year for the 25th Street American Kestrels. Behavior not typical of the species led to events that greatly affected the number of offspring produced, as well as the number that managed to survive. Most of the observable activity took place in the first half of the year. Even so, there was plenty to see and to try to understand.

The small, dark male that sired last year's offspring, stayed over the winter using the nest cavity as a roost. This cavity is well suited for both purposes as a consequence of its accidental design and fortuitous location. The cavity is a disconnected remainder of a vent pipe leading from a heater to the outside. It is about two and a half feet long, six inches in diameter and was sealed on the inside after it was discovered that kestrels were using it as a nest cavity. It was not sealed for the benefit of the birds, however. It was taped off because the birds entered the room containing the pipe and were difficult and time consuming to remove.

The female of the pair was not seen until January 29th. In fact, I cannot be sure the female that nested in the 25th street cavity is the same one that did so last year. To complicate the issue she arrived at about the same time as a larger, brighter plumaged male I designated Male2. Both the female and Male2 were seen investigating various cavities in the area, including the previously used pipe, even though it was still being used as a roost by the smaller, darker male, now called Male1.

By February 5th things started getting a little strange. I saw Male1 emerge from the pipe, perch on top for a while, then leave for his morning hunt. Later that day a starling investigated the cavity, but drew no territorial defense. Apparently, the starling was wise enough to visit when it was sure no kestrel was inside or keeping an eye on the pipe. Later yet, Male1 brought a fresh kill to the cavity which was grabbed by the female on her way out. Male1 then entered the nest causing Male2 to emerge and perch on top of the tube. It was as though Clark Kent went in and Superman came out! The difference between these two birds' appearance is striking.

It would seem most unlikely that two male raptors, vying for the same female's attention would tolerate each other in the same area, let alone the same nest cavity. Yet, by February 10th I found both of them comfortably perched side by side on top of the pipe. This behavior continued through much of February. I again found them shoulder to shoulder on the nest pipe on the 22nd. On the 26th, although both were initially perched separately, both entered and stayed in the nest together.

That same day brought the season's first observed copulation. Poor quality optics, sun glare and distance prevented me from determining which male was involved, but with 28 to 31 days for incubation and another 28 to 31 days from hatching to fledging, there was now a chance I would see some new kestrels by the last week of April.

American Kestrel Nest
Manhattan - Chelsea District
West 25th Street
Five Kestrels Fledged here in mid-May 2007
© Robert DeCandido, PhD

Nest



American Kestrel Nest
Manhattan - Chesea District
West 25th Street
Five Kestrels Fledged here in mid-May 2007
© Robert DeCandido, PhD



Determining paternity continued to be a problem. I saw another copulation on March 12th, but again could not determine which male participated. Male1 was being seen on the nest tube in the early mornings, but Male2 perched there in the afternoons. Obviously, both males were still comfortable with each other, still sharing a nest cavity and possibly a female.

The next two weeks brought only two observations of interest. On March 23rd, one of the males flew into the area carrying a rat that was not much smaller than he was. The way the kestrel struggled, it was obvious he was carrying a load very near his maximum ability. Predators in general do not pick prey too big or too dangerous to handle. This bird's exception opens the question whether he was 1) trying to impress his mate, 2) getting the only meal available, or 3) scavenging a rat already killed by some other means.

If either of the first two options were true, as a male, I understand. But, the third choice leaves me wondering if kestrels will actually scavenge, a behavior I have not yet observed. A fourth possibility is that the rat, addled by some toxin, was behaving in a manner the kestrel just could not resist. A debilitated prey is the meal of choice for any predator. Unfortunately, this would lead to a higher toxin load for the bird and his offspring.

Toxins are not the only hazards kestrels face. The female was having her own troubles. The afternoon of the 23rd, she spent a good half hour preening. This was the full Monty. She dug and scratched with a fervor and determination that, to me, suggested a possible ectoparasite load. I have seen a kestrel do a full body preen before. It looks like it might be pleasurable. But, this female was not enjoying anything. After a considerable time and effort, she just sat in the sun with all her plumage erect. I do not know whether she achieved relief, or just gave up.

March 31st, about a month since I first observed the pair mate, there was evidence of nestlings. Male1 perched across the street with a freshly captured bird. As the male was plucking the prey, the female could be heard calling from the nest. Once the meal was shucked, the male flew to the top of the tube with prey in talon. The female then emerged from the cavity and flew to where the male had plucked the bird; Male1 joined her, passed her the food, and then returned to and entered the nest.

What is telling in this scenario is the method of prey preparation. Nuptial food offerings are generally left intact. Totally plucked prey is reserved for nestlings and new fledglings. Probably, the female perched nearby and ripped the meat into chunks of a size suitable for hatchlings. Then, after a short time, returned to the nest to feed the partially digested meal to her new chicks. This not only would make the meat digestible by the very young birds, but it would also pass a seed crop of necessary bacteria to their digestive systems.

By mid-month the male became decidedly more defensive of his territory. The pigeons which were perched near the cavity entrance were no longer tolerated. The male also became a little more deceptive. He continued to provide food for the nest, but also cached the occasional catch-for himself. To prevent the female from discovering his meal, he would stash it in an obscured spot, then change locations several times in a short period.

Smaller prey items would be passed to the female who would take them directly to the nest. After all the nutrition was removed and fed to the chicks, the skeletal remains would be taken from the cavity and dropped at a reasonable distance. Larger prey birds might leave a remainder which, on occasion, allowed the male to perch and gnaw at his leisure.

By April 22nd, Male1's defense of the nest became an active claim to the area. Nearly any species that came within fifty feet of the entrance was pursued; especially if it showed any sign of slowing or attempted to land nearby. The female, however, seemed indifferent to any pretense of secrecy. She would perch on top of the pipe with no concern for whoever might learn the location of the nest.

In reality, the male's over-aggressive defenses amounted to a large sign indicating the nest's whereabouts. However, it also demonstrated there would be no free lunch. On April 30th, both kestrels were perched close to the nest when a Herring Gull showed too much interest and too little speed. Both birds pursued the gull and the male even raked its back for good measure. They did not break off the chase until they reached the end of the block.

That same day the female delivered food to the nest twice. The first bird was a fresh capture, which she dispatched with several bites to the

back of the neck. She then took the whole, unplucked but dead bird into the nest. Later, the prey was delivered in a more prepared condition. Most probably, she captured the first bird herself, but received the second one from the male. Whole birds, whether plucked or not, can indicate the state of development of the nestlings. As they mature, so does their ability to handle prey. The bites offered by the female get progressively larger until the chicks begin dismembering the prey themselves. By the time they fledge, they can do everything but catch and kill a meal, although they are slow and clumsy at first.

On May 12th, in the late morning, two workers cleaning the sidewalk below the nest found and captured a very young female kestrel. The bird could not fly and was still very downy with a short tail. It was an overcast day with rain forecast for the evening. The bird was put in a cardboard box on the roof over the nest. The box was turned on its side so the chick would have shelter, but would not be trapped. We hoped, as had happened in previous years, the parents would feed and protect the vulnerable bird.

At ten o'clock the next morning the male carried food to the nest. Prior to his arrival, high begging calls could be heard coming from the nest, indicating the continued existence of nestlings inside. A conversation with Larry, the super of the building, revealed that the box on the roof was empty and the young female was nowhere to be found. I took this as an encouraging sign that the young bird had not expired of hunger or exposure during the night.

At five o'clock that day, Larry hailed me from across the street as I was making my way down the block to go home. He had been watching as a kestrel captured, decapitated and then dropped the young female to the sidewalk across from the nest. I retrieved the still warm corpse, but could not find the head. Perhaps it fell to the roof where the avian infanticide took place. I was incredulous as well as unsure how much of Larry's account to believe, so I came up with several explanations for the death, none of which were even close to what I eventually decided had actually happened.

From May 14th to June 28th I saw no activity at the nest. I assumed the failure of the first clutch to be cause enough for the birds to stop trying, or at least to be making a second attempt elsewhere. June 29th brought revelation.

Male2, which I hadn't positively identified since March, brought food to the nest. Upon his arrival, the female left, presumably to hunt. I could only interpret this as a second attempt by the female, but with a new male. This was reinforced by a display of a nuptial flight I call raptor tag. Also, both Male2 and the female were perched together atop the nest tube for a while before they entered. Male1 was not seen in the area. It would seem that Male2 was responsible for the death of the first offspring and for driving Male1 from the area in order to claim both his territory and his mate. Perhaps Male2 should be renamed Oedipus.

By the second week of July the female was spending most of her time inside the nest. Male2 had become very aggressive in his defense of the territory. Again, a Herring Gull had to be removed from the area, as before, with the help of the female. Although the male was quick to launch an attack on a perceived intruder, only a true threat, such as the gull, would actually be engaged. When pigeons got in the way, the kestrel would stoop in their direction, but time his assault to just miss them as they scattered. He seemed to want control of the area, not an unnecessary battle.

Sometime between July 9th and 16th a male fledged. My first sight of him came on the 16th as he flew to a high perch. His clean, fresh plumage accented by a broad, white terminal band on his tail clearly set him apart from the worn and haggard looking parents. Five days later, both adults were still defending the nest, but by August 3rd a pigeon was allowed to perch atop the nest tube. Obviously, there was to be no more activity there that year. I did find a female, Male2 and an immature male flying and perching in the area, but not near the nest cavity.

Not long after the pigeon declared the breeding season to be over, Male1 reappeared. He perched atop the nest tube under the eave to shelter himself from a passing thunderstorm. Male2 was not to be seen again that year, but the female stayed in the area.

Throughout the fall and into December both Male1 and the female could be found perched in the area from time to time. As in the past, one of their favorite perches was the top of a water tank above and just east of the nest. They did not perch together, but did not seek separate territories, either.

On the morning of November 3rd the pair found themselves at the bottom of a river of

birds. Starting just before dawn, large numbers of robins accompanied by about a 10% mix of sparrow-sized birds flew due north over the nest. Most of the visible birds flew at the 30th floor level, but there were many more birds very high overhead. The scene was majestic and inspiring and would compare favorably with the wildebeest migration of the Serengeti.

Just at dawn both kestrels were hunting. Quick glimpses of either bird were barely enough to determine gender. But, seeing them pump powerfully to gain speed, then fold into a stoop configuration to rocket toward their prey left little doubt as to which species they were. They did not hunt together or cooperatively. Neither seemed even aware of the other's existence, yet both behaved as if they were masters of the territory. In fact, they are.

As the first hour after sunrise progressed, the endless flow of migrants continued. The species in the stream gradually changed and so did the number of birds. For each robin that left the scene, two juncos took its place. For every fifth robin, add a kinglet to the juncos. There were other birds in the mix, too. Probably, most of them were Yellow-rumped Warblers and some blackbirds. Great multitudes of the two species were reported elsewhere in the area, but I could not positively identify either of them. Add in some woodpeckers, mostly Northern Flickers, an odd mockingbird, a phoebe or six, and some Blue Jays and you get a general idea of the make-up of the flight.

At times there would be a small break in the flow, but this was only a gap in the birds low enough to try to identify. The upper levels still showed lines and waves of birds, dots actually, that I took to be birds. Never, during the first hour, was there a time when I could look up and not see thousands of birds making their way north.

After the kestrels had both dined and preened, as is their habit, both returned at various times to perches within my view. But, neither could stay still for long. But the birds, no longer hungry but still an aerial predator, gave in to instinct. Whenever a passing migrant flew into a kestrel's kill zone, it would be pursued, but only weakly. The kestrels would launch toward the bird and stoop in its direction, but not at great speed and not for effect. The terrified migrant would be spared at the last minute, as the falcon would

stretch a talon in its direction as it sharply turned to just miss the target. The constant taunt of so many easy marks was just too much for even a well-fed hunter to ignore.

As the flight moved through, the behavior of the passing birds changed. By the middle of the second hour, there were more and more low flying birds. Many were flying below even the sixth floor roof level and had to go around the buildings. Others, in slightly better shape, would just make the roof ledge. There, they would pause for a moment, then continue on. The stragglers bringing up the rear of the migration were showing obvious signs of fatigue and hunger. This made them even easier and more attractive targets for the kestrels, but they were tiring of the morning's game, too. At one point, a small migrant landed not ten feet from a perched kestrel. The potential meal rested for a good thirty to forty seconds, and then flew weakly off. In that time, the kestrel could have easily captured and dispatched the bird. Instead, he just sat and watched.

November 18th brought an insight into a kestrel's ability to adapt to its environment. I found both birds perched on the top of the same water tank. They were shoulder-to-shoulder on the soccer-ball sized cap, so when one shifted its position, the other had to adjust as well. This caused the pair to do a slow rotation on the ball for about forty minutes.

During the whole period, several batches of small birds flew around or over the kestrels. Most of them were Dark-eyed Juncos, but there were others I could not identify, too. Finally, just at 11:00 o'clock, the female got fed up with the taunting or just got hungry. She took off after one of the juncos as though it did not matter if it took all day to catch it. The junco, of course, did not appreciate that the kestrel was not working all that hard to catch up. It frantically flew down the block just avoiding capture by executing a sharp turn at the last second before the talons would have struck home. The kestrel was laconic, but not indifferent to the outcome of the contest, so it too, would make a sharp turn and pursue the bird in the other direction. Another sharp turn saved the junco a second time, but the kestrel did not give up the chase. After the second near miss, the kestrel changed tactics. Instead of turning and following the junco along the block, the kestrel made a wider turn, gaining speed and flanking the

now very tired junco. This proved to be a very effective maneuver. As the junco tried to dodge death by dropping, then by skirting around to the side of the kestrel, it found itself pinned between two sets of talons and a concrete wall. Needless to say, she plucked the junco from the air the way I might have picked an apple from a tree. There never really was any doubt, about the outcome. She took the lazily harvested meal to the roof of the building and proceeded to dine. The whole time, the male stayed on his perch.

The thought-provoking part of all this is whether this hunting technique is an adaptation to city life. In the open countryside, there are no walls to maneuver a tired prey into. Trees and brush only provide cover and probably an escape for the prey. Here, instead of very energy intensive rapid pursuit, a slower, easier pace will ultimately tire the prey and allow it to be maneuvered into a position of no escape. It looks like this city bird has used its brain to improve its life. That is hard not to appreciate.

Throughout December the kestrels were into their winter routine. Most views I got were of Male1 on a high perch, or sometimes on the nest tube. The female put in an appearance occasionally, but she preferred to perch out of my view most of the time. Warm weather allowed the pair to perch outside almost always. Use of the nest cavity as a heated roost was unnecessary until after the New Year had begun.

This being the third consecutive year that Male1 and, presumably, the same female had nested in the same cavity on 25th street, the pair should have settled into a regular routine dictated more by season and the weather than by requirements of food and shelter. The addition of a second male changed everything.

What is most puzzling is Male1's acceptance of the presence of Male2. Shared perches, simultaneous occupation of the nest cavity, no evidence of a struggle, and a general lack of overt aggression indicate that Male1 did not view Male2 as a competitor early in the year. It is possible that Male2 is one of Male1's offspring from 2005, but his being a fully mature adult should have trumped any response other than confrontation and aggression. Sadly, that did not happen and the offspring sired by Male1 were lost. That Male2 helped produce a male fledgling in the second clutch hardly equals the seven fledged the previous year.

Perhaps Male1 is at the end of his reproductive abilities and possibly, even his life. So far, both he and the female have become residents and appear to intend to continue as a breeding pair. Whether Male2 will return in the spring and offer challenge for Male1's mate and territory remains to be seen. And even if Male2 did and were successful, there would be no guarantee she would again accept him as a mate. Humans are not the only species that has to deal with the vicissitudes of life.

NYC Kestrel Newsletter #3

22 April 2008

Hello All,

This week we report some interesting observations, regarding food items eaten by NYC Kestrels, reported by Eric Cohen (Queens) and Patricia Essler (Bronx). However, before we get to the main course, an introductory note about NYC (Harlem) Kestrels from a visitor from Michigan:

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Subject: East Harlem kestrels again

Date: Apr 21, 2008 9:43 AM

Hello again - We're visiting our daughter here for a few days. We've seen a female kestrel several times on the antenna, eating gobbets of something, **so maybe these are her meal breaks from a nest?** If so, the nest might be where it was last year.

Our daughter Lyra took a picture of a brightly colored male kestrel in December,

Best wishes,

Barb and Dick Ward (Eastpointe, Michigan)

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Barbara has observed two interesting things. First, it is likely true that many female kestrels in NYC are now sitting on eggs, and don't often leave the nest cavity...the exception being when eating a food item the male has brought to them. Second, Ms. Ward mentions a photo taken of a kestrel in December (on the same perch). This is good evidence that some (if not all) of our local kestrels remain in NYC year-round. Some individuals (pairs) may move several blocks from the nest site in winter in NYC, but we are confident that they do not leave NYC in winter for better habitats to the south. However, we are open to correction and any observations/ideas that you have to support a migration hypothesis (by even one bird). Finally, attached are a couple of photos of the E 118th street nest in Harlem.



Male American Kestrel photographed in Central Park with a House Sparrow in its talons

© Deborah Allen



American Kestrel Nest
East Harlem - 119th Street Nest
1 June 2007
© Robert DeCandido, PhD



Manhattan: East Harlem (118th street near 2nd Avenue)
Female American Kestrel at Nest
26 May 2007
© Robert DeCandido, PhD



We also received some very exciting news from Patricia Essler from the New York Botanical Garden in the Bronx:

Date: Apr 19, 2008 5:05 PM

Bob,

After seeing the beaver dam, Stephen I went our own way. We're sorry to have missed the wood ducks, however, we did want to let you know what we saw on our own. Besides a garter snake, snapping turtle and some frogs (green we think, but not sure) we saw 3 Red Tail Hawks while we sat under the Tulip Trees in front of the NYBG Library. But our own best sighting of the day occurred while we sat on the bench in front of the pond in the Rock Garden. **At 12:40 pm a red bat flew off a limb of a large tree on the other side of the pond. It was so beautiful as it fluttered around with the sun shining through its wings. I jumped up from my bench and watched to see where it would land. It went back on a limb of that same tree. Within 3 minutes a male Kestrel flew in and landed on the branch, grabbed the bat in its claws and flew away. Although I felt badly for the bat, this is what it's all about.**

Love,

Patricia and Stephen

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And just as interesting are the photos posted by Eric Cohen in Sunnyside, Queens of a kestrel eating a lizard...see the last two photos posted at the link below:

<http://picasaweb.google.com/ericmarccohen/SunnysideKestrels?authkey=Q4kfiIH3uZQ>

I did some research and found this article that appeared in Newsday in 2003. The lizards in question are known as Italian Fence or Wall Lizards.

<http://www.newsday.com/other/special/naturalworld/ny-walllizard3272636may11,0,5447771,full.story>

The Lizard King

The Island's only such species, the Italian wall lizard rules the roost - and imaginations of its host
By Bryn Nelson | Staff Writer [Newsday]

May 11, 2003

Two years before astronauts walked on the moon, a few dozen colonists took their first small steps onto another foreign landscape. The exact details are lost to legend, but the settlers soon discovered that Garden City wasn't such a bad place to land.

For a lizard.

Various tales have sprung up to explain the emigration of a small group of wall lizards from the north of Italy to the suburbs of Long Island. The most likely story involves a 1967 shipment destined for a now-defunct pet supply store that was waylaid by a minor accident, a broken crate and some very swift escapees.

No one knows for sure how many of the cold-blooded reptiles are now basking in the sunshine of suburbia. But they have adapted remarkably well to their adopted homeland, and they've extended far beyond Garden City.



As in their native precincts of Italy and southern Europe, the lizards are thriving in landscapes shaped by humans, in pockets of Nassau County as well as in Queens, Brooklyn and the Bronx. A diet of spiders and crickets and other small invertebrates, a sunny spot to provide warmth and aid metabolism, a haven in the cracks and crevices of walls and gardens - all are abundant here.

The lizards have proliferated along the grassy corridors of railroad tracks, drainage ditches, and power lines. Others have likely hitched rides to new homes in the pockets of admirers, or even in piles of mulch.

"I'm sure there are tens of thousands, and they're spreading fast," says Hofstra University herpetologist Russell Burke.

Despite the advance, the tale of New York's Italian wall lizard population has not followed the familiar plot line of an invasive species wreaking havoc on the natives. Long Island has no

lizards of its own, and the wall lizards seem to have filled an environmental niche that was previously vacant. As far as anyone can tell, they have yet to cause any harm.

Instead, their impact is perhaps most apparent in the childlike wonder that follows in their wake. A biologist laughs at their antics in a nursery school garden. A father eagerly maps their spread. Children clamor to glimpse them on a playground.

Sometimes nature's lessons come in unexpected ways.

Burke has picked a warm September day for fishing, though his black fishing pole seems strangely out of place among impatiens and ornamental shrubs. The small noose dangling from the pole offers another suggestion that this will be no ordinary fishing expedition.

Burke is after the wall lizards, a source of both academic research and personal fascination. He has conducted many of his field studies here, in the three-tiered side garden and spacious backyard of the Garden City Nursery School.

At first, the garden appears deserted. Then a single lizard scurries across a railroad tie retainer and behind a small evergreen shrub. Within seconds, the creatures known as *Podarcis sicula* are everywhere. Grass-green backs. Mottled black and brown patterns with turquoise spots on either side. Basking on ornamental rocks, guarding bits of territory, surveying the scene from the safety of cracks in the garden's lower echelons.

With a fisherman's patience, Burke moves the noose ever closer to the head of a wary lizard. A quick jerking motion and he's made his first catch of the day, a 5-inch-long juvenile male with a dull green back, caught harmlessly around its head.

Burke paints the lizard on each side with a red marker, just as he's marked others with identifiable combinations of blue or black or green. His next catch - a 7-inch-long adult female with a typically narrow head - receives two red blotches on each side.

After another few minutes, he's caught the one he's been after all day, an elusive adult male that measures about 8 inches in length and has his own territory near the far end of the garden. The lizard promptly rewards Burke's efforts by biting him.

"Oh, that's enough of a pinch to hurt." He laughs as the lizard glares at him.

The herpetologist points to a row of scales where the lizard's hind legs intersect its abdomen, a region identifiable on males by a brown spot. It's from the femoral glands here that the male secretes its distinctive pheromone, a chemical calling card of sorts.

"It's probably like, 'I'm a big tough guy and this is my territory,'" Burke says of the scented message. A male lizard basking in the sunshine to regulate his body temperature and synthesize Vitamin D also may be marking his territory as he lays flat against the railroad ties, but Burke can only speculate.

The big male gets two blue marks on each side.

This temporary labeling system will help Burke study how the lizards feed and mate, and how they defend their territories. Some have done so for seven years or more - a ripe old age for a lizard.

He has already determined that they are almost genetically identical to one another, a hallmark of a population founded by a few individuals. Yet the New York settlers are, surprisingly, free of common parasites such as lizard malaria, and are reproducing even faster than their closest genetic kin in Italy.

The Italian group remains active year-round, but their New World cousins stop virtually all activity in the winter. Since Burke has discovered that the lizards cannot tolerate freezing temperatures, he would like to answer the question that's been nagging him for years: How do they survive the winters?

In Topeka, Kan., Larry Miller wonders the same thing. Related lizard species have ventured into Cincinnati and Victoria, British Columbia, and observers recorded a colony of Italian wall lizards in Philadelphia that petered out several decades ago. But active populations of the creatures also known as ruin lizards now inhabit only two known regions of North America: Long Island and Topeka.

Miller, a biology teacher at Topeka's Northern Hills Junior High School, also is mystified as to how they behave during the coldest weather. He hopes to answer some of the lingering questions by establishing a lizard study area near his school.

"I've been teaching science for about 30 years," he says, "and they're one of my best teaching tools."

Again, the details of the Topeka introduction are somewhat hazy, but a pet supply store and an absent-minded owner figure prominently. Miller estimates the lizards have expanded at least a quarter of a mile in all directions from their suspected release site in the late 1950s.

"They've moved in well and they're an animal that has managed to fill a niche that was created by humans," he says. Their urban success story is perhaps best documented by Topeka's prime lizard vantages: outside an auto parts store, a KFC restaurant and a Dimple Doughnuts shop.

It's about three-tenths of a mile from Long Island's Hempstead Turnpike to the generally agreed-upon point where the store-bound lizards made their escape - a site known to a few enthusiasts as Ground L. This stretch of Cherry Valley Avenue runs past ball fields, a bus depot and the municipal yard of Garden City.

The village's composting program at the municipal yard delivers rich black mulch to golf courses, recharge basins and residents, all of it free of charge. The "black gold" is full of nutrients, and lizards, who may be getting a free ride across the county.

Just down the road, the village's community park includes three landscaped pools, a miniature golf course, and other favorite spots for lizard-catching. A wall lizard has escaped on more than one occasion by relinquishing its twitching tail to the sweaty grasp of a young pursuer, a defense mechanism that also helps it evade cats and birds. The loss is only temporary, however. The lizard will soon grow another tail.

Nestled between the community park and the mulch piles lies lizard paradise - the 1-acre site of the Garden City Nursery School, which has harbored the creatures for more than two decades.

"They became such a fascination to the children and parents and teachers that the curiosity just

increased tremendously," says school director Ann Amengual.

The lizards have since become the school's unofficial mascots. A green lizard thermometer commands a prominent position on a pillar by the entrance, the parents have produced several versions of lizard T-shirts for the children, and even the school's board has gotten into the spirit.

"We have a tradition now where the outgoing president gets a gold lizard pin," Amengual says.

Springtime at the school arrives with the wall lizards. "Science for young children is not about learning facts, but it's about stirring curiosity and learning about their life and their world," Amengual says. "That's what happens here. It's contagious - everyone loves these lizards."

Rob Alvey's love affair with the lizards began in 1985. As a teenager in the summer of '68, he had mowed the school's lawn, but it wasn't until he returned as a parent that he first saw them. Lots of them.

The collector of more than 10,000 frog-related items soon found room in his life for yet another small green creature. Alvey, a geologist, even got his daughter involved in an early tracking project using color-coded beads sewn onto the back of each lizard.

When he was appointed to the Garden City Environmental Advisory Board in 1992, Alvey promptly launched a project to trace the background of the lizards. In 1993 he appealed to residents to help him track the reptiles by reporting sightings. Thanks to the Garden City Lizard Watch, he was able to map their expanding range and estimated that they were advancing by a block to 1 1/2 blocks every year.

"I was concerned whether this was a good thing, a dangerous thing," he recalls. "And the more I learned, the more I discovered that this is not something that we need to worry about."

At his home in Garden City, Alvey unfolds a rumpled map of the New York City metropolitan area on his dining room table. With a green highlighter, he marks some of the other known colonies that have radiated from Garden City: Planting Fields Arboretum. The Carle Place Water District. Mount Hebron Cemetery in Flushing.

In 1994 Alvey introduced four lizards to another one of his projects, the Garden City Bird Sanctuary near his home. Now, they abound throughout the 9-acre site. "They're prolific," he says. "They have a natural Viagra in them somewhere along the line."

Another lizard aficionado, Queens College associate biology professor Jon Sperling, remembers collecting lizards of his own at the Garden City municipal yard 12 or 13 years ago.

Perhaps not coincidentally, separate colonies have thrived at his home in Floral Park and at Queens College for the past 12 years. Unlike many of the students, the campus lizards prefer to hang out by Rosenthal Library, where they dart among the prostrate red cedar planted on an incline near the entrance.

"You can see them sunning themselves either on the plants themselves, or on the decor on the incline and on the stairway," Sperling says.

He has integrated the lizards into some of his lessons, asking students whether they've noticed them. Many haven't.

"It's a matter of observation," he says. "People could live next to them all their lives and not see them. Some people are blind to things like that."

In the winter months, few New Yorkers have seen the lizards. One of the few exceptions was when a Long Island homeowner spotted several huddled together beneath a lifted slab of sidewalk.

Last fall, Burke designed a project for high school student Allison Goodman to find out where Italian wall lizards go when the temperature falls below freezing. But neither electrician's tape nor glue held his tiny radio transmitters in place, and the mystery remains - at least for another year.

Despite an unseasonably warm afternoon that bathes the nursery school's garden in light, the wall lizards refuse to stir from their seclusion on St. Patrick's Day. But the following afternoon, a few emboldened members of a colony residing in the Hofstra University greenhouse venture into the adjacent yard to enjoy the sunshine. By the next week, a few more make brief appearances near the biology building at Queens College. They begin showing up in scattered yards around Garden City, and then at the nursery school itself.

At the far end of the school's garden, a mid-sized lizard ventures out on a railway tie before its courage falters and it scurries between the cracks of the wooden tier. Then a tiny lizard with only a hint of green on its back makes its afternoon debut - a summer hatchling with spring fever. But its day in the sun is quickly curtailed by an aggressor twice its size that is in no mood to share its garden fiefdom.

Amid the patchy afternoon sunshine and chatter of small children arriving for school, the wall lizards of spring have returned.

"I didn't see one, but I thought I heard one," says a little girl with a blond bob. Her two friends quickly join her, shushing one another as they tiptoe toward the near end of the garden. Three pairs of feet shuffle around a bush and curious hands pry through the greenery, but no lizards turn up.

"I think we scared it away," the little girl says as they head back inside. Moments later, the lizard reappears just where she said it should be, with a nearby cascade of ivy providing a hideout.

Later that afternoon, Burke and a pair of lizards join a group of schoolchildren for a session of show and tell.

Who's seen a lizard?

Hands shoot up and several kids have stories.

What eats them? Burke asks. Snakes? Cats?

"Lions," offers a boy.

"Cheetahs," says a girl.

For the afternoon lizard hunt, 18 young assistants peer into the garden, around the plastic border

of the playground, between the cracks in the back fence. But the wall lizards, perhaps sensing the commotion, have apparently called it a day.

It doesn't matter. The lizards will be out again next week, and for many more weeks after that. Until cold weather forces a temporary retreat, they will be playing hide and seek, scampering across the fence ties and delighting a few dozen young naturalists eager to see, to touch, to learn the simple lessons that nature - and fate - have brought to their own backyard.

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Well, if you are still reading - Thank You. Do send us your sightings about the local kestrels. Next to nothing is known about these urban falcons in North America, let alone in NYC. I think we can change that.

Regards,

**Robert DeCandido, PhD
The Bronx**



Male American Kestrel looking for prey (Photographer Unknown)

28 April 2008

Hello All,

This week kestrels are sitting on eggs...and at some locations, the eggs have hatched and females are beginning to spend much time sitting on a favorite perch about 200 feet or less from the nest. In this issue of NYC kestrel news, (1) we provide a follow-up on last week's report of a male kestrel capturing a red bat at the New York Botanical Garden in the Bronx made by Patricia Essler and husband Stephen; (2) We also report on a new kestrel nest just north of Central Park reported to us by Bey Devletian; and finally, (3) we provide photos of two kestrel nests in Harlem (St. Nicholas Avenue and Place from 2006 and 2007).

1. Info from the NY State Department of Environmental Conservation on raptors feeding on bats during daylight hours:

"We've received quite a number of reports of raptors taking bats this year. No doubt it is the result of the fact that bats have been more active during daylight as a result of the effects of what has been dubbed "whitenose syndrome" (see <http://www.caves.org/grotto/dcg/white-nose.html>). The interesting thing about your report is that you referred to it as a red bat. Assuming you mean an eastern red bat, *Lasiurus borealis*, that would be the first such report we have heard for that species."

2. Our friend Bey Devletian reported to us a new kestrel nest just north of Central Park...we will have photos of this nest site in the coming weeks. What is important here is that Bey saw a kestrel in his neighborhood and became curious as to their nest location. He noticed that the female liked to perch in one special spot early in the morning (while the sun hit the nest building), so he decided to watch her for a bit as she sat on a roof top. Not long after, she took off and flew to the nest cavity...solving a mystery for Bey, and earning my deepest thanks and respect. Thanks Bey!

3. Finally, see attached photos of an American Kestrel nest site on 149th street and St. Nicholas Place (adjacent to St. Nicholas Ave) in 2006 (two photos). The following year (2007), the same kestrel pair moved its nest north by about four blocks to 153rd street and St. Nicholas Avenue. Note that the 2007 nest site is located on slightly higher ground...but otherwise also faces west and is also in a rusted out cornice above the top floor of an apartment building. (Though the 2007 nest is in a four storey building while the 2006 nest was in a six storey apartment.) Have at look at the four photos attached (two from each year). And a major league Thank You to **Jim O'Brien** who alerted us to these kestrel nests last year. Jim has found more NYC kestrel nests than anyone we know - Jim, Thank YOU! For some of Jim's NYC Kestrel photos, see here:

<http://yojimbot.blogspot.com/2008/04/kestrel-pix.html>

We will feature more of Jim's nests and field research in a coming issue. And on 29 April at 11am on WBAI 99.5 (FM) radio, there will be an interview with Jim. Online it can be heard by going to www.wbai.org and clicking the "listen now" button at the top.

That's all for this week - perhaps a kestrel is sitting on a perch near you right now. Meanwhile, see attached five photos of kestrel nests in Harlem in 2006 and 2007.

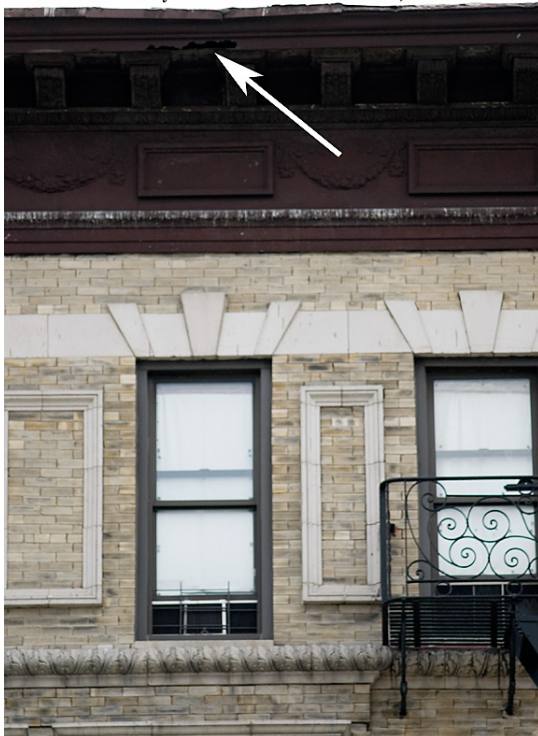
Robert DeCandido

2006:

American Kestrel Nest - 2006
Manhattan: St. Nicholas Place at 149th Street
"Audubon Court"
28 May 2007 - © Robert DeCandido, PhD



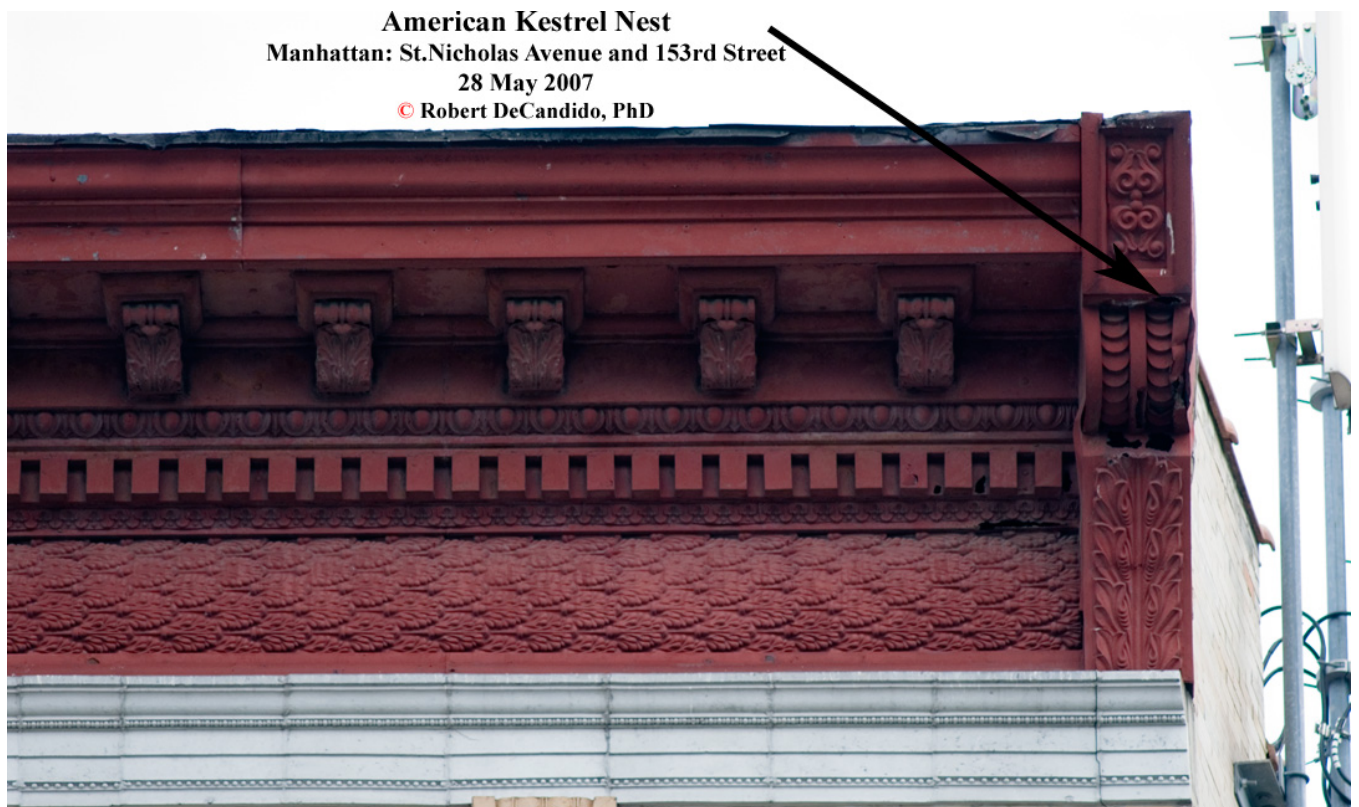
American Kestrel Nest - 2006
Manhattan: St. Nicholas Place at 149th Street / "Audubon Court"
28 May 2007 - © Robert DeCandido, PhD



American Kestrel Nest - 2006
Manhattan: St. Nicholas Place at 149th Street
"Audubon Court"
28 May 2007 - © Robert DeCandido, PhD



2007 (just a few blocks north of the 2006 nest):



5 May 2008 – NYC Kestrel Newsletter #5

Hello All,

On Wednesday, 30 April, Richard Lieberman and I had the opportunity to investigate several Kestrel nests on the west side (Broadway area) of Manhattan. We found a male at home at 69th and Broadway where kestrels also nested in 2006 (but not 2007 - there was construction on a tall apartment building just next door - see attached photo made in 2007). Rob Cicchetti has been watching this pair for several years, and his notes about his kestrels have been invaluable to me and many others. See attached photos of (1) the nest at 69th and Broadway; (2) the adult male and female in 2006 (photo courtesy of Rob Cicchetti); (3) the male bringing food to that nest (photo courtesy of Rob Cicchetti); and (4) a photo of the young kestrels about to fledge at the 69th street nest in 2006 (photo courtesy of Rob Cicchetti).





#2. Female (l) and Male (r)



#3. Prey delivery to nest.



Photo #4 – two young kestrels about to fledge in 2006.



Photo #5 – young female kestrel (note down on blue forehead) just out of nest
(Photos 2-5 courtesy of Rob Cicchetti)

Next, Richard and I walked to 80th and Broadway, to see a nest opposite Zabar's (featured in the NYC Kestrel Newsletter #1). This nest was discovered by Kellee Rosenheim in 2007, just before the young falcons left the nest. (We don't know for how many years this nest cavity has been used.) After about an hour of sitting around in the cold with not much sign of anything, Richard and I were very pleased to see a male kestrel fly in and deliver a small rodent with a very long tail (likely a young rat) to the nest at about 4:30pm. We could hear him calling (killy-killy-killy) as he flew to the nest. We then watch the female leave the nest and proceed to eat 75% of the prey on a favorite "plucking-eating" perch across the street (extensive whitewash below that perch). And we were very heartened to see her return to the nest with the remaining 25% of the prey - indicating to us that she has some very young mouths to feed. (In fact, Chuck McAlexander at his nest site in Chelsea-26th street, is predicting that his kestrels will fledge about 10 May to 15 May...he believes his kestrels will leave the nest a few days earlier than last year.) Finally, while we were at 80th street and Broadway, we were amazed to see a Black Vulture circling above us, and then even more amazed when two Peregrine Falcons (adult male and female) arrived from out of nowhere - not to attack the vulture but to soar in thermals near the larger bird. And when I went home, I found this article that Jorge Santiago once sent to me:

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New York Times
2 July 1993
Letter to the Editor

Perching Kestrels

To the Editor:

Birds may be nesting on rooftops (Topics of the Times, June 22), but less so this year in Manhattan's West 80's, where **falcons** (sometimes likened to hawks) have taken up residence. Check out the television antennas around Broadway and 82nd to 84th streets for these Robin-sized birds.

Seth Fielding, New York
June 23rd, 1993

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Next, Richard and I went to 96th street and Broadway, where our good friend Sharon Kass had watched a pair of nesting kestrels for 2-3 years (2003-2006 or thereabouts). We saw no activity there...but we only spent about 15-20 minutes looking for kestrels flying/perching in the area. In past years kestrels have fledged young from this area - I remember a Daily News story from June 1998 or 1999 when a brood of five young kestrels ended up on the ground in the area of 96th street near the West Side Highway. The Cause? Severe thunderstorms just after the birds left the nest. Once out of the nest and in the rain, the young falcons became soaked and were unable to fly well, ending up on the ground. There they were found by curious onlookers...and ultimately delivered to the Raptor Trust in New Jersey where Len Soucy and Company took care of them until they could fly well. (I think they were released in NJ though...). Jorge, can you help me track down that article in the Daily News (or NY Post perhaps?).

From 96th and Broadway (the active kestrel nest on 86th and Central Park West was not visited

today), Richard and I went north to 104th street and Broadway, where Ben Goloff has been seeing an adult kestrel or two. Ben along with Jacob Drucker have been our primary spies above 100th street on Broadway.

So Richard and I sat ourselves down on a bench in the "traffic island" in the middle of Broadway, facing to the south. Within 10 minutes, a male kestrel arrived to perch on a building on the east side of 104th and Broadway. We then saw this male fold his wings and make a dive at a group of small birds (a mix of starlings, pigeons and house sparrows - he was after the sparrows) about 150 feet north of us, on the same "island." The male kestrel missed his prey - but Richard and I knew we were somewhere within the territory of a pair of kestrels. Indeed as we headed east at about 6:20pm, we found a female kestrel perched on an antenna on 105th street between Amsterdam and Manhattan Avenues - so our best guess is that a nest is less than 200 feet from where we saw that perched female kestrel!

As an aside, our friend Randy Schutz reported a calling male kestrel from 122nd street and Manhattan Avenue - obviously another kestrel territory we will have to investigate.

By 6:30pm, Richard and I were heading home via the north woods of Central Park (in the "Loch" area). Eastern Screech-owls (five including three young) were sitting about 25-35 feet up in a cherry tree. Once upon a time (until the 1950s) both screech-owls and kestrels nested in Central Park. Then something(s) happened, and kestrels now are only found nesting on buildings near Central Park. By comparison, the Eastern Screech-owl became extinct in the park, but because of a restoration project begun in 1998, there are a few pairs nesting in Central Park again...but it has taken 10 years! The morale of the story: it is much better (easier!) to keep what still lives here, than to lose it and try to do a restoration after the species is gone.

So, we seek information about what is still here in order to keep what we already have - and we remain all ears....

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22 May 2008

American Kestrel Nest Survey - Issue #6

American Kestrels are beginning to fledge: we just received the happy news from Chuck McAlexander who watches the west 25th street nest in Manhattan (Chelsea District), that one young female made her first flight late yesterday afternoon (early evening),,,and at least another young male is still in the nest. Unfortunately the young female ended up on the ground under a parked truck, and seems to have spent the night there. This morning, Chuck found her and transported the young falcon to the roof of his building on west 25th street. Chuck's kestrels are often the first to fledge in NYC.

We have also found or heard about several kestrel nests in other parts of NYC since the last newsletter. Most recently, reports have come in from Rob Bate about an active kestrel nest in the cornice of a building opposite the 6BC community garden on 6th Street between avenues B and C. Dennis Edge, who found it, is monitoring and photographing...GREAT!

For our part we have been spending much time at the west 105th street kestrel nest site where Manny and Blanca Vazquez are keeping watch. Here is the nice quiet street where they live. Can you see the nest? We will give you a hint – it is on the left (north) side of 105th street...in the rusted out cornice of one of those brownstones.



Here is the female looking out from the nest cavity on 21 May 2008 while it was raining:



When the adults begin perching at the edge of the nest as in the above photo, it is our experience that the young are getting close to fledging (about 10 days or so). The next (final) phase of the nest season will be when the young kestrels begin sitting at the entrance/exit of the nest cavity. ***One last important note about these west 105th street kestrels:*** they had at least two nest cavities to choose to use along the same cornice. Why do you think they chose the one they did, and not the one to the left, the second bracket to the west of the actual nest?

And just in case you are wondering what is the “natural” habitat of the American Kestrel in NYC, see the following photographs. Yesterday while I watched, I saw the male and female kestrels leave their perches below to hunt in the surrounding neighborhood (next page).



Female (adult) on the left and the Male (adult) with his blue wings on the right

Here is the natural habitat of NYC (Manhattan anyway) kestrels, looking northeast. You can see the trees of Central Park in the distance on the far right.



What were the kestrels chasing you ask? Great question...and I think I can partially answer it as well. The female was off after starlings, while the male focused his attention on capturing House Sparrows. They capture these prey species on city streets, and they rarely venture to the park to look for food. (When they do, they hunt migrant wood warblers in the tops of trees when big waves of migrants arrive in the park.)

From my elevated vantage point, I saw the male capture at least two sparrows in four hours of observation. He “cached” one on the roof of the golden-colored building across the street. The female was not successful, but I did find starling wings, beaks and feet (as well as those of House Sparrows) below a favorite plucking perch just a few feet from where I took these photos...so she has been quite successful in the very recent past.

On 21 May, we also had the great good fortune to accompany Ivan Martinez to the Hunt’s Point section of the South Bronx. Here a pair of kestrels has been nesting since at least 2002, if not much longer. (See nest photo on the following page.) Ivan told me wonderful stories of kestrels bringing small snakes back to the nest. At this nest site in the vegetable/meat/fish market area east of the elevated Bruckner Expressway, there are a number of vacant lots, with an occasional Ring-necked Pheasant still being seen. The kestrels hunt those open fields, and have managed to nest near the cornice of the junction of the walls of a warehouse. Ivan and I will be following up on this nest site in the coming days.

American Kestrel Nest
21 May 2008
Hunt's Point, Bronx (NYC)



Kestrel Nest discovered by Ivan Martinez

With this issue we have decided to send the information in one package as a portable document file, also known as a PDF. ...hence the use of Adobe Acrobat. Note that all previous five issues of the 2008 NYC American Kestrel nest survey are available upon request (free) – and all are now PDFs.

Do send us your kestrel observations. If you see a kestrel in your neighborhood, there is certainly a nest within of few blocks. And if you see a strange form sitting in a rusted out cornice of a building – Eureka! – you have found a nest.

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Male American Kestrel in flight near the Hunt's Point nest in the South Bronx