

# 19 April 2011

## American Kestrel Nest Survey NYC - Issue #7 (2011)

### *Kestrels are beginning to Nest*

With this issue we begin to solve two riddles: (a) given a choice, will kestrels continue to nest in a building cornice or move to a nearby nest box placed there especially for them? Do read Anders Peltomaa critical observations on pp. 6-7; and (b) what effect (if any) do European Starlings have upon kestrel nest site selection? See pp. 8-9 for observations from Pennsylvania (Diane Allison), Brooklyn (Gene Miller) and Manhattan (Francois Portmann). *Please tell us what you are seeing vis-a-vis starling-kestrel interactions.* Thanks!



*Above: male American Kestrel calling to a female to enter a nest cavity with him in the Bronx (Antin Avenue and Bronxdale Avenue). Photo by Abian Saks on 1 April 2011. This courtship behavior is occurring throughout the city right now. One more photo of Bronx kestrels by Abian is on the following page.*

## Kestrel Reports from our Spies in the Field:

**From:** JT

**To:** rdcny@earthlink.net

**Subject:** Looks Great.

**Date:** 6 Apr 6 2011 (Wednesday)

The newsletter looks great. I re-read past newsletters. I think Kim's bird [*of West Houston and 6<sup>th</sup> Ave; see Kestrel Newsletter #1 for 2011; pp. 3-4*] may be one of the females that dines at my place. I have question about my Box/nest. It weighs a ton. My old spot was no good because of location and direction. Can I place on edge/corner that I could isolate? Nest would be approx. 75 ft up from gardens below, but level with my terrace. It faces your recommended direction west/south west. It would be undisturbed [**Yes**]. The other good spot involves my Buildings OK and could take some time. I jotting down: times, weather and which bird shows up. Sorry about taking up all the space on pictures. I'm not tech savvy. I have a niece that will help me put pictures on a disc next week. You can go through if you like. I'm sure you can see stuff in pictures that I don't. I really impressed at all the other folks that are doing this and amazed at all the great pictures. Tell me the best way to report to you. once a week? twice a month? send breaking news? [*as often as you wish – I enjoy all reports – the more the better*]. I can see by the others that you get a tremendous amount of material.

JT [*who lives near Houston and 6<sup>th</sup> Ave.*]

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**Above:** *American Kestrel zooming across the New York City skyline on 16 April 2011. Photographed by Abian Saks from the old Pelham Bay Park landfill in the Bronx, looking south toward Manhattan. The site has become a large grassland, and is a magnet for migrating kestrels in spring/autumn. Occasionally a pair nests there in one of the eight nest boxes put up by Jacob Masenior and myself in spring 1998 (see page 4).*



**From:** Don & Carol McCartney <DCMcCartney@earthlink.net>

**Subject:** Oregon Kestrels

**Date:** 5 Apr 2011 (Tuesday)

Kestrel Team Members,

I find it quite odd to be writing to you in the first week of April about the Kestrel season, but it is already unfolding. Normally, the birds start hanging around their chosen real estate during the last two weeks in April. The earliest first-egg date over the last 13 years has been April 26. However, I am already receiving reports of Kestrels from vigilant landowners. Diane Kook saw a Kestrel enter the box in her yard on March 27! Last weekend Diane readied the boxes in her far-flung territory; the wind really howls out there (Skeleton burn to Millican), so she waits until the latest possible time to add shavings. She found three pairs of Kestrels around the boxes, and one pair was mating.

Dean Hale found a mated pair near one of his boxes, and Steve and Patti Janego, near Hwy 126 and Goodrich Rd., had a Kestrel near their box last Saturday. So, Kestrels are starting to breed at least a full two weeks early this year!

I find it rather exciting to be hearing about Kestrels this early, but this has a dark side to it. Kestrels brood their chicks at night for just a few days after hatching. If there is a hard frost in June and the adults have stopped brooding, the chicks can die of hypothermia. Thus, the survival rate for eggs laid May 5th or later have a better chance for survival.

Checking boxes too early can have negative consequences, too. Female Kestrels seem to spend some time in the boxes, even before they have commenced laying eggs. A couple of years ago, I checked a box in late April and found a female standing on the shavings, but with no eggs. We were beak to nose for a couple of seconds, and then she flushed from the box. That box went unused that season, and that was the only abandonment that I have experienced in checking hundreds of boxes over the years. Normally, we do the first box check about May 7 to May 15. I'm in a bit of a quandary about when to schedule the first box check for this season. I will let you know ASAP.

I would like to introduce a new volunteer, and he is Vernon Threlkeld. Vernon alerted me to some good Kestrel habitat in a burn area out on China Hat Rd. We put up three new boxes, and Vernon offered to monitor them, as he will also be checking Diane's Lewis's Woodpecker boxes in the same general area.

As always, please contact me if you should have any questions.

Hoping for another 55-box year -

Don

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**From:** Paul Weyker

**To:** rdcny@earthlink.net

**Subject:** Kestrels

**Date:** 4 Apr 4 2011

My name is Paul Weyker, I am an anesthesiology resident at New York Presbyterian Hospital. I was working with Dr. Joseph Haddad (who sent me your information) the other day in the OR and he was talking about a pair of kestrels that nest at his apartment. This was very fascinating to me because as a teenager I was a licensed falconer and had a red-tailed hawk for several years (back home in Wisconsin). During that time I worked with

a man who caught, banded, and released various hawks, falcons, and accipiters and shared data with the US Fish and Wildlife Service. When I went away to college I let my red-tail go, however while in college I built a couple kestrel nesting boxes that I hung on buildings on my parent's farm. The very first year I had a pair that nested in one of the boxes. They successfully raised 5 babies that year. I have attached a few pictures from that summer [*see Paul's photo below – our first hatchlings in NYC will appear approx. 20 April*].

Paul



**From:** LD  
**To:** Robert DeCandido PhD <rdcny@earthlink.net>  
**Subject:** Brooklyn Kestrels  
**Date:** 6 Apr 2011 (Wednesday)

Dear Robert,

The Fort Greene Park [Brooklyn] kestrels are back, with a slightly different nest and perch (luckily the perch is still outside my window). The nest is very easy to identify, in the cornice of a brownstone about 6-8 buildings down Washington Park from the corner of Dekalb.

I also saw a kestrel pair attacking a crow on the church on North 6 between Bedford and Driggs in Williamsburg about a month ago.

Best,

LD

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**From:** JT  
**To:** "Robert DeCandido, PhD" <rdcny@earthlink.net>  
**Subject:** SoHo Kestrels  
**Date:** 7 Apr 2011 (Thursday)

I've been seeing kestrels about 4-4:30 pm last few days at 178 Houston (formerly Jerry's Laundry and DALLS JONES building). Female lands on roof vent stacks or old brick chimneys. Then flies to poles on my terrace, grabs dinner flies to corner of Houston St and 6th (building next to quick stop deli) stop and eats. I have also seen her grab food and fly down Bedford south right down 6th Ave but I lose her when she turns corner. Male has been showing after she calls from pole. He is very wary of me and flies off at the slightest motion. I had three females early; I think your girl looked like the smaller female.

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**From:** Bill Benish  
**To:** Robert DeCandido PhD <rdcny@earthlink.net>  
**Subject:** Central Park Kestrel  
**Date:** 7 Apr 2011 (Thursday)

Hello Bob,

I've attached a photo of a kestrel that had just captured a Chipping Sparrow near the feeders in Central Park this afternoon. I was watching the bunch of mostly chipping sparrows with two other people late this afternoon when all of a sudden, this kestrel swooped down a mere eight feet away from me and caught the sparrow on the ground! I took this photo from afar, after the bird flew away with its prize.

Never a dull moment!

Best regards,

Bill

*[see Bill's photo on the next page – thanks!].*



**From:** Laura Mattera  
**To:** rdcny@earthlink.net  
**Subject:** Bronx Kestrel  
**Date:** 8 April 2011 (Friday)

As for the Kestrel, not happy about that.. about 2 weeks ago, one flew into the front (I have a large climbing rose) and the sparrows went wild - looks like they "ganged" up on him and he flew away for his life! Thankfully, without a catch. I hope not to see that one again!

Saw a hawk leisurely fly overhead last night about 8pm; couldn't tell what kind, but caught me off guard and it was gone before I could figure out which one it was!

Take care,

Laura

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**From:** Anders Peltomaa  
**To:** Robert DeCandido <rdcny@earthlink.net>, Deborah Allen  
**Subject:** Amsterdam Avenue Kestrels (Manhattan)  
**Date:** 10 April 2011 (Saturday)

Hi Bob and Deb,

After I left you and Richard by the Reservoir I stopped by the kestrel site at 511 Amsterdam. Didn't see anything, so I started walking home - but right when I was about to start walking up 84th Street a bird swooped around the corner of the nest building and flew along the row cornices. It was a Kestrel, and it was carrying something in its talons. The bird made a brief stop (a second or two) by the old nest opening. Afterwards it flew



back towards me and perched on the cellphone antenna on the SW corner of the nest building and I could confirm that it was the male.

I walked back across the street and watched the nest opening from the stoop straight across from 511. (Why had he stopped by the nest? Had the female gone inside?) After about 5 minutes I saw a head pop in to view in the nest opening. They have made their choice!

And although it would have been fun if they had taken the new nest box (at least for the building's owner), I for one am glad **they chose the old nest in the cornice because that allows me to view them from the street:-)**

What a perfect finale for a nice afternoon walk in the park. Hope you got your Ruby-crowned Kinglet photo.

- Anders

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**From:** Carine Mitchell  
**Sent:** 11Apr 2011 (Monday)  
**To:** Deborah Allen  
**Subject:** Virgin Island Kestrels

Hi Deb,

I can't wait to tell you about all the kestrels we saw on St. John, Virgin Islands. They feed on lizards. Lots of other beautiful birds, too. I'll be on your walk next Sunday, April 17 ([www.BirdingBob.com](http://www.BirdingBob.com)). Have a good week.

Carine

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**From:** The Allisons in Pennsylvania  
**To:** rdcny@earthlink.net  
**Subject:** Question - Kestrels and Starlings  
**Date:** 15 April 2011

Hello, My name is Diane Allison, you stayed in my home when you came to Bucks Birders [[Pennsylvania](#)] to speak in July. Anyway, I was wondering if you could tell me about kestrels and starlings. Do starlings deter kestrels or do the kestrels take a nest site if they want it???

Thought maybe being in the city you may have some first-hand knowledge of their interactions. I am working with a birder friend to put up boxes, he is doing all the work!!! I have just been making landowner contacts for places and watching for kestrels to see the best places for success. I was just wondering what impact starlings will have.

Also, just a quick story. I put up a box near my home about 5 years ago or so after I saw a couple of kestrels hanging around in early March. Well, they moved on and it has never been used, but I keep it clean and ready. Some years I have seen a kestrel around for a day or two again early in March. .... but this year at the end of march I noticed one around then saw it periodically and then this past weekend I confirmed a second bird, a female - so FANTASTIC - a pair! Tonight when I went for my evening walk there were 3 kestrels on the wires in the vicinity of the box, don't know what to make of that, but we'll see what happens, I am excited just to see them as there is also a pair hanging around one of our boxes about a mile down the road so we are hoping to get some takers. Anyway, if you have any thoughts on the starling vs. kestrel question I would love to hear them.

*then:*

We are trying to determine how diligent our starling eviction/elimination efforts have to be [[Very!](#)]. I plan to keep an eye on the box down the road that has some starlings hanging around but also has a pair of kestrels interested..... we won't allow starlings to be successful in raising young but whether we can be enough of a deterrent early on to help the kestrels win out remains to be seen, it may be up to them to fight for the box at least in addition to our efforts.

Diane.

*Really superb questions about starlings-kestrels! Many people believe starlings are the #1 problem for kestrels seeking to nest in a cavity...starlings will work as a group of 3-5 to take over a nest cavity from woodpeckers, bluebirds and on occasion, even kestrels. We need more first-hand reports on the effect(s) of starlings upon kestrels in NYC and rural areas too.*



**From:** gene4eagles (Gene Miller)  
**To:** rdcny@earthlink.net  
**Subject:** Have The Kestrels Left Bath Ave. (Brooklyn)?  
**Date:** 15 Apr 2011 (Friday)

I checked out the Bath Ave. [Brooklyn] Kestrel site this morning, and found a ton of European Starlings in the area, but no Kestrels. **I even viewed a Starling in the Kestrel nest/cornice. I viewed a similar trend a few weeks ago, and wondered if the Starlings would displace the Kestrels. This might be happening. I will check the site in the future to confirm this.** I went to the Palisades yesterday, seeking Peregrines, but no luck. The only raptors I viewed were a single Red-Tail hawk, and many Turkey Vultures soaring above and along the cliffs. The Turkey Vulture is surely a bird that only a "Mother can love". I was at the State Line Lookout, and Alpine Boat basin, where I had some success last year in finding Peregrines. Nothing this year. I know that there are four nests in the cliffs along the Palisades, but don't know the exact location. Do you know where the nest boxes are? Hoping to bring you more positive reports in the future. [*For NJ Peregrines, see:*

<http://www.fredmiranda.com/forum/topic/1000237>

GENE

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**From:** Francois Portmann  
**To:** "Robert DeCandido, PhD" <rdcny@earthlink.net>  
**Subject:** Kestrels - Manhattan (and Starlings)  
**Date:** 16 April 2011

Hi Bob,

Good to see you at Central Park!

The kestrel was busy chasing off a starling trying to enter the nest cavity and then perched on a building across 2nd ave. Again, I could not tell who it is (no binoc and flat light) but the bird looked pretty big.

Francois

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**From:** Rob Goldstein  
**Subject:** Kestrel sighted on my balcony on 32nd and 2nd (Manhattan)  
**Date:** 18 April 2011 (Monday)

I understand that you are asking people to inform you about Kestrel sightings. A Kestrel was perched on my balcony at 11:30AM, Tuesday, March 29 for about 5 minutes looking north-east, up and across 2nd Avenue [*see Rob's photo on the next page*]. I snapped a few photos - they're from about 10 feet away, but if you blow them up, you can more easily identify the bird. It flew away when I wasn't looking so I'm not sure where it went.

I'm an outdoor enthusiast and conservation professional who recently moved to NY from California 4 months ago, so I would be interested in learning more about what's going on in NYC in terms of avian conservation. Also I was curious if Kestrels have already been seen in my area or if it's a new sighting [*some info on the next page as well*]

Rob Goldstein



**Above:** male kestrel on Paul Goldstein's balcony on 32nd Street and 2<sup>nd</sup> Ave. The photo is looking north up 2nd Ave - the gold dome church is at 34th by the entrance to the midtown tunnel. We have received reports of kestrels in this area (especially from Lexington Ave east to York Ave). There are many apartment buildings with cornices in that area...great kestrel nesting habitat, as well as House Sparrow habitat. Please find us a nest Rob!

**From:** Janet Bachant  
**To:** "Robert DeCandido, PhD" <rdcny@earthlink.net>  
**Subject:** Kestrel Attack! (86th street and Central Park West)  
**Date:** 18 April 2011 (Monday)

Hi Bob,

Just want to report on a kestrel attack a few minutes ago (6:00 PM) on Monday. Not sure whether he was successful (it was a male). Haven't seen them around as much in the last couple of months. Also have not seen them on the ole stomping grounds when I've been by. Have you had any other reports of sightings at the Amsterdam Ave nest? [*Yes – see Anders' report on page 6-7 of this issue – looks like they will nest in the cornice again – and not the newly placed nest box on the roof of that building.*] I thought that after I saw them on their usual perches I would see them a lot more but that has not been....

Hope you are well. Will try to join you on a walk soon. Janet

Janet Lee Bachant, Ph.D.

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**From:** Abian Sacks  
**To:** Robert DeCandido PhD <rdcny@earthlink.net>  
**Subject:** Landfill fun (the Bronx)  
**Date:** 18 April 2011 (Monday)

Howdy Boberino,

Photographing kestrels aint easy! Especially when you've got to sneak into a landfill and evade its security forces. Throw in some strong winds, a little sunburn... I love kestrels.

Crouched low on top of the landfill, my bro, Mike, and I witnessed plenty of kestrels on the hunt. If the kestrels on Antin Place are city birds [*p.1 photo*], then the ones at the landfill [*p.2 photo*] are country folk.

Hope you enjoy these! Found the gnatcatcher near Hunter Island.

- Abe

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**From:** JT  
**To:** "Robert DeCandido, PhD" <rdcny@earthlink.net>  
**Subject:** 4/11/11-4/17/11 (Manhattan Kestrels)  
**Date:** 18 April 2011 (Monday)

Hi Bob,

No Kestrels Monday- Friday [11-15 April]. Maybe nesting. Then Saturday Windy and rainy. He showed at 1 pm, 3:30, 5:15, and 7:20 and grabbed food 3 of 4 visits. Sunday I saw male twice. Left food but I did not see food taken. No sign of Female. I'll keep you posted.

Thanks

JT





*Above: male kestrel coming at you in the vicinity of Houston Street and 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue – photographed by JT. Take special note of the black metal cornice on the building in the background – particularly that roundish hole. That is a typical nest opening here in NYC for kestrels. These falcons also like the brackets (“modillion” in architectural terms) to nest in, if one has a hole. The brackets (modillions) are the decorative rectangular structures that support the cornice. Four can be seen in this photo – but none have holes. Photo by JT of SoHo.*

**If you see a kestrel perched near your home, there is likely a pair in the area – and a nearby nest.**

**Deborah Allen and Robert DeCandido PhD**

**[rdcny@earthlink.net](mailto:rdcny@earthlink.net)**