

Species Sheets: American Kestrel



photo by Kate Davis ©

Common name: American Kestrel

Latin Name: *Falco sparverius*

Field Marks: Length 10 1/2 inches
Wing span 23 inches



Smallest and most common falcon in U.S. Light colored with spots or streaks below, brown above. Males have slate gray “shoulders” or wing coverts and solid brown tail with black bar at tip. Female has barred tail, and both sexes have two black stripes on each side of face. Very conspicuous and noisy, seen perched on telephone lines bobbing tail and head. Call is a sharp “killy, killy, killy”. Probably the most abundant daytime raptor on continent. Used to be called Sparrow Hawk, but “kestrel” indicates falcon and is the name given to this type of bird around the world.

Habitat:

Open country, farmland, orchards, and fields throughout North America.

Behavior:

Feeds mostly on large insects like grasshoppers plus rodents such as mice and voles with the occasional catch of small birds. May hover with rapidly beating wings when hunting. Family groups are seen hunting together in the late summer.

Nest and eggs:

Falcons do not build nests, and kestrels are no exception. Woodpecker holes or natural cavities in trees are favored sites. May take over old magpie nests. Eggs number 3-5. Incubation is by both parents but mostly female for 28-31 days.

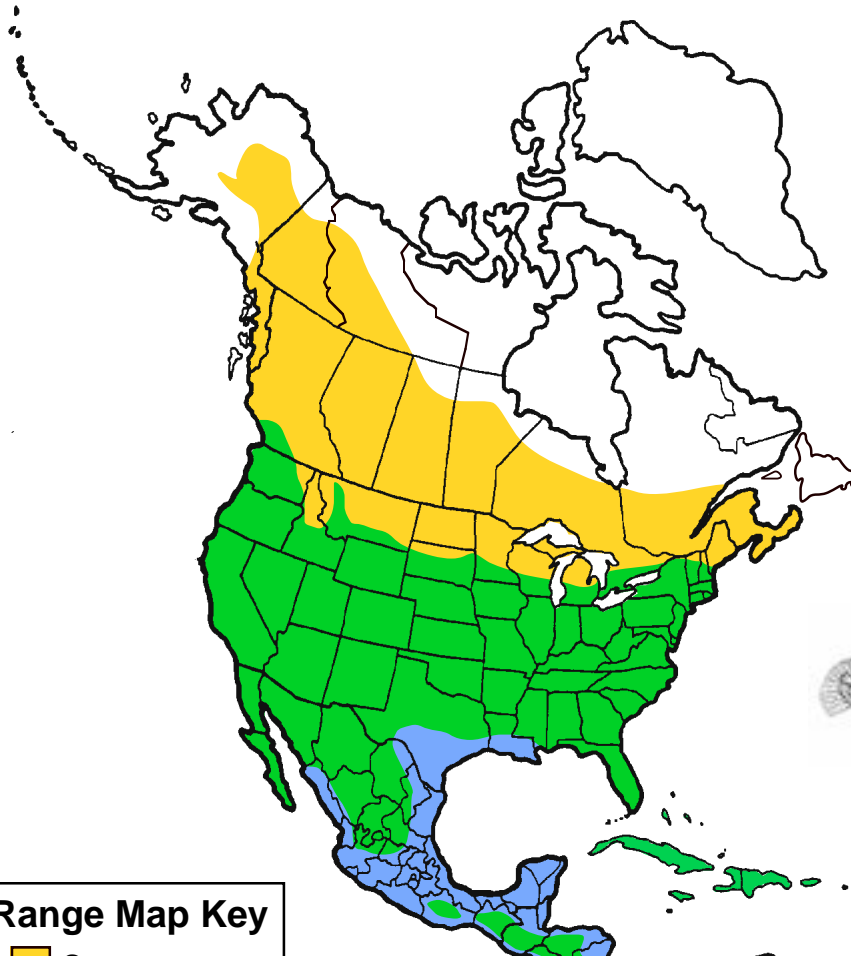
Movement:

We may enjoy kestrels year-round during mild winters, but usually these birds migrate to the southern states and even in to Mexico and Central America. May migrate in small groups of three or four birds.

Interesting Fact:

By building nesting boxes, one may attract a family of these birds. Place box about 15 inches tall with an 8 by 8-inch floor and a 3-inch hole overlooking a hunting area with some good nearby perches. With luck, some kestrels will discover this human-made home, which may be occupied year after year.

Range Map: American Kestrel



American Kestrel, Copyright © Kate Davis

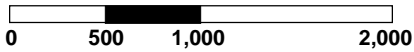


These maps are designed to show the general limits of occurrence. Within those limits, each species will likely be found only in appropriate habitat.

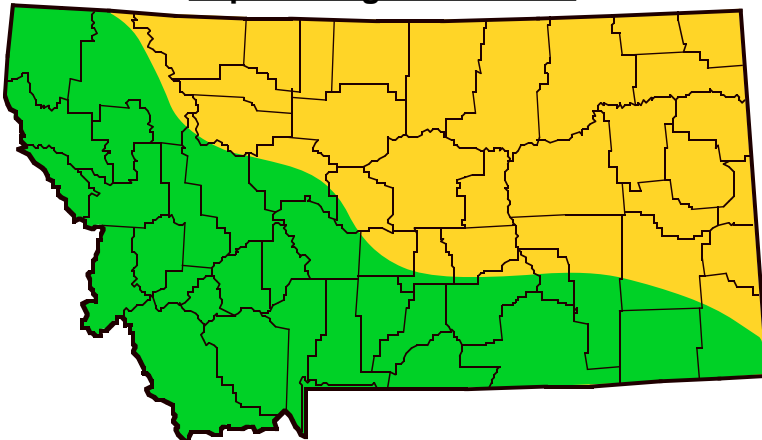
Range Map Key

- Summer
- Year-round
- Winter

scale: 1 inch = 1,000 miles



Raptor Range in Montana



Montana range maps are based on the Montana Bird Distribution data.