



INSTALLING AND MONITORING KESTREL NEST BOXES

HOW AND WHEN DO I INSTALL MY NEST BOX?

Install boxes no later than the end of February. Boxes should be placed in areas surrounded by at least 1 acre of open habitat in a larger area of approximately 50 acres of primarily open landscape and as far away from woodlots as possible. Place them in open grassy areas away from woodland edges to reduce use by non-target bird species, squirrels and Cooper's Hawks. Nest boxes should be placed at least 1/2 mile apart. Install the boxes 10-20 feet up from the ground on a tree, post, out-building, barn, or other structure. Orient the box with a southern exposure to aid in thermoregulation and help prevent starlings from using the box. Place wood chips in the box.

WHY DO WE NEED TO MONITOR?

Monitoring kestrel boxes allows the observer to prevent non-target species using the boxes, documents that kestrels are using the box, and determines whether or not young fledge.

MONITORING

When do I monitor?

Monitoring should begin between March 1st and March 15th and continue through June. If a pair of kestrels nests later into the season, continue monitoring it beyond the end of June. Monitor the boxes weekly.

How to monitor

Early in the breeding season kestrels may not be present, but monitoring is necessary to make sure that starlings or other species, like mice or squirrels, do not use the box. If another species other than kestrels is observed using the box, get a ladder, open the box, clean it out and replace the wood chips. Be ready for the inhabitant to exit when you open the box or gently tap the box before opening it. If other native bird species such as Eastern Screech Owls or Eastern Bluebirds use the box don't disturb them and allow them to continue using the box.

Hopefully you will start to see a pair of kestrels using the box or even a male bringing food to a female. After a pair is observed using the box, continue visiting weekly to document nesting status using the data sheet to document your observations. Observations should be made between mid-morning and late afternoon for 15 to 30 minutes, from March through late June or until the box is no longer being used by kestrels. Select a viewing location that allows you to see the nest box and the surrounding area clearly. Be sure to inspect nearby power lines, fences, and trees, where kestrels often perch, nesting kestrels frequently enter and exit nest boxes by both the male and female. After about 30 days from when nesting began, the eggs should hatch. Females tend to be the primary brooder until a week after the eggs hatch and so the male may be seen more frequently during this stage. After that point, you are likely to see both parents since both bring food to the young. The young will fledge about 30 days after hatching. The young are dependent on their parents for 12-14 days after fledging and the entire family may be seen in the surrounding area during this period.

A final visit should occur one month after the nestlings have fledged to clean the nest box of all materials. Leave boxes out during the winter to provide winter cover for kestrels, screech owls, and other resident birds.

