

Our Feathered Friends - December 21, 2011

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It is hard to believe that Christmas is here, and before we blink it will be 2012. I hope you have all had a great year and are looking forward to another exciting adventure in the coming one. **Ray** and I would like to wish all of you a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

I live in Mt. Juliet and while traveling around town this past week or two I've noticed a frequent feathered friend perched on some power lines near Old Lebanon Dirt Road. It is a beautiful American Kestrel, and he has been keeping a keen eye on some open fields from his perch. I decided to look him up this week and learn more about him since I'm not familiar with our smallest falcon. Here are some of the interesting things I learned...



Aside from being the smallest falcon in North America, he is also the most colorful. With a combination of slate blue and rusty reddish coloring sprinkled with black, he is in my opinion one of the most beautiful birds in our area. Males and females are generally the same, but females tend to be a little muted in their colors.

They hunt in the day and like to eat insects like dragonflies, beetles, spiders, grasshoppers and small prey like voles, mice, bats and lizards. Kestrels can see ultra-violet light, which means they can pick out urine trails left by prey. This is an advantage when it comes to hunting because they are keenly aware of their prey's paths and routines. Kestrels will also hide extra food they catch in stumps, grass, and tree roots. This is either to save it for later or to protect it from thieves until the coast is clear. However, as you can imagine they are themselves unfortunately prey to many of our larger raptors like the Coopers, Red-Tailed and Sharp-shinned Hawks, as well as Barn Owls and American Crows.

They live year-round in our area and nest in open cavities. Since they are unable to make their own nest cavities they rely heavily on old woodpecker nests and man-made structures. The male will hunt out a suitable location and bring his mate for the final inspection/approval. The female will lay 3-7 eggs and both will take turns incubating the eggs.

Kestrels are on the decline in many areas but will readily nest in man-made boxes, so if your yard meets their "conditions," you may want to consider putting up a nesting box. They prefer to be on a tree line next to an open field or in open areas with dense ground vegetation and shrubs. They are also common near parks, so if you live near a park you may want to consider providing a nesting site.

A good site to visit for plans on making a nesting box for the American Kestrel is http://ny.audubon.org/PDFs/American_KestrelNest_Plan.pdf

. These plans were created by Art Gingert, and he recommends a box about 9 inches by 10 inches with a side opening. He also recommends an oval opening 3-4 inches in diameter.

Our Friend and Bird Guru Ray is making good improvement, but due to some pain and difficulty using his left hand, I will continue to help write articles. I hope to spend some time with him early in January to get some important information typed up about his ordeal. He would like to pass on his experiences and hopefully prevent others from encountering a similar situation. Please keep him in your prayers as he continues to return to normal. Also, please email me with any comments or suggestions you have about my articles or to suggest future topics at [This e-mail address is being protected from spambots. You need JavaScript enabled to view it](mailto:) .

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