

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