

3 June 2008

American Kestrel Nest Survey NYC - Issue #9

Kestrels are Fledging!!!

Greetings,

All around NYC young kestrels are beginning to leave their nest (fledging). During the course of the next three weeks, the vast majority of young NYC kestrels will make their first flights. It is a time fraught with danger, but much excitement and fun too. Below we describe what you should do if you find a young kestrel on the ground. And on the last page of this issue we have a photo quiz.

First though, we have to get your eyes trained on a nest. On Monday, 2 June, Deborah Allen, Randy Schutz and I were at the kestrel nest near the Brooklyn Bridge. We watched several heads moving around and then took some photos. (Deborah's are much better than mine by the way.) How many heads can you count? More importantly, when you start seeing your young kestrels at the front of the nest, they will begin fledging in the next few days (and possibly even that day). They may not all leave the nest on the same day, but when you see young birds sitting at the entrance (exit) to the nest as the two below, they are ready to take wing



Young kestrels (three) at the Brooklyn Bridge nest site – 2 June 2008

In the above photo, note the absence of down (tiny white feathers) on the foreheads of the two young females sitting next to one another, while the young bird in the lower part of the photo has many white feathers on the head still. The lower bird might not fledge for another week, while the two sisters could fly at any moment.

Please look at the Brooklyn Bridge nest site again – how many young can you count now?



Brooklyn Bridge (Front Street) Kestrel nest – photographed on 2 June 2008 – four young kestrels!

Many thanks to our kestrel spies for providing information about happenings at NYC nests. Here are some updates: at the 80th street kestrel nest (the George H. Beane site), we received a report from Zach Lehman of Great Eastern Ecology. He reported that a young kestrel made its first flight on Monday (2 June) and flew into a window near the nest. The young bird ended up on the ground...and concerned onlookers placed the young falcon in a tree. Meanwhile in Brooklyn, Brad Klein and Danielle Gustafson report that a kestrel had fledged from the Hoyt Street nest. Brad sent a photo of a young bird still in the nest...do you think it is a male or a female?





The photo on the left shows the 2008 nest building at East 6th street (a late 19th century apartment building with metal cornice). The nest (see arrow) is located on the front of the building about 60-70 feet above the street. This nest has wonderful kestrel spies – Ms. Caroline Blacque and her dad, Pascal; Dino Sorbello, Nelson the Super One!; Karen Tighe; Daniel Root; Marion and of course Dennis Edge and Rob Bate.



Male leaving nest cavity located in right (east) bracket above in late May 2008.

Dino Sorbello sent us some important information...see photo below taken in spring 2003 on 6th street. It shows a just fledged young male kestrel (note down on forehead) on the ground. So now we know that kestrels have been nesting on 6th street for five years at least!



What to Do if You Find a Young Kestrel on the Ground?

At this time of the year when young kestrels make their first flights they are very (very) vulnerable. They often end up on the ground (street) where their parents cannot bring them food or defend them from problems such as moving vehicles, cats, etc. Note here that a kestrel on the ground of a rooftop is in a good place...and that is what our goal will be – to get a street level kestrel to a rooftop where the adults can bring the young falcon food and defend it from predators such as Crows and Blue Jays and even Robins.

So if you see a kestrel on the street that is being gawked at and surrounded by people, get yourself a coat or a large towel and calmly (slowly) approach the young bird. When you are within reach, toss the coat/towel over the kestrel...and then transport the package to a nearby rooftop. Obviously catching the young kestrel will not be easy, but it is doable. The most important thing to do is to transport the bird to a secure rooftop in the area where you found the bird. The parents will find it...(youngsters become very vocal when they are hungry). A good rooftop is one that is about 40-80 feet high and does not get any visitors (foot traffic). Alternately, a ledge or fire escape that faces the main street would be ok. If you want more advice, then give me a call (718-828-8262). Also, only call the NYC Parks Dept. or another conservation group as a last resort. They will likely come and take the bird away (and bring it to a re-hab facility). This is a good strategy if the parents have been killed...but when a young one is taken away, it is usually not released back into NYC – so we lose a future breeder in NYC. My opinion as a biologist is to keep young birds with their parents in the habitat where they were hatched...it is the only way we can hope to retain a breeding population of kestrels in NYC.

Here is a photo sent to us by Marion Smith. It shows a female kestrel (appears to be an adult) perched on her fire escape on East 6th street in April 2004. By the way, based upon observations made on our most recent visit to the 6th street nest, we think the kestrels there will fledge about June 12-16...they appear relatively young (much down on wings/body).



Next week we will have more info on a newly discovered nest on East 75th Street (thanks Ben Cacace, Christina Reik and Rosie Bonamusa), as well as more fledging kestrels from around the city.

Thanks! And don't forget to take the kestrel quiz on the following page.

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Photo Quiz – ok kestrel spies, here is a photo of a Eurasian Kestrel (taken by our Hungarian colleague Paolo Morandini in the city of Budapest in 2007). Our question is: why is this adult kestrel interested in the crane? Is the adult falcon after food? If you look closely you will see...



So if you can spot this nest with the three young (on the left side of the crane) in Budapest (and if you are reading the fine print here) you can find a kestrel nest in NYC! We need your help – do report any sightings to us. Indeed if you see an adult kestrel anywhere in NYC these days there is a nest nearby. So do let us know of kestrel sightings. Thank YOU!

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