

American kestrel *Falco sparverius*

Kingdom: Animalia

Division/Phylum: Chordata

Class: Aves

Order: Falconiformes

Family: Falconidae

ILLINOIS STATUS common, native

FEATURES

The American kestrel, also known as the sparrow hawk, is about nine to 12 inches in length (tail tip to bill tip in preserved specimen). This small hawk has rust-red back and tail feathers. The male has blue-gray wing feathers, while the female's wing feathers are rust-red. Both sexes have a black-and-white facial pattern with a black mark extending down from each eye. When flying, the pointed wings and long, thin tail of this bird are easy to see.

BEHAVIORS

The American kestrel is a common, permanent resident statewide in Illinois. It is often seen perching on wires and in tree tops, particularly along roads. This bird is commonly found in urban as well as rural areas. In summer, it frequents ungrazed grasslands and fallow fields. Winter habitats include cultivated fields, hayfields, pastures and roadsides. Its call is a series of "klee" or "killy" notes. The kestrel's nest is placed in a tree cavity or other structure with a cavity in it, including nest boxes, old woodpecker holes and in eaves of buildings. Little or no material is added to the nest cavity. The breeding season occurs in Illinois from April through June. The female produces from three to five, tan eggs with dark markings. Eggs are laid on alternate days. The female does most of the incubating over the 29- to 31-day incubation period. The kestrel hovers when hunting for its insect, bird, mammal, reptile and amphibian prey items.

HABITATS

Aquatic Habitats

none

Woodland Habitats

none

Prairie and Edge Habitats

black soil prairie; dolomite prairie; edge; gravel prairie; hill prairie; sand prairie; shrub prairie

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