



## American Kestrel

### Coloring Instructions:

Reddish-brown - the crown, nape, back and the tail

Bluish gray - the head, shoulder and the wings

White - the throat, tip of the tail and outer tail feathers

Black - the eye, the spots on the back and other areas that are already marked in black

# American Kestrel

**Length:** 8  $\frac{1}{2}$ "

**Wingspan:** 21"

**Habitat:** Fields and open woodlands; more common in winter

**Field marks:** Small hawk with reddish tail which has a large black band on it

The American Kestrel is the smallest falcon in the United States. Falcons are hawks with pointed wings that can fly very fast. The size of an animal influences what it can catch and eat. The kestrel can catch small birds, but its main food is mice and insects such as grasshoppers.

The American Kestrel is a year-round resident. When there is no wind, you will see them hunt by perching and gliding down upon some prey that it has spotted. But if there is a breeze, you might see kestrels hovering 5 to 20 feet above the ground and then dropping. When they are hovering, you can easily see their brilliant cinnamon tail and back.

As with other hawks, the population of kestrels increases in the Sacramento River Valley during the winter. If you drive through the country in winter, you will see many solitary birds sitting on fence posts and telephone wires. Kestrels often set up a winter territory so they space themselves out over the countryside.

Ornithologists have noticed that males and females tend to set up their territories in different habitats. Females tend to set up territories in more open grassland country. Males tend to set up territories where there are more trees or brush, often on the edge of towns. See if that is true in the areas you observe.

# American Kestrel Challenges

Put a check mark in the box when you have completed the challenge.

- Identify a male kestrel. The male has blue-gray wings and a rich brown tail.
- Identify a female kestrel. The female has brown wings and a brown tail with horizontal black streaks.
- See an American Kestrel hover.
- See an American Kestrel glide from a perch down upon prey on the ground.
- Observe whether the kestrels in the more open country during the winter are mostly females.

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