



giving
nature
a home

Name:

Kestrel



History

Falconry was very popular in England following the Norman conquest of 1066, and kestrels were kept and trained to hunt.

However, in the 19th and early 20th centuries, kestrel numbers declined. Pesticides used in farming caused a particular problem, especially in eastern England. When kestrels ate prey that had been poisoned by pesticides, it caused them to lay eggs that had thin and fragile shells. These would break too early, before the chick inside was old enough to survive.

When these pesticides were banned, kestrel numbers increased until the 1980s. Since then, the way that land is used has limited the places where kestrels can live and find food. Between 1970 and 2015, kestrels declined by 50% in the UK.

What is special about this bird?

Kestrels are able to hover above the ground when searching for prey. Look for them doing this over roadside verges or out in the countryside.

General info

Scientific name: *Falco tinnunculus*

Size: Around 34cm long, with a wingspan of 76cm (the average armspan of a 9-year-old child is 1.3m).

Weight: Males up to 190g; females up to 220g.

Where they live: Throughout the UK in open country, towns and cities, on rough grassland and roadside verges.

How long they live: Typically, kestrels live up to four years. However, the oldest bird recorded lived for 15 years, 11 months and one day.

What they eat: Voles are the most important food for kestrels, except in Northern Ireland where there aren't any voles. Kestrels also eat other small mammals such as wood mice and shrews, as well as small birds, insects, earthworms, and even small lizards in warmer areas.

Conservation status: The kestrel is on the Amber List, because it is declining.

Fascinating fact

Voles – the kestrel's favourite prey – mark their runs with wee, which shows up in ultraviolet light. Unfortunately for the voles, kestrels can see ultraviolet and so these wee trails lead them straight to their prey.