



Bird Residents of the Nature Center

Rocky the Kestrel

Personal History:

Rocky hatched in Lincoln during the spring of 2002 and apparently fell from his nest while he was still too young to even recognize a cricket or mouse, favorite foods of wild kestrels. He was brought to the California Foundation for Birds of Prey, where veterinarian Vickie Joseph checked Rocky and found that he had an injured shoulder. He was placed with a falconer for rehabilitation and later evaluation. By July it was clear that Rocky's shoulder injury would prevent him from being released to the wild because he would never be able to fly well enough to hunt for prey or protect himself. Rocky was transferred to the Nature Center to become an educational bird.



Rocky is an inquisitive bird that really likes to be around people. He responds with head bobs and sidesteps when spoken to or when music is played. He shares a spacious enclosure with the quiet little screech owl, Ferrous.

Natural History: American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*)

Description: In North America there are seven living native species of birds classified as falcons. The American kestrel is the smallest raptor found in North America. Falcons have a bullet like head and a short neck. The broad, powerful shoulders taper back to the long, pointed wings and medium-long tapered tail. The feet are relatively large, with slender toes and sharply curved talons. The bill is also strongly hooked. The American kestrel is 9-12 inches in length, with a wingspan of 20-24 inches. Males weigh about 3 1/2 ounces and females about 4 ounces. The sexes are similar, but the smaller male has blue-gray wings, while the larger female has brown wings. The color of the tail also differs.

Habitat: Open country, prairies, deserts, wooded streams, farmlands and even cities can be home to the American kestrel. They range over most of North and South America, breeding throughout the West, from Alaska south.

Food: The American kestrel eats insects, bats, mice, birds, lizards, small snakes and frogs. In summer they eat primarily grasshoppers and crickets. In winter they prey mostly on birds and mice.

Communication: It's call is "killy-killy-killy-killy-killy-killy" or "klee-klee-klee".

Nesting Behavior: The American kestrel prefers old nesting holes (such as those of flickers) and hollows in trees, occasionally using old magpie nests or holes in cliffs. In cities and towns they will often nest in niches in walls and holes under gables.

Reproduction: Four or five white to cream or pale pink eggs, heavily blotched with brown, are laid from mid-April on. The female does most of the incubating, which takes 29-30 days. The male calls the female from the nest hole to feed her. The young leave the nest 30-31 days after hatching.

Additional Information: In experiments, falcons can recognize sitting doves at 3,000 feet and a white handkerchief at about 5,100 feet. They can achieve speeds up to 30-39 m.p.h. They are capable of living in desert regions in summer because of their tolerance to great heat and their ability to get moisture from their carnivorous diet.