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Kale, H. W., II, B. Pranty, B. M. Stith, and C. W. Biggs. 1992. The atlas of the breeding birds of Florida. Final Report. Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission, Tallahassee, Florida.

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American Kestrel *Falco sparverius*

The American Kestrel is one of our most colorful raptors. With a length of only 23 to 30 cm (9 to 12 in), this diminutive falcon is the smallest diurnal raptor in North America. It breeds from above the Arctic Circle to the southern tip of South America (Cade 1982). The nominate race winters in Florida from September to April, but only *F. s. paulus*, the smaller Southeastern American Kestrel, breeds in the state.

Habitat. Southeastern American Kestrels prefer open habitats, such as pine savannas, longleaf pine-turkey oak sandhills, pine flatwoods, farmlands, and even suburban golf courses and residential areas (Wiley 1978). Components that make these landscapes suitable include open terrain with enough cover to support small terrestrial prey animals, vegetation low and sparse enough to ensure adequate prey availability, elevated hunting perches, and an adequate supply of nesting sites. American Kestrels nest in cavities excavated by woodpeckers and in artificial objects such as power poles and buildings (Wiley 1978; Cade 1982; Hoffman and Collopy 1987; J. Layne, pers. commun.). When nest sites limit American Kestrel populations, suitably placed nest boxes are readily accepted by these falcons, and breeding success rates are similar to natural sites (Hammerstrom et al. 1973, Toland and Elder 1987). In Florida, the American Kestrel diet is dominated by large insects, but during nesting includes more vertebrates, especially lizards (Wiley 1978; M. Collopy, pers. commun.; J. Layne, pers. commun.).

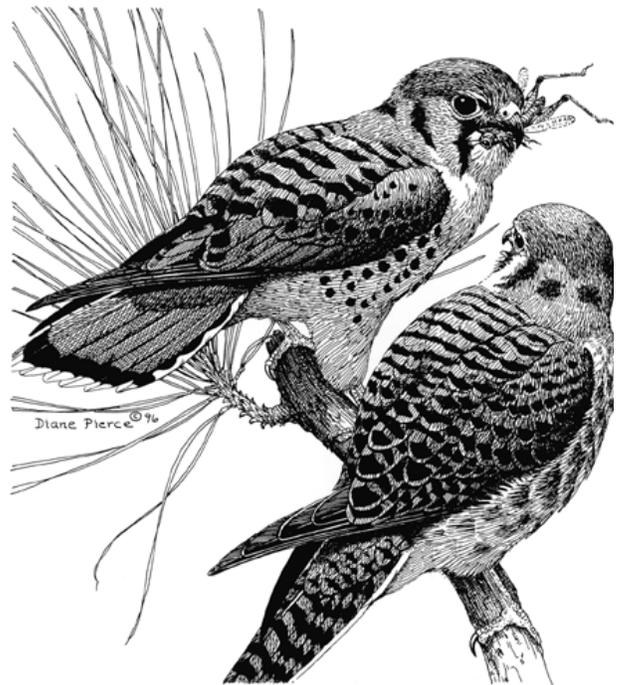


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In Florida, American Kestrels lay a clutch of 3 to 5 eggs, which are pinkish to buff, with reddish-brown speckles and irregular dark brown spots (Kale and Maehr 1990, Harrison 1978). Although usually single-brooded, they successfully raise 2 broods when food and weather conditions are favorable (Toland 1985c). The incubation period is 28 to 31 days, and the young fledge at 28 to 31 days of age (Palmer 1988, Johnsgard 1990).

Seasonal Occurrence. Territorial pairs remain together throughout the year, and, during courtship in February and March, they are conspicuous as they perform mutual perching, dive displays, flutter glides, and ritualized courtship feeding (Willoughby and Cade 1964, Palmer 1988, Johnsgard 1990). In Florida most American Kestrel nest from March through June (Kale and Maehr 1990).

Status. The Southeastern American Kestrel is considered a Threatened Species by the Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission [editor: now Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission] (Wood 1991).

American Kestrels currently are restricted mostly to the central sandy ridges from Suwannee County south to Highlands County. Examination of historic records of oologists indicates that much of this subspecies' habitat has been lost to development and agriculture (Hoffman and Collopy 1988). The clearing of longleaf pine snags from open fields in North Florida and extensive conversion of open sandhills and pine flatwoods to citrus groves in South Florida have greatly reduced the available nesting and foraging habitats for Southeastern American Kestrels (Hoffman and Collopy 1988).

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American Kestrel

