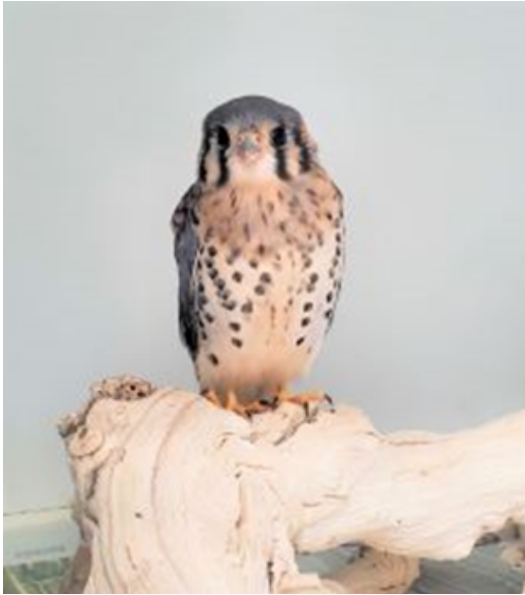




California Wildlife Center

Patient of the Week

June 23, 2023



Kestrels life expectancy is 2-5 years in the wild.

American Kestrel

On June 10th we received one of the more unusual species we treat – an American Kestrel. Brought to us by one of our volunteers who picked him up from the East Valley Animal Care Center in Van Nuys, he was suffering from damage to his eye and beak. Our vet suspects that the bird suffered a blunt force trauma on the left side of his head, possibly having been struck by a car.

After an initial assessment by our Wildlife Technician, the kestrel was given antibiotics, pain medication, and kept in our quarantine zone for his first few days. Due to the presence of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI), we are taking extra precautions for all species who may have contracted the disease. We have a special screening room and isolation ward in order to protect the rest of the population of patients and if new intakes develop or show symptoms, they are euthanized to prevent the spread of HPAI.

Fortunately, this bird did not demonstrate any signs of HPAI and was transferred to our ICU for further care. He remains there as we attempt to heal his injuries.

American Kestrels are the smallest falcon in North America and are found throughout California. The same size as a Mourning Dove, the kestrel's diet is comprised primarily of insects and small vertebrates such as mice and voles. Our patient weighs 90 grams, the same as 12 sheets of paper or four AAA batteries. Their wingspan is 20-24 inches. Kestrels are unique amongst raptors as their plumage is different in males and females. Males have dark gray wings and head and a reddish back while the females have a lighter rust back and wings and a pale beige underside.

Kestrel populations have dropped in half since the 1970's and while they are currently still numerous, scientists are searching for the reason why there are fewer kestrels than ever before. Some suspect rodenticide poisoning, which affects many of our predator patients. Others point to climate change and the efficiency of insect-inhibiting pesticides. Invasive European Starlings have taken over the cavities where kestrels would lay eggs, and as they do not build nests, they have nowhere to reproduce. And of course, like so many of the animals we treat—the dramatic loss of open space and habitat means fewer places for kestrels to thrive.

You can buy a kestrel nesting box or find instructions on how to build one [here](#). Peregrinefund.org has great advice on how to mount and monitor your box.