



Keeping Up with the Kestrels

July 2020 Update



Dear Community Conservation partners,

Since mid-April FoHVOS has been keeping a close eye on its 50 American Kestrel nest boxes. Each year we maintain and monitor boxes situated in grassland habitats throughout the Hopewell Valley as part of our project to recover the population of this state-threatened Falcon in our region. You may have seen some of these boxes while hiking in places like Mercer Meadows, St. Michael's Farm Preserve, the Watershed Reserve, or Fiddler's Creek Preserve.

With the kestrel breeding season drawing to a close, we can now report the numbers:

Spring 2020 saw a whopping 30 young kestrels fledge from 9 boxes! Compared to 2019, this year saw many more boxes occupied, a low rate of nest failure, and nearly 100% nestling survivorship. Last year – the first year of the expanded kestrel recovery program – we were delighted to have 5 active boxes produce 10 fledged young. This year we are elated to have 30 more young kestrels venturing out into a region that has seen widespread declines in the species for the past several decades.

What are the reasons underlying this year's tremendous success?

There are many possible reasons, but two seem particularly important. First, it appears to take time for a local population to "catch up" to the new capacity created by the addition of nest boxes; second, kestrel populations – like those of many raptor species – are cyclical, and 2020 appears to have been a banner year for kestrels in New Jersey.

We are grateful to our volunteers and partners for making 2020 a highly successful year for the kestrel recovery project, despite early challenges imposed on us by the pandemic.

[Read](#) the Watershed Institute piece on banding the nestlings from one of FoHVOS's boxes at the Watershed Reserve.



A young kestrel chick, estimated about 13 weeks old.
(PC: The Watershed Institute)



NJ Division of Fish and Wildlife's, Bill Pitts, showing off one of the recently banded kestrel chicks.
(PC: The Watershed Institute)



FoHVOS

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