

American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*)

This smallest North American falcon's former name was "Sparrow Hawk". The sexes are easily identified by their differences in colouration (sexual dimorphism). Males have blue wings and those of the female are brown. Both have vertical black markings on the side of their head that are often called "mustaches" or "sideburns".

Kestrels scan for prey from high perches on branches or telephone wires. They are the only North American falcon to hover above their prey before swooping in for a meal of mice, voles, grasshoppers, dragonflies and, at times, other small birds.

They hunt in open field (such as the meadow area at Colonel Sam Smith Park) and farmland areas, but like to build their nests in tree cavities or in nesting boxes. Both parents incubate the eggs. The female stays with the young during the first several days after hatching and the male delivers food to the nest.

Although many Kestrels fly south during migration, some winter over in southern Ontario.

Sadly, the populations of this native symbol of speed and grace are threatened by habitat loss, pesticide poisoning, collisions with motor vehicles and thoughtless shooting.