

# Kestrel

*Falco tinnunculus*



## Description

The Kestrel is a small bird of prey, brown or reddish-brown in colour, with long wings and a long tail. Kestrels are most often seen singly, hunting during the day, with a characteristic hovering flight. This species is found in a variety of habitats, including urban areas, but is most numerous in areas of rough grassland where small mammals can be found. Embankments and reservations along motorways and other busy roads are frequently used as hunting sites.

Kestrels do not build a nest but use holes in trees, buildings, old crow nests and nest boxes, if they are provided. The 4–6 eggs, which are laid in a shallow scrape, take about 30 days to hatch, with the young flying some 30 days later.

The decline of Kestrel is typical of species that depend on grassland which provides small mammals as food. The loss of this habitat, along with the loss of nest sites, has caused the decline.

## National Status

Kestrel numbers suffered a serious decline in the late 1950s and 1960s due to the effects of pesticides such as DDT. Although a recovery was noted after the withdrawal of such pesticides, numbers began to decline again in the 1980s. Figures from 1988–91 estimate the UK breeding population to be 52,000 pairs.

The Kestrel appears on the Amber List of *Birds of Conservation Concern* as a result of a moderate decline in the UK breeding population and its adverse conservation status in wider Europe.

## Local Status

Although present throughout most of the borough, little is known about the current population status of this species.

## Legal Status

The Kestrel is protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981), making it an offence to kill, injure or take a Kestrel, or to take, damage or destroy an active nest or its contents.

## Links with other Action Plans

- HAP4 Wood Pasture and Parkland
- HAP5 Hedgerows
- HAP6 Arable Field Margins
- HAP7 Floodplain Grazing Marsh
- HAP8 Lowland Meadows
- HAP9 Lowland Dry Acidic Grassland
- HAP10 Lowland Heathland
- HAP11 Upland Heathland
- HAP17 Open Mosaic Habitats on Previously Developed Land

### **Current Factors Causing Loss or Decline**

- Population fluctuations in main prey species.
- Agricultural intensification leading to larger fields, reduced semi-natural habitat and increased use of pesticides.
- Habitat loss associated with change from pastoral farming to arable crops.
- Loss of/lack of nest sites due to development and changing land use.

### **Current Local Action**

- Twelve Barn Owl boxes installed at sites across the borough in 2006/07 also make provision for occupation by Kestrels.
- Local promotion of farmland conservation may also benefit this species.
- Recording of Kestrel by members of Barnsley Bird Study Group as part of the forthcoming *Breeding Bird Atlas*.

### **Proposed Local Action**

- Install nest boxes at suitable sites.
- Publicity to increase public awareness of Kestrel.
- Extract information from the *Barnsley Bird Study Group Breeding Bird Survey* to provide populations and mapping of breeding Kestrel.
- Encourage the creation and effective management of rough grassland to support key prey species.
- Encourage the provision of unmanaged grassland margins on agricultural land under Stewardship agreements, to provide suitable habitat for prey species.

### **BMBC Land Ownership and Management Actions**

- Maintain Elsecar Reservoir Local Nature Reserve (LNR), Carlton Marsh LNR and other Barnsley MBC owned grassland zones to prevent encroachment of scrub.