

Kestrel - Funky Facts

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Common Kestrels (*Falco tinnunculus*) are small compared to other birds of prey, but larger than most common songbirds. Female Kestrels are slightly larger than males, and the sexes have different coloured plumage, which makes it easier to tell them apart. Where **males** have reddish-brown coloured wings and a grey head and tail (see image, left), the **females** have a more subdued brown color with many small, dark specks (see image above, right). In both sexes, the tail has a black tip with a narrow white rim and they also have prominent black 'eye stripes' (malar stripes).

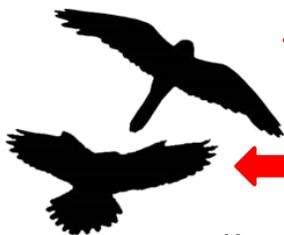


The skin around the eyes, nostrils and feet is bright yellow, whilst the bill and iris are both dark. When juvenile, the plumage will resemble that of adult females.

The wingspan of Kestrels can reach up to 76 cm. Males weigh 190 g whilst the larger females weigh around 220 g.

As mortality is high during their first year of life, many Kestrels die before reaching 2 years of age. However, they can reach an age of 16 years or more.

Kestrels can be seen across the UK throughout the year. They are commonly seen hunting across farmland, scrub and moorland, often perching on poles and wires. The distinctive flight pattern of Kestrels can be used to identify these birds from other birds of prey. When hunting, the Kestrel will hover before suddenly swooping down to attack its prey (see pictures below for silhouette examples).



Silhouette of a Kestrel in motion, flying through the air.

Hovering silhouette, Kestrel searching for prey.

Kestrels hunt during the day and around dusk. Kestrels mainly feed on small mammals and songbirds, but they will also eat beetles, insects and worms.

Recent estimates have concluded that Kestrels appear to be in decline in Scotland. The causes of this decline are not entirely understood, but the intensification in grassland management is thought to be a contributing factor, as there are now fewer habitats supporting voles, an essential part of the Kestrel's diet.

Reference: *RSPB handbook of BRITISH Birds*. 3rd ed. Peter Holden and Tim Cleeves 2012 (re-print). HELM Bloomsbury Publishing PLC London.

Bird silhouettes and reference: *Edinburgh Hawkwatch*, www.edinburghhawkwatch.org.uk

All photos: *Dean Bricknell Photography*, www.deanbricknellphotography.com

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