

NOTES ON THIS STORY

In 2008, Susan Botti's family found an abandoned young kestrel, too young to survive on its own. They took it to a shelter, Ravensbeard, and hoped it would survive. The family kept tabs on the kestrel. They had the honor of helping the Ravensbeard staff release the bird in the family backyard – an amazing experience for everyone. The story below was posted by Ellen Kalish, one of the staff members and the person who helped nurse Orfeo to health.

It is included in the BandQuest™ curriculum because it was one more personal experience with raptors for Susan Botti – one that she saw through the eyes of her children.

The Story of Orfeo

the American Kestrel (2008)

By Ellen Kalish

Orpheus, an American Kestrel arrived on June 30th. He was found by the roadside on a straightaway where cars would drive by at 50-60 mph. He was too young to be on his own. There was no nest to be found and no screeching parents to protect him from danger, so Roland Vazquez stopped the car and picked him up. He placed him off the road about 20' into a nearby field and drove home.



After wondering if he did the right thing, he made some calls to seek advice from someone more knowledgeable. When he called Ravensbeard, I asked him to describe the bird in detail so we knew what we were dealing with and therefore more able to understand the behavior and natural history. I said that if he went back to the same place the next morning he could investigate more closely. Sure enough, Roland called back that morning saying that it was true; no parents, the baby couldn't fly, and it was cold.

He and his daughter, Isabel, brought the bird to me. Isabel was extremely interested in what was going to happen next. She planned to write about Orpheus (their name for the orphan) for her school's summer project. I could see her taking in all I was saying, making many mental notes.

The Vazquez family came once more in July to see her. By then we had changed the name from Orpheus to Orfeo, as "she" turned out to be a male and he was quite stunning. It all happens in approximately 4 –6 weeks. They took pictures and Isabel noted his changes for her paper.



Orfeo & Friends

Orfeo grew and developed into a beautiful young male. Once he was able to hunt and capture live prey such as grasshoppers, katydids, crickets, mealworms and mice, he was ready to be released.

September 13 was the date for his release. I brought Orfeo to their home, which was a few hundred yards from where he was found. It was a safe place to insure his release was successful. Isabel and her brother Hugo peered into the carrying crate that held the nervous bird. They got their cameras ready as I held the Kestrel, preparing him for his maiden voyage.

They got their photos once he was in my glove and then I let go. He almost landed on Isabel's head but instead perched on the ground to orient himself. Then he screeched and flew about 100 yards away up into a tree. About a minute later he screeched again as to say "I did it...I'm free." We couldn't see him at that point but occasionally he would call out to let us know he was still there.

We went inside for a drink of water and to see the video of the release that Susan had taken. I was thoroughly entertained by the children and their art projects for quite some time, then it was time to leave.

It all seemed so quiet outside, we thought Orfeo had gone to explore his new world. But as I was escorted to my car by the entire family, we were greeted by KEEeee, KEEeee, KEEeee, KEEeee. He was only about 40 feet from the car. We all looked at each other... and froze. Then we heard him again. I started to tear up when Susan said, "He heard your voice and wanted to be near you one more time." With goose bumps on my arms, I must say it wasn't a surprise...It's happened time and time again. Just when you think they're going to fly as fast and far as they can to be free, they circle over or come back to give their closing comments.



This is what I live for, this is what charges me to get through all those who may not make it.....this makes all my efforts just and good. I have the best job in the world!

Stories from Ravenbeard Wildlife Center, Saugerties, New York, <http://www.ravenbeard.org/Ravenbeard-Wildlife-Center-STORIES-3.htm#loon>.

American Kestrel

COMMON NAME: American kestrel

SCIENTIFIC NAME: *Falco sparverius*

IDENTIFYING CHARACTERISTICS: The American kestrel is the smallest falcon found in North America, and with the exception of the Seychelles kestrel, the world. Like all members of the genus *Falco*, American kestrels have dark eyes, a notched beak, and un-feathered legs. Males have a rusty back, blue wings, and a rusty-colored tail with a black terminal band. Females have rusty wings, back, and tail, all marked with black barring. Both sexes have a dark vertical line running through the eye with white cheek and chin patches. The top of their head is blue with a rusty cap, usually brighter in males than females.



Darner is a kestrel living at the MN Raptor Center

RANGE: American kestrels are widely distributed throughout the New World. Their breeding range extends as far north as central and western Alaska across northern Canada to Nova Scotia, and extends south throughout North America, into central Mexico, Baja, and the Caribbean. They are local breeders in Central America and are widely distributed throughout South America. Most of the birds breeding in Canada and the northern United States migrate south in the winter, although some males are year round residents.

HABITAT: American kestrels are found in a variety of habitats, including parks, suburbs, open fields, forest edges, alpine zones, and deserts. In addition to requiring open space for hunting, American kestrels seem to need perches to hunt from, cavities for nesting, and a sufficient food supply. In Minnesota they can be found in urban and rural areas, hunting along roadsides from telephone wires or trees, or hovering over fields.

NESTING: A cavity nester, the American kestrel uses holes in trees, artificial nest boxes, or small spaces in buildings. Both males and females incubate the eggs, which hatch about 30 days after being laid. Three to five young are often hatched. They grow very quickly, assuming adult weight in about two and a half weeks and fledging about a month after hatching. They will nest again if the first nest fails and have been reported to raise two broods per year in some of the southern states.

FEEDING HABITS: In summer, kestrels feed on insects that they catch either on the ground or in the air. They will also eat small rodents and birds. Wintering birds feed primarily on rodents and birds.

CONSERVATION NOTES: The kestrel is an extremely common falcon. Estimates of up to 1.2 million breeding pairs have been made for the North American population (T. Cade, *Falcons of the World*), with an equal number thought to breed in the Neotropics. One of the more common raptors in the Midwest, the American kestrel is afforded no special status in this area. In Florida, however, the southeastern sub-species is listed as threatened.

This article is from Minnesota Raptor Center <https://www.raptor.umn.edu/learn-about-raptors>