



Nest Box News

Grafton Land Trust

Preserving Grafton's open spaces since 1958

April 2015

Dear Volunteer,

RE: Our First Confirmed American Kestrel Sighting!

On April 15th, I monitored one of our kestrel nest boxes between 4:00 and 5:00pm. I parked and had walked only a short distance onto the property when I noticed a bird perched on the top of a tree. I forgot to take my binoculars with me that day, but I had my camera and a 70-200mm lens. I zoomed in on the bird for a closer look and it had the shape of a small hawk, or I hoped ... a falcon. The bird flew from its perch and fluttered down to the ground to pounce on a small prey item. Was it a kestrel? I could not be sure. I needed a picture, so I could zoom in for a closer look. I snapped the first shot as the bird streaked across the sky. Then another a few minutes later as the bird zipped by the edge of the forest. I zoomed in on the camera's viewfinder and the bird appeared to have a black stripe descending from below its eye, and a second stripe about an inch behind its eye. It also had the body form and position of a falcon! But I could not be sure. Then I noticed what appeared to be a second bird at the far end of the field near the nest box. Was it the same bird ... or another? I crept in for a closer look, but still maintained a long distance between me and the nest box. If it was a falcon, I did not want to scare it off. Then something GREAT happened! The bird flew from a tree and perched on top of the nest box! I zoomed in with my 200mm lens and snapped a series of pictures. The bird was tiny in the frame, but the image was a high resolution RAW file (which is about 20MB). When I got home, I opened the file in Photoshop and zoomed in. As you can see from the image below ... we have our first confirmed kestrel sighting on a Grafton Land Trust nest box!!!!



- Quick Links**
[The Kestrel Project Monitoring Form](#)
[Grafton Land Trust Property Maps](#)
[Join Us on Facebook](#)
[eBird.org](#)
[NestWatch.org](#)
[MassWildlife](#)
[U.S. Fish & Wildlife](#)

Submit Your Pics!

Got a cool photo from a recent monitoring trip? Send it to kestrel@grafftonland.org and we'll publish it in the "Photo of the month" section of Nest Box News.



We are a member supported organization that relies on you - birders - as well as hikers, equestrians, hunters and other recreational users to manage our lands. Please [become a member](#) today!



But the story gets BETTER ... one of our volunteers monitored this box about 30 minutes after I left and he saw a PAIR of kestrels flying together above the field; only inches apart and at high speed!

We are not yet going to reveal the location of this box. As we agreed during our volunteer orientation meeting, we are going to proceed with great caution as we do not want to scare the falcons away from a potential nesting site. Too much human activity near a nest box could do just that. I conferred with the MassWildlife State Ornithologist today and he provided the following information,

"Adults do check out potential nesting locations and could be seen going into the box at this time. However, they may not do this extensively, and you may not witness this behavior at all. When the female is laying eggs she generally is only in the box during the actual egg laying and activity at the box is otherwise limited during that phase. Even during incubation, there can be surprisingly little activity at the nest box. Of course, once young are being fed is when you can expect a lot of activity by both the male and female at the box. -- Andrew Vitz, MassWildlife."

I also emailed Joey Mason, our presenter at the Kestrel Project orientation event and she responded as follows,

"Wow, that is terrific!!! That little male may stake his claim. I'm so happy that after all your hard work, you may be rewarded. Your optimistic spirit may have won out after all. Please keep me posted. -- Joey Mason, Keeping Company with Kestrels"

One key point I would like to make at this time is **DO NOT GIVE UP ON MONITORING YOUR NEST BOX** if you do not see activity or if you see other birds entering and exiting the nest box. Eastern bluebirds had been seen several times at the box shown above (going in and out of the box and perching on top of the box) but it appears as though the kestrels have evicted them. Long term, consistent observation is needed to get a clear picture of avian activity at your nest box. We encourage you all to continue to enjoy the early spring weather while you monitor your chosen nest box. I have contacted the monitors of the nest box shown above to ask them to be extra cautious so we can minimize the chances of scaring this pair of kestrels away. When we know for sure that there is nesting activity at this box we will communicate with all of our Kestrel Project volunteers so you can all have the chance to see these beautiful falcons.

Please continue sending in your [monitoring reports](#) and let us know right away if you see, or think you see, kestrels.

I want to thank Christine Thurber, the Coordinator of our Kestrel Monitoring Program, as she has done a great job organizing our volunteers, designing our monitoring data form, and monitoring our nest box on Potter Hill. Christine has a great deal of avian experience, so send her any questions you may have. We both receives messages sent to kestrel@grafftonland.org.

See you in the field.

Troy Gipps
Vice President & Kestrel Project leader
Grafton Land Trust
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Hunting Season Notice - Spring Wild Turkey

As you may know, the Grafton Land Trust allows hunting on its properties with written permission, and most of the Town of Grafton's Properties are also open for hunting.

The [Massachusetts spring wild turkey hunting season](#) opens on Monday, April 27th and runs through Saturday, May 23rd.

Spring hunting hours begin 1/2 hour before sunrise to 12:00 noon.

Later on today, we will be notifying all of our hunting permit holders to inform them of our Kestrel Project and ask that they maintain a suitable distance from the nest boxes. We have also asked them to let us know if they see kestrels in the vicinity of our nest boxes.



A tom wild turkey walks along the edge of a Grafton field in early April. (Photo by Dean Cerrati)

There are typically more turkey hunters out on Saturday mornings (hunting is not allowed on Saturdays in Massachusetts), so you may want to shift your monitoring activities to Saturday afternoon and/or Sunday morning if you are in the habit of monitoring boxes on the weekends. This will accommodate the multi-use nature of our properties and will likely enhance your monitoring enjoyment and success.

Photo of the month



A song sparrow sings on public land in Grafton in early April. (Photo by Dean Cerrati)

The Grafton Land Trust is a private, non-profit, member-supported organization that preserves, maintains, and advocates for open space in Grafton, and promotes environmental education and stewardship.

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