

UNUSUAL NEST SITE FOR AN AMERICAN KESTREL IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

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The American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*) does not create its own nesting cavity and is considered a secondary cavity nesting species. It uses woodpecker-excavated holes and natural cavities in both living and dead trees. Other natural sites include cavities and crevices in banks and cliffs and occasionally open and closed nests of other avian species. The kestrel readily accepts artificial nest boxes and occasionally nests in small, enclosed spaces in buildings (Smallwood and Bird 2002). In British Columbia, this small falcon has also been found nesting in artificial sites including crevices in abandoned buildings (Campbell et al. 1990).

During the summer of 2006, while conducting fieldwork in the Nemiah Valley, about 180 km southwest of Williams Lake, British Columbia, a pair of American Kestrels was observed nesting in our lodging building. It is believed that a woodpecker (most likely the Northern Flicker, *Colaptes auratus*), originally excavated the cavity, in pressboard, in the side of the ranch house, approximately 6.5 m above the ground. A dead woodpecker was found

on the ground about 10 m from the nest hole early in the spring, but its identification was unconfirmed. Cause of death was unknown but it did not appear to die violently. It is estimated that the American Kestrel pair began nesting in June 2006 while the human occupants of the house were out of town. A neighbour had noticed nesting activity and the birds remained when the owners returned in early July. At that time, the owners could hear noises in the wall of the house and estimated that the nest contained two or three nestlings. On 27 July an undetermined number of nestlings were still in the cavity and one, close to fledging, appeared at the entrance (Figure 1). The family had been very vocal and active throughout our stay during the last week of July.



Figure 1. Near-fledging American Kestrel at nest entrance in a cavity on the side of a lodge. Nemiah Valley, BC. 27 July 2006 (Brent M. Matsuda). BC Photo 3434.

Young would call from inside the nest hole while an adult was vocalizing from trees 50 m away. By the end of the month an unknown number of young had fledged and shortly thereafter all the kestrels left the nest for good.

Other nest sites in buildings in British Columbia have all been in small openings or crevices in walls and roofs (R. W. Campbell, pers. comm.). The Nemiah Valley nest appears to be the first documented use of a woodpecker hole in a building, which in itself seems unusual.

The nesting chronology falls within the period listed by Campbell et al. (1990) for British Columbia.

Acknowledgements

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Literature Cited

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About the Author

Brent is a wildlife biologist/naturalist and consultant who recently returned to Vancouver after working in California for the past five years. While typecast as a herpetologist, most of his professional work has been with birds. However, he prefers to work on a variety of taxa, whether in Canada or abroad.