

23 June 2008

American Kestrel Nest Survey NYC - Issue #12

Kestrels are Fledging!!! – Part 3

Kestrels continue to fledge around town. Working with colleagues, Deborah Allen and I visited several kestrel nests in Manhattan and the Bronx to see what had happened in the June 16 through June 22 time frame (2008). Here is what we learned:

At the 69th street and Broadway nest, Carol Wood and Rob Cicchetti have been studiously observing happenings with the five young...all seems to be going well in their first week of flying in the neighborhood. See the “Reports from the Field” section for observations by Rob and Carol. We also include photos in this issue to profile that kestrel nest site – see below and pages 3-5.

At the 111th street and St. Nicholas Avenue nest on 20 June, several of us watched the female receive prey from the male, and then take it (a House Sparrow) to the nest. The female remained inside this Harlem nest for 5-7 minutes...indicating that she was still feeding the young – who are likely about 7-10 days from fledging. Several prey deliveries were seen on this day...suggesting that there are multiple mouths to feed – perhaps a brood of four?

At the West 86th street nest, Jane M. Politi has been watching several heads and bodies at the front of the nest. See the “Reports from the Field” section for her observations...Jane believes the young will begin fledging over the weekend (June 21-22). There are at least four young in the nest...perhaps five. Two photos of the 86th street nest can be found on pages 10-11.



Adult female American Kestrel with prey (House Sparrow) she is about to deliver to the 69th street and Broadway nest (Manhattan) – 26 May 2008.

In the South Bronx at the wonderful kestrel nest site that Ivan Martinez told us about, we are in a quandary as to what exactly is happening. On Wednesday (18 June), Jack Rothman and I spent much time there, and also searched for kestrels in the surrounding parking lots, overgrown shrubby fields, etc. We saw the adult male flying in the area of the nest, and the female fly to the nest and perch just outside, looking in. We did not see any prey deliveries to the nest. On Friday, June 20th, Deborah Allen and I spent the better part of the afternoon watching the nest – we saw the male flying in the area, but no visits were made to the nest by either of the adults...We remain perplexed.

Finally, we have some good news to report from the Lower East Side: at the 6th street nest, two young kestrels fledged this past week: a female on 16 June (thanks Dino Sorbello!), and a male on 19 June. The latter was rescued by James Andersen – he placed the young bird on the roof of the nearby Pencer House (630 East 6th), and we hope all goes well from there. Without Mr. Andersen's help, that young male would likely have been cat food. The two photos below tell the story this week. Below left, Deborah Allen photographed the adult female kestrel leaving the nest with a recently caught House Sparrow on 18 June. Why is she leaving the nest with food? Because the youngster she is looking for (male, below right) had flown from the nest – and she cannot locate him. Thanks to James Andersen, who found the young male on the terrace of the Pencer Building (across the street and just east of the nest), and placed him in a large cardboard box on the roof, we are confident that he will be found and receive food from his parents regularly.



Photos from the East 6th street nest on the Lower East Side. Above left, female leaving the nest with prey (House Sparrow); and above right, just fledged young male from that nest – note extensive downy white feathers on his head and lower back. He should have waited another two days or so before flying...

Reports from Raptor Re-habbers – a new direction for research!

Last week I received information from two very important people. First, Eileen Jones, a long-time raptor re-habber in NYC, emailed regarding a young kestrel in Brooklyn:

=====
From: Eileen Jones <vzeus9ad@verizon.net>
Subject: Re: NYC Kestrel Newsletter #10
Date: Jun 15, 2008 8:56 PM

The first kestrel fledgling of the season came in yesterday, a male. The closest location data is North 8th St in Greenpoint.

=====

We immediately contacted Arthur Leiz in Brooklyn to let him know that one of his kestrels was likely found down on the ground, and then sent to Eileen. She will spend a few weeks feeding the young bird and getting it ready for release, hopefully in NYC.

Then on Monday evening, Robert Horvath, a NYC fireman who does raptor rehabilitation (and he is also a Federally licensed bird bander) called with fascinating information. In a nutshell, Bob has been working with NYC raptors (and other birds/wildlife) for more than a decade. Each year he receives many (sometimes +/- 30) young kestrels from NYC when they were retrieved from the ground or an otherwise precarious place. The person/people who found the kestrels did not know what to do with the bird. Indeed, they usually did not know they had found a small falcon. Ultimately such birds end up with Robert and his wife. Now here is where the story gets really interesting. For example, in June 2007, a young kestrel from NYC was banded on Long Island (at Mr. Horvath's rehab center), and subsequently was found dead in Florida in August (2007). And so far this year 17 young kestrels have arrived from NYC – the number of young kestrels Robert receives has been increasing during the last 3-4 years. It seems either (a) more and more people are learning to whom to send a “downed” kestrel; and/or, (b) NYC kestrels are increasing in number. Here is a partial list of kestrel recoveries from this year:

McDonald Ave (Brooklyn) = 3
152 South 2nd Street (Brooklyn) = 1
445 East 5th Street (Manhattan) = 1
60 Madison Ave (at 59th street) = 1
East 3rd Street and Waverly Place = 1
950 Third Avenue (at 56th street) = 1

=====

Wow – we did not even know of kestrel nests in these locations. These kestrel recoveries could illustrate a unique map of Brooklyn and Manhattan. And we bet dollars to donuts that their primary nesting distribution is correlated with late 19th and early 20th century apartment buildings.

We have begun collaborating with **Chad Seewagen (PhD candidate at the University of Toronto)** who is doing fabulous extensive work to assess the condition of migrant birds in NYC and lower Westchester County Parks. It would be wonderful to get some blood samples of these NYC kestrel youngsters to find how they are doing; or use some telemetry equipment to see when and how far they disperse, etc. Chad is a native New Yorker (Manhattan!) who also works for the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS aka the Bronx Zoo) while working on his doctorate.

To contact local raptor rehabilitators if you find (or know of) a kestrel in trouble:

Eileen Jones - 718-853-9290 or EJ74@verizon.net – in Brooklyn – her raptors often end up with Robert Horvath since she does not have the necessary room for flight training/exercise.

Robert Horvath - 516-293-0587 or BobbyH5800@verizon.net – on Long Island (but takes many NYC raptors).

Both Eileen and Bob are doing extraordinary work that is largely unknown to most bird watchers in NYC. Thank You from all of us.

69th and Broadway Nest – Field Notes and Photographs

Rob Cicchetti spent much of spring 2006 studying the kestrels nesting on 69th and Broadway across from his living room window. He compiled these notes into a report with photos. Here is one interesting observation from spring 2008, with photos to illustrate. On the following two pages, there are four additional photos to show the habitat in which the 69th street kestrels live/hunt:

From: Rob Cicchetti

Subject: The Cicchetti Kestrels

Date: May 26, 2008 7:11 PM

Hi Bob,

I thought you would like to see these photos: the quality isn't too great, given the late afternoon lighting with a long lens, on a dark background, but they of the female kestrel near the nest across from my apartment.

There were two guys cleaning windows today and the female was acting extremely protective, being very persistent diving repeatedly at the two; with her presumably considering them a threat to the nest. Over a period of 20 minutes, she must have dove over 50 times (and spent a lot of energy in doing so).

Given her protective and defensive behavior today, I would assume she is protecting something, that something being little kestrels! I am assuming there are young in the nest, while I have not actually seen them. I saw the female enter the nest twice today, once with a fresh kill.

=====



These two photos by Rob Cicchetti show the adult female aggressively flying at the person cleaning the window on the apartment just below the kestrel nest. See the next two pages for photos of the nest building and surrounding habitat.

See also Carol Wood's wonderful description of how the fledglings are doing in the "Reports from the Field" section.



Looking north on Broadway from the south corner of 68th street.



Female entering nest cavity at 69th street nest with prey in early June 2008.



Here are two more views of the 69th and Broadway kestrel nest – that fledged young in 2006 and 2008, but not 2007 (when the exterior of the taller, mostly glass building just to the right – south – of the nest building, was being extensively renovated). The nest is in the black (metal) cornice near the southwest corner of the building (see arrow in photo left, and bottom photo on previous page). And the favorite perch is upon the wooden water tower at the right (southwest) corner of the building. The photo below shows the view toward the northeast...the nest building would be just to the right (south) of the shadow at the bottom right of the photo. This is another urban setting...we have seen female kestrels chasing starlings over Broadway. We have also seen males dive down into the traffic “islands” in the middle of Broadway (see bottom right of the photo on the left) to try to catch House Sparrows there. Finally, in the photo below, note how there are trees in the backyards of some of the houses – these act as nesting areas for a variety of birds that kestrels hunt.

We think that nests are significantly higher on the two way streets...possibly because there are many taller buildings on Broadway (or possibly because kestrels prefer to nest higher on busy streets).



REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

From: Rose Bonamusa
Subject: Re: 75th street kestrels
Date: Jun 16, 2008 3:09 PM

Thanks Bob,

I have seen at least 2 flying across 69th, and landing on the top of a water tower, or chimney.

So they are active here on 69th (Park Ave./Lexington Ave. area).

rosie

=====
From: Jane McCall Politi
Subject: Re: NYC Kestrel Newsletter #11
Date: Jun 16, 2008 5:05 PM

Hi Bob,

I'm sorry I missed the bird walk on Sunday. It was great fun meeting you and the group. However, I did go hunting for the kestrels on W. 86th. Ahha! Today I saw two distinct little heads looking out the hole at me googling at them! There may be another chick. Last week I just saw the adults flying around.

Best,

Jane

=====
From: James Andersen
Subject: Baby Hawk at 6th street
Date: Jun 18, 2008 6:54 PM

Hi,

This is James, the man you met today with the baby Hawk. I am emailing you so that you can send the pics you were talking about. Me and Robert will check the roof tomorrow to see if the Hawk is there. Again, thank you for all your help with the situation. We were at a loss as to what to do. We at PENCER HOUSE 630 E. 6th St. hope to see you again. Please come by anytime you like. You are always welcome in our establishment.

=====
From: Rob Cicchetti
To: rdcny@earthlink.net
Subject: Kestrels – 69th and Broadway
Date: Jun 18, 2008 9:40 PM

Hi Bob,

I thought I may have had to rescue a kestrel the other evening during that thunderstorm..after work I was watching the kestrels prepare for the coming storm - three of them flew back to the base of the nearby water tower where they had been perching a few minutes prior to the rain, seemingly

anticipating the coming weather.

As the wind increased and then the rain, a fourth one came in and as it prepared to land, got carried away with the strong wind and now horizontal rain, unable to fly effectively given its newly learned skill...the hapless kestrel dove uncontrollably 45 degrees towards the sidewalk and then disappeared out of sight as the rain turned nearly sideways.

I put my foul weather gear on and ran out, thinking I may see it flailing on the street or sidewalk and brought a sack to wrap it in should I find it...but after looking around the area I didn't see anything, so let's hope he/she was able to "pull up" and make it to a tree or above the building...

Rob

=====
From: Robert (Bob) Ruckh
Subject: Kestrel, spotted at Loreto Park (Bronx)
Date: Jun 18, 2008 8:13 PM

Hi Bob & Deb, today 06/18 at about **6:30 am** on Morris Park ave I spotted a Kestrel flying from the apartment bldg on the north side of the street over to Loreto Park (in the Bronx). It circled over the park and appeared to be hunting. Unfortunately I did not have the time to pursue or break out the Bino's. Your Kestrel letter triggered the watch, hope this helps, Regards, Bob R.

PS it was great to see you, hope your walk went well! BR

=====
From: Margaret Segall
Subject: W. Village kestrels
Date: Jun 19, 2008 11:46 AM

Bob,

I'm afraid I haven't been able to locate the Kestrel nest near me (Horatio St.), but the birds are definitely around -- I've been hearing them the past few days. Yesterday evening at dusk, the sound got louder as I approached my building and there was a bird perched on the top above the cornice that could have been the kestrel calling. But by the time I went upstairs and got my binoculars, it was gone, alas.

I'll keep looking...

Margaret

=====
From: Carol Wood
Subject: Kestrels – 69th and Broadway
Date: Jun 19, 2008 4:33 PM

Hi Bob,

I was just up on the roof terrace. I saw one female on the wooden post on the southern water tank on the nest building. She was eating something, but I couldn't tell what it was. A second female flew in with a small bird, probably a house sparrow, and landed on the roof with the skylights. She plucked it for a moment, and then flew with it behind something, blocking my view. A third kestrel appeared on top of the northern water tank on the nest building. I think this was a young male. The upper breast had

a tawny color, paler than the adult male, but I couldn't see the wings because I saw the bird head on. After a while the first female flew north and landed successfully on the tree on which we had seen one of the fledglings attempt a landing the last time you were here. In the meantime, the second female brought her prey to the northwestern edge of the skylight roof, and plucked it some more. After a few minutes, she left it lying on the skylight roof and moved away from it. She eventually went back to it, and continued plucking.

Regards,

Carol

=====

To: Justin Fantasia

Subject: Your Kestrels

Date: Jun 16, 2008 7:25pm

Hi Justin,

This morning after you left, I heard the male making the typical call - and then a second bird (a female - could not tell if it was a young one or the adult female/mom) came over and took the prey (a small bird). The latter bird then took the food to the top of one of the Ruppert Buildings (the very tall apartment on the SE corner of 3rd Ave in which the Post Office is located), and ate it there. Meanwhile the male (missing a central tail feather - he is moulting) perched on the railing of the water tower of the building next door to you. He sat there quite a while...then flew off. I saw both kestrels in the area for a while after that...they like to circle up over 3rd Ave.

=====

From: Carol Wood

Subject: Kestrels

Date: Jun 21, 2008 11:08 AM

Hi Bob,

I worked a later than usual shift last night, but I was able to get upstairs on a break from about 5-5:30. I had fun watching the kestrels, and saw five, three females and two males. I assume they were all the young ones. I first saw two males and a female on the roof with the skylights. One on them was eating something. Then I saw a female chasing another female, with exciting aerial acrobatics. They went back and forth between the nest building and the metal tower to the north. One of them would land, and the other would displace it. At one point, I saw that one of the females on the roof was eating a second prey, although I didn't see the catching or delivering of it. Later one of the males engaged in another aerial chase with one of the females. All five sound up on the skylight roof.

Regards,

Carol

=====

From: Jane McCall Politi

Subject: Re: Kestrels on 86th street

Date: Jun 20, 2008 9:04 AM

Hi Bob,

Yesterday afternoon (19 June - Thurs.) one was poised, standing tall on the edge of the nest, cocking

his head to the left and right, scrutinizing everything. I thought he'd take off any minute, but he went back into the nest. I only saw the head of one other. I ran into some friends on 84th. I told them about the kestrels. They said they had seen a woman Wednesday in that area with a bird in a box. Did one of them fledge that day? I'll go by later and see what's new. I wonder what the best thing is to do if I see the bird fly and not make it across to the park? [*See photos below*]

Best,

Jane

=====

Robert DeCandido rdcny@earthlink.net
718-828-8262

Photos of the 86th street and Central Park West nest:



Adult male checking on what is happening in the nest. Photo by Deborah Allen using a Nikon 500mm AIS Nikkor (manual focus) lens with 2x teleconverter.



Three chicks (at least) in the 86th street and Central Park West nest on 18 June – likely there are at least four. We expect the first flights to occur about 23 June – Monday. This photo was “digiscoped” using an Olympus 7070 camera mounted on a Swarovski spotting scope with 32x eyepiece (the zoom version). The digiscoping adapter is made by our good friend Dr. Cheang Kum Seng in Malaysia.



Nest Site at 86th Street and Central Park West