



Birds of a Feather



Scientists and naturalists rely on art to identify birds--in fact, the most popular bird books still use paintings instead of photographs because this allows the artists to emphasize important **field markings**. In this activity, students will produce art in this style. Can we draw field markings so that a new birder could use our art to tell the difference between female and male kestrels? Is there anything else about kestrels we can communicate through art?

Instructions

1. Use bird book examples to point out how artists use paintings and text together to emphasize **field markings**. **Ornithologists** and bird lovers trust this art to communicate which markings are important.
2. Ask students to point out obvious differences between male and female kestrels, using the attached photograph. Write them on the board: these are your field markings. Pass out two coloring sheets per student and have them color one male and one female kestrel, making sure to include the field markings they have identified. If useful, they can point them out with text. Older students may wish to draw their own kestrels instead of using coloring sheets.

Important field markings: males have blue on their wings while females are brown-red all over. Females have stripes all down their tails, while males only have one thick black band at the bottom.

3. **Optional extension:** paint/draw **habitat** in the background. Remember that kestrels like to hunt in open, grassy areas, and that they catch **prey** like mice, grasshoppers, snakes, lizards, and sometimes other birds. Students can even draw a nestbox!

Subject: Art; Natural Science

Grades: 3-5

Materials: two coloring sheets (attached) per student; watercolors, colored pencils or crayons; print-outs of attached photographs; an illustrated bird book (if unavailable, can print example pages from the Internet).

Concepts:

- Art can be used to communicate about the natural world.
- Female and male kestrels are easy to tell apart once you know how!

4. Have volunteers present their artwork to the class. Can you tell which one is a female and male kestrel? What do you like about the art? Can you tell anything else about kestrels from the art?
5. Use students' drawings to identify male and female kestrels. Either 1) take a walk outside and try to find male and female kestrels, 2) visit kestrel.peregrinefund.org to watch footage of nestboxes, or 3) identify male and female kestrels from printed photographs. Have students take the drawings home to share. Can they find and identify kestrels on the way to school? Watch for them on power lines.

Glossary

Field Marking: a specific characteristic that distinguishes one bird from others. It could be anything from the color of certain feathers to the shape of its wings.

Habitat: an environment where groups of organisms live together. For example, a kestrel's habitat includes open space over which to hunt, a cavity to nest in, and prey species like mice.

Medium: the substance an artist uses to create art.

Organism: a living thing.

Ornithologist: a scientist who studies birds.

Predator: an animals that hunts and eats other animals. Humans and kestrels are both predators.

Prey: an animal that is hunted and eaten by other animals. Mice are prey because they are eaten by predators like kestrels.

Style: a way of doing art that is characteristic of a particular time, place, culture, person, etc.

Visit us! kestrel.peregrinefund.org

The American Kestrel



Female Kestrel



Male Kestrel

