

British Nature Guide

The Kestrel – a hovering predator



Kestrels are famous for hovering high above the ground. While their wings are flapping, they keep their heads perfectly still and scan for their prey.

Kestrels have very large eyes and exceptional eyesight. They can see movement in the grass, even from a great height. If they see something they will move closer and then hover again to make sure what it is, before dropping to the ground. They grab their prey with their sharp talons and kill it with their hooked bill.

If they have young to feed they will return to their nest holding their food in their talons. If they are hunting for themselves they will fly to a safe place to feed.



Kestrels hunt voles, mice and birds as well as some insects. They swallow their food in large chunks. It takes about a day for them to digest the edible parts. The hair and bones cannot be digested and are coughed up as pellets. Scientists study these pellets to discover exactly what Kestrels have been eating.

Kestrels don't always hover, sometimes they sit on posts or wires to hunt.

Kestrels can live for more than ten years in captivity, but birds living in the wild rarely survive for more than three years.

The Kestrel has a wingspan of around 75cm. The male and female look similar. To tell them apart look at the head, the male's is grey and the female's is brown.