



Trust pilots roadside kestrel project

Plan for 240 kestrel nestboxes in neighbourhood of 240 miles of highway

Kestrel Highways is a Hawk and Owl Trust project to find out whether lack of nesting sites is the reason for the falcon's dramatic decline.

Backed by funding from the renowned conservationist Dr Luc Hoffmann, it will establish whether providing nestboxes in suitable feeding habitat will help reverse the falcon's population slump.

The kestrel is an iconic bird for motorists as it hovers above the rough grassland on roadside verges, looking for prey.

It is, however, no longer the most common bird of prey in the UK.

Buzzards and sparrow-hawks are now thought to be more numerous, according to the new report on the status of the UK's birds of prey, *On a Wing and a Prayer* (see page 8). It found that the kestrel had declined by a fifth between 1994 and 2005.

The Trust's plan is to provide vital nestboxes for kestrels near major roads in the UK, ready for the 2009 breeding season.

Trust staff and volunteers, including local members' groups, have been selecting suitable sites (with landowners' permission) for 10 nestboxes in countryside along a 10-mile stretch of each of the roads.

The nestboxes will then be monitored in the spring to check occupation by breeding kestrels.

The idea is to extend the project in 2009 - the Trust's 40th anniversary year.

The plan is to erect 10 more boxes per road along additional 10-mile stretches next year, and the same again in 2010.

The target is 240 nestboxes along 240 miles of major roads in the United Kingdom.

"We want to see whether lack of nesting sites is the missing link - the reason for this roadside hunter's worrying decline," explained the project's national co-ordinator, trustee Major Nigel Lewis, who is also responsible for the section along the A303.

He and his group have made a great impact with the kestrel nestboxes they have put up on Salisbury Plain and around South Wiltshire in the last 24 years.

Most are now regularly occupied by breeding kestrels and this year there were 54 pairs. Nigel has drawn on this experience in devising the Kestrel Highways project.

"In most cases the nestboxes we will be putting up for the project will be mounted in trees, except in North Yorkshire.

"There our pilot project is taking place where the A171 crosses the Trust's Fyling-dales Moor conservation area, with no suitable trees. So we'll be mounting boxes on poles instead," he said.

"The results at the different sites and associated habitat will provide valuable data on the factors that affect the breeding ecology of these falcons."

Supporters can contribute by reporting sightings of kestrels in the project areas. That will help the Trust to get an idea about whether the 80 new nestboxes are doing the trick. [Click here to report a sighting](#) on one of the target roads.

2010 update on target roads

By 2010 nestboxes had been put up along the following stretches of road:

ENGLAND

- A24, Worthing through Low Weald Area, West Sussex
- A303, Mere to Amesbury, Wiltshire
- A38, Bedminster Down, Bristol to Bridgwater, Somerset
- A38, Alveston to Hardwicke, Gloucestershire
- A46 Swainswick, Bath to Horton, South Gloucestershire
- A420 Wick, South Gloucestershire, to Chippenham, Wiltshire
- B4058, Frampton Cotterell to Wotton-under-Edge, Gloucestershire
- A148, Felbrigg Hall to Little Snoring, Norfolk
- A171, Harwood Dale to Robin Hood's Bay, North Yorkshire
- B1416, from A171 to Sneaton Moor, North Yorkshire

WALES

- A40/A465, Abergavenny, Monmouthshire, to Longtown, Hereford

SCOTLAND

- A75, Newton Stewart to Gatehouse of Fleet, Dumfries & Galloway

see also

- [Kestrel](#)

The kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*) can be seen hovering at the roadside, but is less common than in the recent past

- [Artificial nest sites](#)

Providing nestboxes and other artificial nest sites for birds of prey to breed is a vital part of the Hawk and Owl Trust's conservation work.

- [Status of UK diurnal birds of prey](#)



- [Build and erect](#)

a kestrel nestbox