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RE: Status Report for 2017 Award to Kestrels on Campus

In August of 2017 the Kestrels on Campus project submitted an application to the Great Salt Lake Audubon requesting funding for a scope digitizing lens and adaptor as well as a go-pro camera with pole extension. We had coordinated directly with the lead biologist for the American Kestrel Study, Jesse Watson, to determine how to be optimally effective in monitoring kestrel nesting activity on campus. Jesse urged us to purchase a go-pro camera with a long extension pole to efficiently peek into the nestboxes while minimizing disturbance. It was also clear in talking to Jesse, that to be able to identify previously banded kestrels we would need to be able to take zoomed-in photos of the leg bands. We were so grateful to receive enough funding from GSL Audubon to purchase two cameras and extension poles, both of which have been, and continue to be, used extensively by the students monitoring our campus kestrel nestboxes, which now total 18 throughout the open spaces on the University of Utah greater campus.

Along with the cameras and extension poles, we were able to purchase a scope digitizing adaptor. We have so far not found any kestrel pairs nesting in our campus boxes, but we are contributing “presence/absence” data to the Hawkwatch International (HWI) database through continued monitoring. As HWI is collecting data in hopes of comparing nesting and fledgling success in a wide variety of habitat types, it is important to be able to record all kinds of data including “not present”. We haven’t lost hope for a campus nesting pair quite yet though, since kestrels can lay eggs through mid-June. This happened during the summer of 2014 at the Ft. Douglas nestbox after kestrels kicked out (or possibly predated?) nesting starlings. If we find a nesting pair, we will be utilizing the scope-digitizing lens and adaptor to take pictures of leg bands (and birds!), and we will share with GSL Audubon.

In the meantime, one of our students, Jennifer Bridgeman, is, in addition to monitoring campus kestrel activity, conducting undergraduate research on raptors up City Creek Canyon. She has identified at least one nesting pair of peregrine falcons and is hoping to use the Kestrels on Campus scope digitizing adaptor to take close-up pictures of the pair. Jennifer will be presenting the results of her research to the Birds n’ Bites presentation this fall, and will include any photos she’s able to capture using this equipment.

We will continue to participate in the American Kestrel study for as long as HWI collects data. We are very grateful for the ability to purchase these vital pieces of equipment, made possible only by the generous award from the GSL Audubon. Thank you!



Mindy Simmons monitoring a kestrel nestbox...only to find that a northern flicker had taken up residency! As you can see, these nestboxes have been placed fairly high in trees, and the extension pole is a must-have piece of equipment for checking the contents of the box. Plus, using them is far safer than climbing shaky ladders!