

SOUTHEASTERN AMERICAN KESTREL

Falco sparverius paulus

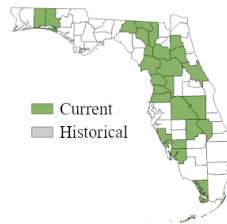
Order: Falconiformes

Family: Falconidae

FNAI Ranks: G5T4/S3

U.S. Status: none

FL Status: Threatened



Description: Smallest falcon in U.S. and similar in size to the familiar mourning dove (*Zenaida macroura*). Sexes distinctive: male has blue-gray wings, while female is larger and has more uniformly rufous back and wings. Both sexes have a mustached black-and-white facial pattern with strong perpendicular lines extending below eye and near ear, and a black band at base of rufous tail. Falcons in general have long, pointed wings and long tails, similar to doves. The alarm call, given frequently in flight, is killy, killy, killy.

Similar Species: The merlin (*Falco columbaris*), another falcon found in Florida, is larger and lacks the rufous back and tail found on kestrels. The sharp-shinned hawk (*Accipiter striatus*) has rounded wings and also lacks the rufous tail and back. Both the merlin and sharp-shinned hawk also are generally not found in Florida in summer (May - early September).

Habitat: Found in open pine habitats, woodland edges, prairies, and pastures throughout much of Florida. Availability of suitable nesting sites is key during breeding season. Nest sites are tall dead trees or utility poles generally with an unobstructed view of surroundings. Sandhill habitats seem to be preferred, but may also occur in flatwoods settings. Open patches of grass or bare ground are needed in flatwoods settings, since thick palmettos prevent detection of prey.

Seasonal Occurrence: Found throughout Florida year-round, but seasonal occurrence is complicated by arrival of northern migrants in winter. The subspecies that breeds in Florida is listed, but northern migrants are not listed. Northern migrants generally arrive in September and depart by March, but there are records outside these dates. All birds found in the breeding season (April through early September) should be treated as the listed subspecies.

Florida Distribution: Wintering birds found throughout Florida (including the Keys), but the breeding subspecies is non-migratory and most common in peninsular Florida, rare in the Panhandle. Breeding subspecies appears to be extirpated from former nesting areas in south Florida (Miami-Dade County).

Range-wide Distribution: Found throughout most of North and South America, but the listed subspecies is restricted to the southeastern U.S., occurring from Louisiana east to South Carolina and south through the Florida peninsula.

Conservation Status: Population trends cannot be determined from available survey programs. Natural nesting and foraging habitats have certainly declined, as sandhill and open flatwoods habitats are converted to intensive agricultural lands and residential development. Pasture lands may be used by the breeding species but often lack snags used for nesting sites.

Protection and Management: A key habitat feature necessary for breeding is a suitable cavity tree. Cavity trees are usually excavated in large pines and, less frequently, oaks by various woodpeckers. Manage for dead tree snags on public lands. Nest-box programs have been used to augment populations in many areas.

References: Loftin 1992, Robertson and Woolfenden 1992, Rodgers et al. (eds.) 1996, Stevenson and Anderson 1994, Stys 1993, Wood et al. 1988.



