

The First Record of Eurasian Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*) in British Columbia.

By Rick Toochin. Submitted April 15, 2017.

Introduction and Distribution

The Eurasian Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*) is among the most widespread species of raptor that is found throughout the Old World, occurring as a breeder throughout Europe, North Africa, and much of Asia, including Japan (del Hoyo *et al.* 1994, Ferguson-Lees and Christie 2001). As many as eleven subspecies have been described (del Hoyo *et al.* 1994, Clements *et al.* 2015).

In North America, the only region with several records is in Alaska where the Eurasian Kestrel is casual from the western Aleutians and the Pribilof Islands (West 2008). Along the west coast of North America, south of Alaska, the Eurasian Kestrel is an accidental vagrant with a single historical specimen record for British Columbia (Campbell 1985), a single accepted record for Washington State by the Washington Bird Records Committee from Samish Flats, Skagit County, October 31-November 7, 1999 (Wahl *et al.* 2005, WBRC 2016), and 1 accepted record for California by the California Bird Records Committee of a banded bird from the Marin Headlands, in Marin County on October 23, 2007 (Hull *et al.* 2008) and a very recent record of a photographed bird from near Eureka, in Humboldt County on January 6, 2017 (Swick 2017).

In the rest of North America outside of Alaska this species is an accidental vagrant with only a few scattered records along the East Coast from Canada south into the Caribbean and also from South America. These records include individual birds often found in the late fall and winter months. In Eastern Canada, a single bird that was found in both New Brunswick January 18-20, 1988 at Fort Beausejour, Westmorland County was later found in Nova Scotia at the Elysian Fields north of Minudie from January 23 - February 18, 1988 (Mills 1988, Nikula 1988) and recently another was photographed near Hartlen Point, outside Halifax between December 28, 2014 – March 20, 2015 Nova Scotia (e-bird Canada 2017). In the eastern United States, there are 2 accepted records for the state of Massachusetts by the Massachusetts Bird Records Committee with the first record involving a collected specimen record on September 29, 1887 at Nastasket Beach which was the same location as the first record for North America (Cory 1888) and the other from Cape Cod from April 14-May 5, 2002 (Perkins 2002). There is 1 accepted record for the state of New Jersey by the New Jersey Records Committee of a bird found on September 23, 1972 at Cape May Point (Clark 1974). There is a single accepted record for Florida by the Florida Bird Records Committee from Lake Apopka North Shore Restoration Area in Orange County on March 2, 2003 (Pranty *et al.* 2004). Sightings from areas outside of North America include records of single birds from Ferry Point, in Bermuda on February 4, 1908 (Pranty *et al.* 2004), from the west coast of Martinique in 1959 (Pranty *et al.* 2004), a first

winter female from Carli Bay, in Trinidad from December 17, 2003 -January 1, 2004 (Pranty *et al.* 2004) and in South America in French Guiana (A.O.U. 1998).

Identification and Similar Species

The identification of the Eurasian Kestrel is described in most comprehensive North American Field Guides. This is a medium-sized species measuring 34 cm in length, with a wingspan of 74 cm, and weighs 150-185 grams (Brazil 2009, Dunn and Alderfer 2011). This makes the Eurasian Kestrel a much larger species than the American Kestrel which measures 27 cm in length, with a wingspan of 58 cm, and weighs 117 grams (Sibley 2000, Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The larger wings and longer tail of the Eurasian Kestrel should be obvious to any observer if seen under good conditions. The Eurasian Kestrel, like the American Kestrel, is found in open country, on plains, airfields, motorways, arable fields, heaths and marshes interspersed with woods and copses (Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009). This species hovers for its prey, with the tail held down and spread out in a fan (Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009). The Eurasian Kestrel prefers to feed on Voles and Insects (Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009). When not hovering, the flight style is active with loose wingbeats and less gliding (Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009).

Adult males are colourful overall (Jonsson 1992). The head is blue-gray, large and round in shape with pale blue-gray cheeks (Clark and Wheeler 1987). The bill is hooked with a yellow cere and black tip (Wheeler 2003, Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009). There is a thin yellow eye-ring around the dark eye (Brazil 2009). There is a single thin dark moustache mark, and a white throat (Clark and Wheeler 1987). The back and upperwing-coverts are rufous with small dark spots (Brazil 2009). The uppertail-coverts are solid gray (Clark and Wheeler 1987). The underparts are creamy to buffy with a finely streaked breast and with spotting on the belly (Brazil 2009). The undertail-coverts and leg feathers are unstreaked (Clark and Wheeler 1987). The long gray tail is usually un-banded except for a wide sub-terminal band and narrow white terminal band (Clark and Wheeler 1987). The legs and feet are yellow (Dunn and Alderfer 2011).

Adult females have a reddish-brown head, with fine dark streaking and pale cheeks (Clark and Wheeler 1987). There is one thin moustache stripe and a white throat (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The bill is hooked with a yellow cere and black tip (Clark and Wheeler 1987, Wheeler 2003). There is a thin yellow eye-ring around the dark eye (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The back and upper-wing coverts are reddish-brown and have short dark triangular bars (Clark and Wheeler 1987). The upper-tail coverts vary from reddish-brown to gray, and usually have faint dark bars (Clark and Wheeler 1987). The under-parts are buffy with fine streaks (Brazil 2009). The under-tail coverts and leg feathers are creamy and un-streaked (Clark and Wheeler 1987). The long, rounded tail varies from reddish-brown, often with a grayish cast, to solid gray; the

tail has narrow dark brown bands with wide dark brown sub-terminal band (Clark and Wheeler 1987). The legs and feet are yellow (Brazil 2009).

Immature birds are similar looking to adult females, but the back and the upper-wing coverts are brown and have wide dark brown bars (Clark and Wheeler 1987). The tail has wider dark brown bands, and streaking on under-parts is thicker (Clark and Wheeler 1987).

The similar looking American Kestrel is overall smaller with 2 distinct moustache stripes on the side of the face (Clark and Wheeler 1987). This species lacks a two-toned upper-wing in flight and has a noticeably shorter tail that is more rounded at the tip (Clark and Wheeler 1987). Adult male American Kestrels have rufous tails and grayish wing-coverts while this is the opposite on Eurasian Kestrel (Clark and Wheeler 1987).

Occurrence and Documentation

The Eurasian Kestrel is an accidental vagrant anywhere in British Columbia with only 1 historical record of an immature female that was collected and prepared as a specimen by Leo Jobin and came from Alkali Lake, 41 km south of Williams Lake, on December 10, 1946 (Campbell 1985). The bird was originally mislabeled by Mr. Jobin as a Prairie Falcon (*Falco mexicanus*) and was not discovered as a Eurasian Kestrel until the collection was donated to the Royal BC Museum and was found and identified by R. Wayne Campbell who corrected the misidentification and gave the specimen number 15934 (Campbell 1985). The Eurasian Kestrel is an interesting species in North America as it has occurred during fall migration on both the west and east coasts, but also there are several records during the winter months (Pranty *et al.* 2004). The British Columbia record is not unique and occurred in the winter which, surprisingly, is a time period that this species has occurred in North America (Pranty *et al.* 2004). Most records in North America involve immature or female-type plumages and not adult males (Pranty *et al.* 2004). The Eurasian Kestrel is a species that has been documented boarding ships, such as in the Atlantic Ocean (Pranty *et al.* 2004). This species is also widely kept in captivity by Falconers and all future records should be investigated thoroughly for possible captive origin. The Eurasian Kestrel that was found in Samish Flats in Washington State was later caught, banded and measured by raptor biologist Bud Anderson and showed no signs of captivity (Wahl *et al.* 2005). The Eurasian Kestrel is a species that can turn up anywhere in British Columbia and could be found either during the fall migration between the months of September – October or anytime during the winter months from December to February. Though this species is still very rare anywhere in North America, it could turn up again the province in the future.

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