

— BIODIVERSITY — on your Farm

The National Biodiversity Data Centre has set a challenge for farmers to record some of the amazing biodiversity found on your farm during the year. We have 40 species for you to record.
Are you up for the challenge?

Species: Common Kestrel

Scientific Name: *Falco tinnunculus*

Irish name: Pocaire gaoithe

Group

Belong to the Falcon genus (*Falco*) bird family with Merlin, Hobby and Peregrine Falcon.

1 of 457 resident and regularly breeding birds species in Ireland.

How common on farms

Biodiversity surveys were carried out across 40 farms within the National Biodiversity Data Centre’s ‘Protecting Farmland Pollinators’ EIP project (<https://biodiversityireland.ie/projects/protecting-farmland-pollinators/>). The 40 farms were chosen to reflect farms of differing types and intensity levels. Kestrel was recorded as present on 14 of the 40 farms. There were no records of breeding Kestrel in the last few years.



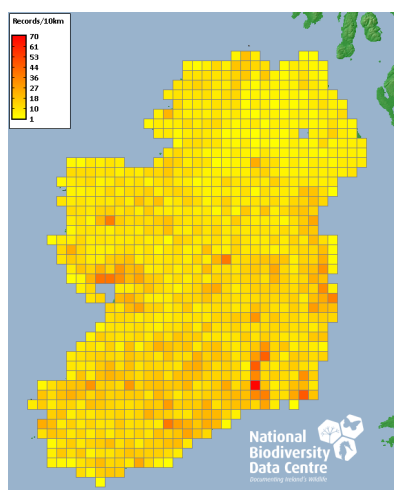
The Common Kestrel (male). Brown spotted back, narrow wings and tail.

Identification Tips

- Roughly the size of a magpie, with pointed wings and tail.
- Males, smaller than females, with a blue-grey head and tail and its upperparts are reddish-brown and spotted with back.
- Females are streaky brown all over.
- Usually hovers at a height of 10-20m above the ground, with a fanned tail when it hunts its prey over rough grass areas.
- Call is a high-pitched ‘kee-kee-kee’.

Distribution

Common and widespread.



Source: The Common Kestrel records as viewed on Biodiversity Maps, 2023.

Biodiversity Tip No. 27

Consider non-chemical alternatives to rodenticides.

Remove food and water and make buildings as rodent proof as possible.



Conservation Status

Red Lists are an internationally recognised methodology for assessing conservation status. An Irish Birds of Conservation Concern (IBoCC) List was published for 2020 to 2026. It found that the Common Kestrel was Red listed, meaning they are of high conservation concern.

Management Tips

On the farm:

- Retain or create field margins, leave some areas of tussocky grass.
- In non-farmed areas and buffer strips, leave some open areas of tussocky grass.
- Create a pond, Kestrels feed on frog at certain times of the year [Ponds for Biodiversity | An Taisce - The National Trust For Ireland](#)
- Consider non-chemical alternatives to rodenticides.
- Remove food and water and make buildings as rodent proof as possible.

Nesting sites for Common Kestrel:

- Consider building a Kestrel nesting box, [How To Make A Kestrel Nest Box - The RSPB](#)
- Fix the nest box to a tree/pole/building in an undisturbed location, close to grassland with



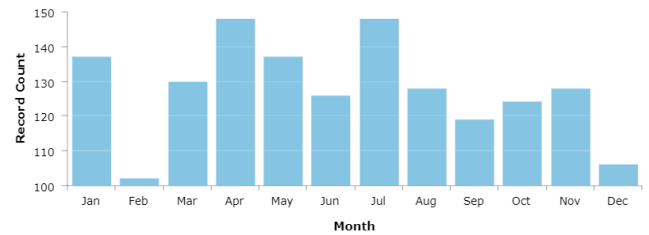
Common Kestrel in flight. Note dark chocolate brown wings.

Photo: Mike Pearson.

When?

Can be seen all year round.

Records per month across all datasets



National Biodiversity Data Centre, Ireland, Common Kestrel, *Falco tinnunculus*, image, accessed May 2023, [Common Kestrel \(Falco tinnunculus\) - Detail - Biodiversity Maps \(biodiversityireland.ie\)](#)

Where on the farm?

Usually seen hovering over fields or along roadside verges.

They can occur in most types of farmland, but tend to avoid planted forests and exposed mountains.

On farmland Kestrels have learned to watch farming operations, waiting for the tractors to flush prey.

Value

- As top predators, birds of prey are a barometer of the overall health of the environment.
- A natural pest control of small mammals on the farm.



Common Kestrel.

Photo: Mike Pearson

Further Info

They feed on a variety of prey, from mammals such as mice and shrews to small birds, frogs, lizards and even invertebrates such as insects and earthworms.

Due to their ability to hover in place, with extremely sharp eyesight, Kestrels can spot a beetle from 50 metres away. They can even see ultraviolet light, which is invisible to the human eye. This means they can detect the urine trails left by rodents on the ground, helping the birds locate their prey. They will often spot their prey along linear features such as hedgerows where mammals will pass to avoid straying into open ground.

Unfortunately severe declines in viable breeding populations in recent years have been recorded, many reasons for the decline in Kestrel have been noted such as reduced prey availability, intensification of agriculture and secondary rodenticide poisoning (Gilbert, Stanbury and Lewis, 2021).

Affected by a change in climate?

Changes to the seasons and changeable weather may affect breeding Kestrels and the juvenile birds in their first year to find enough food.

Change in climate may indirectly decouple some predator-prey relationships.

Similar species

They can be similar to Sparrowhawk, Merlin and Hobby.

Need some help with identification?

Just drop us a line, we'll be happy to help:
pollinators@biodiversityireland.ie

Useful Links

Birdwatch Ireland have information here:

[Kestrel - BirdWatch Ireland](#)

For information on best practise and responsible use of chemical rodent control:

[PRCD - Campaign for Responsible Rodenticide Use in Ireland \(agriculture.gov.ie\)](#)

Watch a recent talk by Eanna Ní Lamhna

[Signpost Series - Safeguarding our wildlife, campaign for responsible rodenticide use \(CRRU\) - YouTube](#)

Record here

Your records will help us build a picture of farmland biodiversity in Ireland. If you're happy with your identification, you can submit your record.

- On the National Biodiversity Data Centre website:
<https://records.biodiversityireland.ie/record/biodiversity-on-your-farm#7/53.455/-8.016>

The Farmland Pollinator Officer post is funded by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine as one of its contributions to assisting implementation of the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan 2021-2025.



An Roinn Talmhaíochta,
Bia agus Mara
Department of Agriculture,
Food and the Marine



An Roinn Tithíochta,
Rialtais Áitiúil agus Oidhreacht
Department of Housing,
Local Government and Heritage



An Chomhairle Oidhreachta
The Heritage Council



An tSeirbhís Páirceanna Náisiúnta
agus Fiadhúlra
National Parks and Wildlife Service

The National Biodiversity Data Centre is a Company Limited by Guarantee. Register Number: 730718.