American Kestrel Nest Boxes

The VINS research staff are continuing our important work with American Kestrels in Vermont and New Hampshire. Since 2021 we have monitored boxes, and banded nestlings in those boxes, with over 60 birds encountered to date. We are starting our 2023 season with over 100 boxes in our network across both states, and have already received reports of interested birds at several locations. We continue to work with landowners to help site and install boxes throughout the region and will have several new boxes set up before this breeding season, including all the new boxes we installed over the winter.

This year we plan to include adult birds in our banding efforts and will conduct roadside trapping near nest boxes in order to gather more information about the birds that might be using our boxes. We will include color bands on these birds to make re-sighting by landowners and staff easier. Color bands will also be attached to nestling birds to help track their dispersal.

While we have birds in hand we will gather morphometric measurements, and collect feathers to send to our partners at Middlebury College, who will analyze those feathers to assess mercury concentrations in our local birds.

We are also introducing a new option to our adoption program, where people can symbolically adopt an adult kestrel, a nestling kestrel, or a box within our network. They will receive updates throughout the breeding season and information on each individual they adopt, including band numbers and data collected during banding.

We greatly appreciate the support of our partner landowners, and the members of the public who have already adopted birds and boxes!

— Jim Armbruster, Health and Safety Officer, Research Coordinator

Find out more at vinsweb.org/american-kestral-project.

VINS Upcoming Events

- MAY 2 - 4: VINS Science Symposium
- MAY 4: Rough Legged Hawk Research (virtual presentation)
- MAY 6 & 13: Birding Workshop
- MAY 13: International Migratory Bird Day
- MAY 21: Raptors in Focus Workshop
- JUNE 3: Remarkable Reptile Day
- JUNE 3: Drawing From Nature: Amphibians & Reptiles
- JUNE 10: Get Outdoors Day

View our full event schedule at vinsweb.org/calendar.

The songbirds shown on the front cover are residents of the VINS Songbird Aviary.
New Owl Ambassadors

Last May, we acquired two new members from St. Louis, Missouri for our Environmental Education team at VINS.

A female Barn Owl, hatched at the World Bird Sanctuary, and an Eastern Screech Owl, from the Illinois Raptor Center, were each barely six weeks old and had been bred to be education ambassadors. In joining our team, these tiny fluff-balls would receive skillful care, socialization, and training in order to become successful representatives of their species in our programs.

Historically, our ambassador raptors came from the Center for Wild Bird Rehabilitation or other rehabilitators as injured, non-releasable wild birds. The welfare of VINS ambassadors is paramount; we strive to never put our birds in stressful situations, and we are constantly assessing their comfort. Experts agree that owls raised carefully by humans from a young age are known to be more confident and healthier in an education setting.

We know we elevate visitor experiences when we ensure our ambassadors have the choice to participate in programs.

The past year with these young owls – St. Louis and Decatur – has been delightful. Decatur’s habit of hooting mid-flight while he flaps his way over small audiences, and St. Louis’s fascination with every one of her enrichment items shows us that we have succeeded in our goals. Because we value these birds’ unique ability to connect people to the natural world, just as highly as we value their comfort and welfare in our care.

— Anna Morris, Lead, Environmental Educator

Interested in adopting a VINS Avian Ambassador? Find out more at vinsweb.org/adopt.

A Special Message

The other day I shoveled several feet of snow off the part of the garden where the crocuses bloom and there they were, waiting to be revealed and touched by the warmth of the spring sun. They are in full bloom now and as lovely as always, seemingly untouched by a changing climate.

At VINS, as we imagine our role as environmental educators and refine our message tailoring it to the new challenges and realities facing the natural world and its creatures, we are more committed than ever to continue our role as a leading voice in conservation and environmental education.

This was a record year for VINS – 76,572 visitors joined us at the Nature Center this last year.

A total of 95,240 people were touched by a VINS experience through visiting, community outreach, school programs and nature camp. For almost a decade, 551,134 children and adults have engaged with an owl, a turtle, a snake or two, an eagle and a myriad of other birds, walked on a nature trail, come on a field trip, rescued a wild bird, climbed to the top of the Canopy Walk Treehouse, found their way into the spider web, listened to a raptor presentation, engaged with the Birds Are Dinosaurs Exhibit, had a personal event at our facility or just enjoyed being out in nature at VINS.

So, our work continues, and would not be possible without the amazing staff, board members, committed volunteers and members, as well as the generosity of our supporters.

You, as a member of the VINS community, continue to be an essential part of our ability to do what we do. Please make a gift today to help VINS continue to make a difference.

Thank you for being part of our community. Without you, none of our work is possible.

Yours truly,

Charles F. Rattigan
Executive Director

Amphibians: Why Are They So Important?

AMPHIBIANS are incredibly sensitive to environmental changes, and they not only provide valuable ecosystem services, but they also provide information about how an ecosystem is functioning. Tadpoles are able to help maintain clean water by feeding on the algae that would otherwise negatively impact water, ecosystem, and human health.

AMPHIBIANS have a huge influence on many other species, as both predator and prey. They eat agricultural insect pests as well as mosquitos, both of which are hugely beneficial to humans. More salamander species live in the United States than any other place in the world, and when they disappear, the environment changes dramatically.

— Mary Davidson Graham, Assistant Executive Director & Calah Beckwith, Press & Grant Writer
Illustrations by Mal Muratori, VINS Environmental Educator

— Anna Morris, Lead, Environmental Educator

Illustrations by Mal Muratori, VINS Environmental Educator

— Mary Davidson Graham, Assistant Executive Director & Calah Beckwith, Press & Grant Writer