



Quest for the Kestrel

Windsor, Vermont

Physical Difficulty: Easy

Special Features: Natural, Vista

Duration: 0:30

Compass: Binoculars, Field Guide

To get there: From either Exit 8 or 9 off I-91, take Route 5 south or north to downtown Windsor. Turn west on State Street. Bear right at the fork, and then turn right onto County Road. After 2.6 miles, turn left on Weeden Hill. Then, after 0.1 mile, take your first left onto Marton Rd. After 0.7 mile, park in the pull-off by the low shed on the left.

QUEST SITE OVERVIEW

Old fields include a mixture of annual, biennial and perennial herbaceous plants, along with grasses, shrubs and young trees. Old fields undergo a process known as *succession*. Any open field fills in, over time, with a succession of species. First to come are the “pioneer” species, herbaceous weeds like asters and goldenrod. Later, trees seed in, and eventually, a field—if left untended—will become a young forest. First to come are the sun-loving trees, like white pine and pin cherry. While this field is still open, look to the surrounding ridges: much of this land is returning to forest. **The Kestrel Quest** and the Wellborn Ecology Fund Natural Communities Quest Series as a whole were made possible by a generous grant from the Wellborn Ecology Fund of the Upper Valley Community Foundation. For more information, please visit www.nhcf.org

CLUES:

Look up, and around—
There is so much sky!
And so many habitats, too.

To the south there are hay fields.
Floating up in the hills, a tree plantation.

The ridge lines march east: green, gray, blue,
Across the Connecticut River Valley to Cornish.
Close in, the land folds into an old field.

What lives here?
Look. Wait.
Listen. Learn.

Find the wires, then follow the lane running east.
A sign says "No trespassing,"
But that's only for the cars.

Stop and sit awhile. Take in the field: goldenrod,
Wild parsnip, honeysuckle, white and red clover, milkweed,
Red osier dogwood, New England aster, Queen Anne's lace.

Can you find the boundaries of the old field?
Where the land is plowed or cut back year after year?
In the old field, see young trees seeding in: willow, pine, and aspen.

This field is a community, ripe with seed,
And with insects, too—both are food for other species.
Who feeds on these two? Look: are they in your view?

Continue east on the road, toward the crab apples.
Walk leisurely, watching for movement, and listening for birds.
Who is working the fields, the wires, the trees?

Flitting in the thickets,
Song sparrows you might find, singing their bubbly
"Madge, madge, please put on the teakettle."

If you are lucky,
You may see an indigo bunting, from a shrub or treetop, singing
"Sweet, sweet, chew, chew, sweet, sweet."

A yellow warbler,
Lurking in a willow or shrub thicket calling out:
"Sweet, sweet, sweeter than sweet."

Field sparrows, common yellow throats,
Bluebirds, and who else do you see?
So many birds are waiting here for you.

Why all of these species?
It's all about habitat:
About cover, food and water.

Keep on following the wires east.
Soon you'll spy wooden boxes—
Houses for bluebirds and tree swallows on the posts.

Bluebirds nest in cavities.
Count all of the boxes that you see.

In the field to the north see the lonely double 2x4 pole
Attached to a much larger wooden box:
This one is for the American kestrel.

A jay-sized and open-field falcon,
It has two black stripes on a white face...beautiful markings!
A curved beak and narrow, pointy wings.

Look for them perched on the wires,
Resting, hunting, watching for insects and small mammals.
The American kestrel's song, a rowdy and rich "killy killy killy."

An open field is an invitation for grasses and herbs.
This richness and diversity invites the insects and birds.
All this life humming in a field ...and then the kestrel is revealed.



Ahead there are two poles...like an inverted V.
And climbing up hill to the right, a barbed wire fence line.
At the base of the pole just before these? A Valley Quest box to find.

Open up the box: a notebook.
Patiently linger: see what you see,
Please record your discoveries faithfully.

The Kestrel Quest Species Check List

What did YOU see?

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Goldenrod | <input type="checkbox"/> Wild Parsnip |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Honeysuckle | <input type="checkbox"/> Red Clover |
| <input type="checkbox"/> White Clover | <input type="checkbox"/> Red Osier Dogwood |
| <input type="checkbox"/> New England Aster | <input type="checkbox"/> Queen Anne's Lace |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Song Sparrow | <input type="checkbox"/> Indigo Bunting |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yellow Warbler | <input type="checkbox"/> Field Sparrow |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Common Yellowthroat | <input type="checkbox"/> Eastern Bluebird |
| <input type="checkbox"/> American Kestrel | <input type="checkbox"/> Common Dandelion |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bull Thistle | <input type="checkbox"/> Common Burdock |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Milkweed | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |

Did you know?

In the winter, female and male kestrels have been known to pick different migrating spots, with females preferring open areas and males favoring wooded spaces. Source: allaboutbirds.org

This Quest was created by Michael Quinn, Bill Shepard, Andy Boyce and Steve Glazer in 2003.

Please be a good steward of the land: leave it better than you found it and pack out any trash you find.



Valley Quest is a collection of treasure hunts that share and teach the natural gems and cultural heritage of the Upper Valley with children, families, adults, and visitors. It is a program of Vital Communities, a regional nonprofit working to engage citizens, organizations, and communities in creating solutions to our region's challenges. Learn more at vitalcommunities.org