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THE OCCURRENCE OF MELANISM IN AN AMERICAN KESTREL

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On 14 May 1986 we captured, banded and released a partially melanistic male American Kestrel, (*Falco sparverius*) (Fig. 1) at Whitefish Point, Chippewa County, Michigan. Plumage differed from normal by having an almost completely black tail, black upper tail coverts, black primary coverts, and black alula. Greater, middle and lesser secondary coverts, marginal coverts, the rump, and the back also had much more black coloration than usual (Fig. 1). The underside (throat, breast, belly, flanks, wing linings) of the bird and the crown were normal in color.

Neither Bent (*Life histories of North American birds of prey*, part 2. Dover, 1961) nor Gross (*Bird-Banding* 36: 240-242, 1965) reported melanism in the American Kestrel, and a review of the literature from 1965-1986 also failed to reveal any records. We have banded over 250 American Kestrels and have never encountered a similarly

colored bird. David M. Bird (pers. comm.), who has bred over 1000 American Kestrels in captivity and studied over 100 breeding pairs in the wild, has also never encountered a melanistic plumage. However, melanism is known to occur in the European Kestrel, *Falco tinnunculus* (Sage, *Br. Birds* 55:201-225, 1962; Rense, *Limosa* 44:62, 1971).

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Figure 1. Partially melanistic American Kestrel captured at Whitefish Point, Michigan.