



Merlin

January 2026 - Bird Of The Month

The Merlin is a small, powerfully built falcon known for its incredible speed, agility, and fierce hunting prowess. A fearsome hunter, this bird of prey specializes in rapid aerial ambushes of smaller birds.

Historically, in medieval Europe they were used in falconry, being particularly favored by noblewomen for hunting skylarks, earning them the nickname "lady hawks".

Fierce and pugnacious, Merlin hunt by surprising prey with fast, horizontal attacks, often from below, relentlessly chasing birds until they tire.

Nimble and cunning, Merlin thrive today due to a surprising adaptation to urban environments by using old crow, raven or hawk nests, making it a tenacious, adaptable hunter in a variety of novel habitats where unwitting avian prey is abundant.

Merlin breed in the northern boreal forests of Alaska/Canada and the Great Plains. They migrate south as solitary individuals to our area to overwinter where they can be seen from October through March. Slightly larger than their falcon cousin, the American Kestrel, the Merlin is heavily streaked below with males having bluish backs; the larger female being more brown. The depth and intensity of brown coloration serve to differentiate the three distinct North American Merlin subspecies.

Photos by James Kendall Written by Betty Kanne

