

Seattle-Area Merlin Research Study

Merlins are small falcons, a type of bird of prey. Merlins were first documented breeding in Seattle in 2008. The Merlins breeding in Seattle and surrounding cities provide a unique opportunity to find out more about a little-studied species, and how a raptor species can adapt to an urban/suburban environment. This study will investigate:

- Nest site characteristics
- Nesting success and productivity
- Site and pair fidelity
- Annual movements and juvenile dispersal

We've identified Merlin presence and/or nesting activity in your neighborhood. You might see us from time to time throughout the year, checking on the merlins and/or their nest with binoculars and spotting scopes.



In addition, we'll be attempting to band some of the Merlins, with federally-permitted bird bands. Merlins will be banded with a silver band on one leg, and either a red band or a blue band on the other leg. Red bands are coded with two digit white numbers and will be read left to right. Blue bands are coded with two character letters, stacked vertically, and will be read top to bottom. If you see any banded Merlins we would certainly appreciate hearing about what you saw – such re-sightings of banded Merlins are very valuable to our study.



If you see us around please feel free to ask us any questions you may have about our project, or the Merlins. We're happy to let you know what we are doing.

Thank you for your support and interest, and if you have any questions or want to let us know of any Merlin sightings you've had, please contact us.



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Merlin FAQs

1. What are Merlins?

Merlins are small falcons. They are smaller than Peregrine Falcons and larger than Kestrels. There are 3 subspecies of Merlins in North America. The subspecies nesting in Western Washington is called the “Black” or “Pacific” Merlin, and is darker than the other North American subspecies.

2. How common are Merlins in Seattle?

Merlins are a common wintering raptor species in the Seattle area. Merlins were first observed in NE Seattle during the breeding season around 2005-2006, with the first nest documented in 2008, in the Victory Heights neighborhood. Until fairly recently, Merlins were listed as a Species of Concern in Washington State.

3. What do Merlins eat?

Merlins are raptors, birds of prey. They usually hunt their prey in-flight. They eat small birds, insects, and occasionally bats.

4. I have a Merlin nest in my neighborhood, what should I do?

Please give your Merlins their space and view them discretely, especially early in the breeding season, so that they feel comfortable establishing their nest site. Merlins will attack anything that they view as a threat to their nestlings. This includes cats on roofs, and anything climbing the nest tree. Please consider postponing major tree work of the nest tree and immediately-adjacent trees until late summer. Merlins like to bathe, so providing shallow (2-3” deep) pools of clean water is beneficial.

5. A baby Merlin has fallen from its nest. What should I do?

If the young Merlin is almost ready to fly, and appears unharmed, place it in a secure, high place, where its parents can feed and watch over it. For very young or injured Merlins, please follow the instructions provided by PAWS Wildlife Center (<http://www.paws.org/wildlife/found-a-wild-animal/>), 425-412-4040.