

# Raptors in the Rows

## Nature's Pest Control



Rodents can cause costly damage in orchards and vineyards, but local raptors—like owls, hawks, and kestrels—offer a natural, effective solution. These skilled hunters can be encouraged to stay by adding simple features such as nest boxes and perching posts. The result? Fewer rodents, less need for costly rodenticides, and a healthier, more balanced ecosystem.

Raptors are reliable pest managers, hunting rodents, insects, and even starlings that damage crops and infrastructure. Great-horned Owls, Red-tailed Hawks, and American Kestrels all prey on voles, mice, and gophers that tunnel through roots, chew irrigation lines, and girdle young trees. A single red-tailed hawk can eat up to 1,000 rodents a year! Some species, like the American Kestrel even help with insect control, feeding on grasshoppers, caterpillars, and other crop pests.

## Stewardship that Pays Off

More and more growers are seeing the value of integrating wildlife stewardship with farm management. Attracting raptors is a cost-effective, chemical-free way to reduce pest pressure while contributing to long-term sustainability. In the Okanagan-Similkameen and across the province, growers can find guidance and even cost-sharing opportunities through conservation groups focused on habitat enhancement.

With just a few low-tech additions—nest boxes, T-posts, and a little patience—raptors can become valuable allies in managing pests, saving crops, and reducing chemical inputs. It's a small step that yields big returns for the land, the harvest, and the wildlife that helps it thrive.



Okanagan Fruit Tree Farm in Kelowna is tackling a vole issue with integrated pest management that includes raptor posts and boxes.

## How to Attract Raptors to Your Property

### Install Nest Boxes



- Barn owls and kestrels readily use man-made boxes.
- Mount boxes on poles or buildings 10–15 feet above ground, facing away from prevailing winds.
- Space kestrel boxes a few hundred metres apart near open hunting grounds.
- Nesting platforms can also attract great horned owls and red-tailed hawks.

### Provide Perches

- Raptors need elevated hunting spots.
- Add T-posts or wooden perches (12–15 feet tall) every few acres near rodent activity or crop rows.



### Conserve Natural Habitat



- Leave field edges, grass strips, or standing dead trees (snags) when possible.
- These areas support both raptors and the small mammals they feed on, while improving biodiversity



### Avoiding Pitfalls

**Skip rodenticides:** poisoned prey can harm or kill raptors as well as any other predators, such as domestic cats and dogs.

**Keep netting tight:** loose netting can trap and kill owls, hawks, snakes, and small birds.

