



Newsletter, Autumn 2023



Red Kite Breeding, Ringing and Wing-Tagging – Ken Sanderson and John Barrett

The number of known breeding pairs at 27 has remained stable for the third year in a row with the number of chicks known to have fledged being at least 39. This figure is slightly down from previous years but with some nests it was not possible to ascertain an accurate brood count, and these have been credited with just one chick. Seven nests failed which is slightly higher than normal.

Whilst the majority of pairs nested in Gateshead MBC and Co. Durham there is more encouraging news from Northumberland with evidence that at least 8 chicks have fledged from 5 nests in the west of the county. A further 3 territories have been confirmed there but no evidence of breeding found. The west of Northumberland is such a vast area to survey, and the confirmed kite territories range from just south of Haltwhistle down to the border with Durham.

Of the 10 kite youngsters that were ringed and tagged in mid-June 7 have been identified since fledging. This year's right wing tag colour is orange, and the juveniles are individually identified from X5 to Y4. The left wing tag colour of pink denotes the kite fledged in the north east of England.



Photograph courtesy of Ken Sanderson – Youngsters 'playing dead' after being ringed and wing tagged.

Relationship Building with Muggleswick Estate – John Barrett and Ken Sanderson

We reported in the last newsletter on the 'Edmundbyers Gathering', a meeting with the local community of Edmundbyers and the surrounding area, and FoRK representatives. This prompted a request from the local land manager to hold a similar event for the staff of Muggleswick Estate. On the 24th of July John Barrett and Ken Sanderson met with Muggleswick Estate's Manager and 12 of the Estate's keepers in order to provide them with an overview of the red kite release in the North East and an update on the current status of the birds including information derived from the movements of the satellite tagged birds and reasons for the high mortality amongst our birds.

The keepers were generally of a young age and most appeared to be relatively new to the Estate. They were keen to hear about the background to the kite releases but also interested to learn about the current issues facing the kites and how they might help. They all see kites on a regular basis, often multiples of birds and therefore hadn't appreciated the current plight of the birds though were very much aware of some of the recent issues in the area. They have had a clear message from the Estate that conservation is an important objective and kites are to be welcomed. They had no concerns over the presence of the kites in the area and appreciated the kites posed no threat to the grouse.

The presentation and discussion were well received and we agreed to keep in contact. The Estate will provide FoRK with counts of the kites and also information on sightings of any wing tagged birds. To help with this we have given them the colour codes for the wing tags and information on the numbering and lettering on the tags.

We are hoping that by developing a constructive relationship with the Estate this will help engender support for the kites and that they will be seen as making an important contribution to the biodiversity on the Estate.

Harold Dobson Update – Sylvia Jones

Our dear friend and secretary Harold is still in hospital after 3 months. He is now in the Freeman Hospital where his consultant is based. Harold remains cheerful and positive. He is getting mobilised by working daily with his physio team. Harold would like to thank his many friends for all the cards, emails, texts and pre-arranged visits. He hopes to leave hospital in the near future but no date has been given yet. He is definitely on the mend and looks forward to resuming his many interests and regular routines.

Twentieth Anniversary Event – Sylvia Jones

Our plans are progressing for special events next year for the twentieth anniversary of the release of the first red kites in Gateshead in 2004. Dates will be released when they are confirmed, if anyone has any extra ideas, please contact a committee member.

[Health Walks with Friends of Red Kites – Jackey Lockwood, Health Walk Co-ordinator](#)

In the last year we have once again enjoyed a varied and interesting programme of Health Walks. There are five favourite walks which we have used. We have met up each Monday afternoon at 1.30 pm for a 3 mile walk in the Derwent Valley or in nearby Watergate Park. The paths we have used have been surfaced and at most had a gentle gradient (except for the steps from the Meadow!). There were three nominated Leaders on each walk so the pace could be varied if necessary but so all Walkers improved their fitness and stamina as well as socialising. There was a café at the end of most of the walks for those who wanted refreshments.

The most northerly of the walks we did was a circular route from Sands Road car park in Swalwell to the confluence of the River Derwent with the River Tyne and back to the start point in a figure of eight. This walk gave good views of waders, gulls and ducks. The most southerly of the walks was a linear one from Stirling Lane in Rowlands Gill to the viaducts near Hamsterley and back again along the Co. Durham section of the Derwent Walk. This gave regular sightings of red kites from various view points as well as woodland birds.

Two other walks which were used several times in the years' programme started from Winlaton Mill. One of these routes took us through Derwenthaugh Park to Swalwell then up on to Gateshead's section of the Derwent Walk to cross the river at the Butterfly Bridge. The other route went through the Park, around Clockburn Lake to the Nine Arches Viaduct, down on to the Meadow at Lockhaugh and back in a loop. These walks gave good sightings of riverside birds such as dipper, grey wagtail, goosander, swan and heron, a variety of summer migrant birds such as chiffchaff, blackcap, swallow and sand martin as well as resident birds such as buzzard and bullfinch. Through the seasons there were many species of woodland and meadow flowers as well as deer.

The walks in Watergate Park and Washingwell Woods offered the option of a shorter walk around Watergate Lake. There was always plenty to see there from a pair of swans and six cygnets to little grebe, mallard, tufted duck, coot, moorhen and gulls. Swallows and house martins were regularly seen over the water and a variety of song birds were heard. The slightly more challenging section through the woods was taken on by most Walkers each week.



Photograph courtesy of Jackey Lockwood

The average number of Walkers out with us has declined from a pre-Covid high of 45 to about 18. We are very fortunate to have been able to enjoy some of the best outdoor spaces in Gateshead. The current programme of walks is on our website. The walks are free and new Walkers are always welcome; you just need to register when you arrive. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the volunteer Health Walk Leaders who have contributed so much to the success and enjoyment of these walks, and to the Walkers themselves for their continued interest, enthusiasm and support. We look forward to getting out in the fresh air for exercise in the year ahead.

A copy of our latest Health Walk schedule can be downloaded [here](#).

Grounded Red Kite Juvenile – John Barrett

On the morning of Monday 24th July Allan Witherington collected a wet and bedraggled juvenile kite from a garden in the Rowlands Gill Dene. John Barrett, who had been giving a presentation to the Estate Keepers at the same time met up with Allan at his home later and they checked the bird over. It didn't appear to have any injuries, so John took the bird and after drying it out, gave it a good feed and left it to have a restful night. The following morning the bird was active and alert, so it was released back into the wild from the garden where it was found and was immediately joined by one of the parents. A successful outcome.



Time to Renew Your Membership – Jennifer Adams

September is especially significant in the Friends of Red Kites (FoRK) calendar. This month marks a pivotal moment when the dedicated volunteers of our organisation, who tirelessly monitor the well-being of the majestic Red Kites in the Derwent Valley and its surrounding areas, rely on the unwavering support of our valued members. Your continued membership is the lifeblood that sustains our essential work.

The mission undertaken by FoRK is of paramount importance, and your membership renewal plays a significant role in our ongoing efforts to preserve and safeguard the breathtakingly beautiful red kites gracing our skies. As a token of our gratitude, we keep you informed about upcoming events and share our informative Newsletter.

FoRK eagerly anticipates your membership for the upcoming year, from 2023 to 2024 and we have attached a membership renewal form so that you can join us in our mission to protect these magnificent birds.

Our heartfelt thanks for your support.