



# Friends of Red Kites

in the North East of England

[www.friendsofredkites.org.uk](http://www.friendsofredkites.org.uk)



## Newsletter, Autumn 2016

### Breeding report - Ian Kerr & Ken Sanderson

#### Summary of 2016 breeding

Number of known territories: 35  
No. of incubating females: 14  
No. of known successful nests: 9  
No. of known fledged chicks: 18  
No. of chicks ringed and wing-tagged: 13  
No. of chicks ringed only: 2  
No. of failed nests: 5 (plus 6 more probable)

#### More detailed report



The first confirmed successful nesting of Red Kites in Northumberland since a pair were poisoned in 2010 was a highlight of another otherwise disappointing season for this iconic species.

In early spring, pairs or single birds were holding around 35 potential nesting territories across the region. Of these, around 14 pairs went on to produce eggs. Nine were successful fledging 18 young while at least five nests failed. Three of the successful nests were in County Durham, fledging 8 young, and five were in Gateshead's Derwent Valley.

Pairs may have also been successful at other localities which could not be fully checked during the season so the figures for successful sites given above must be regarded as the absolute minimum.

Some nests failed because of natural predation and others probably from disturbance which will always be a problem because kites often chose to nest close to homes or in local woodland used for recreation.

At the closely monitored nest sites, 13 chicks were ringed and tagged. Two others were ringed but wings were not well enough developed for tagging. At another site the young were judged too large to safely handle.

The Northumberland success was the first for the county since the pair which was a big attraction for visitors to the former wild cattle centre at Whittonstall perished during the breeding season in 2010.

The success involved a very late nest in the Stocksfield area where two young did not fledge until early August, by far the latest recorded since breeding resumed in the region. The pair may have failed earlier, perhaps after long clashes with local Buzzards, before producing a second clutch.

The nest was discovered during commercial felling operations when a harvesting machine was within 60m of the mature Scots Pine chosen by the pair. A visiting birdwatcher had first raised the possibility of nesting in the area. Shortly afterwards, a forester, familiar with kites after taking his children to see them in the Derwent Valley, noticed a bird slipping away from a nest.

The landowners contacted FoRK and timber operations were immediately halted at considerable cost and disruption to the estate. The nest was regularly monitored and two young were ringed in mid-July when one of them was still too small for wing-tagging. FoRK would like to express its appreciation for the co-operation from this estate.

Concern has continued about the failure of our kites to spread from their core area in the Derwent Valley and the immediate surrounding areas. There have been 213 known fledged kites since the project began. If the region had followed the trend of other re-introductions we should now have over 50 breeding pairs annually.

Ten kites have, so far, been found illegally poisoned in the region and one shot so persecution remains a problem and probably an inhibiting fact to expansion.

Another worrying factor is that the number of kites using the main roosting areas in the Derwent Valley showed a decline last winter. Comments have also been made that people living in areas where kites were an everyday sight are now seeing fewer of them. This has been apparent even in the core area.

This winter FoRK is planning major efforts to monitor existing roosts site and to discover any additional areas being used. Next spring an appeal will be made to the public to come forward with any evidence they have of kites frequenting areas where breeding has so far not been confirmed.

## Annual General Meeting – Harold Dobson

Lintzford Garden Centre, Rowlands Gill, hosted our 7<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting on the evening of Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2016.

34 members attended and, as all the relevant paperwork had been emailed to members well in advance, we managed to get through the formal part of the meeting in 20 minutes (a record !): Ken Sanderson and Harold Dobson were re-elected as Chairman & Secretary respectively and Hilary Johnson was elected as our new Treasurer. Committee members re-elected were: Fiona Clapham, Paul Danielson, Sylvia Jones, Jackey Lockwood, Judy Summerson, Marian Williams and Allan Withrington.



The Chairman commented on the status of the red kites themselves, there is a sustainable population but there were three main concerns:

The red kites were not spreading out from the core area.  
The number of failed nests was significantly higher than the national average.  
Persecution: four of our kites had been found dead in the last two years.



The Monitoring Team were investigating the first two issues and a Persecution Working Group had been set up to address the third. After the meeting, Ken gave us an updated breeding report before we were served with a lovely meal by the Lintzford staff. Fiona raised £45 from the raffle.

## Hen Harrier Day – Tim Watson

It was great to see seven "Friends of Red Kites" members among the 85 other campaigners who attended the third "Hen Harrier Day" event, held for the second year at the RSPB's Saltholme reserve on August 7<sup>th</sup> 2016. The event, held with the support of the Durham Bird Club and the Teesmouth Bird Club, was one of twelve held across the country from the Highlands & Islands of Scotland to the south of England and Northern Ireland, to highlight the plight of Hen Harriers and other birds of prey.

The first "Hen Harrier Day" in the north was held in pouring rain on Lambley Viaduct in the South Tyne Valley in 2014 when the total for all the events was only a few hundred, so the 2,000 plus who attended this year was a sign of a growing frustration at the continuing illegal killing of Golden Eagles, Hen Harriers, Red Kites, Buzzards and Peregrines, mainly where sporting interests on grouse moors and around pheasant shoots are concerned. Inspired by Mark Avery's campaign to ban driven grouse shooting and supported by celebrity Chris Packham, the effect of the events was seen quickly as Mark's e-petition went through the 100,000 barrier necessary to trigger a parliamentary debate. The petition finally closed on 21<sup>st</sup> September 2016 and the final total was a massive 123,076. MPs on the Petitions Committee and Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee are due to hear from experts to discuss grouse shooting before they debate a petition on this issue on Tuesday 18<sup>th</sup> October 2016 between 14:15 and approximately 15:15. This can be watched at <http://www.parliamentlive.tv/Commons> and the speakers will include Dr Mark Avery (petition creator), Jeff Knott (Head of Nature Policy, RSPB) and representatives of the Moorland Association and the Countryside Alliance.

At Saltholme, there were three inspirational speakers to bring everyone up to date. First, John Olley, a former Hen Harrier field worker for Natural England and member of Durham Bird Club, gave a passionate account of the hours spent protecting harriers only for adult birds or clutches of eggs to be destroyed by keepers forced by their employers to maximise the "bag" of grouse. John was followed by Blanaid Denham, who works for the Hen Harrier Life+ project: encouraging community engagement and linking with schools, Blanaid's work has bravely taken her to the colleges where young gamekeepers-to-be are trained. She has talked of doing role play with them and how they have appreciated the issues around law breaking, but how many take that back to their estates, upon qualification, must be in some doubt!

Martin Harper, Conservation Director at the RSPB, closed the event by explaining why his employer had withdrawn, rightly so, from the Hen Harrier Recovery Plan which DEFRA had put in place in 2015. This was because in only the first nesting season (2016) since the plan had been initiated, sporting estates had still not cleaned up their act and the persecution was still going on. He drew inspiration from the numbers attending the events and predicted eventual success.

My message from the day is that we are not campaigning for new legislation, only that the existing laws protecting wildlife are not routinely ignored by those with sporting interests. We left Saltholme with the feeling that the momentum was building and that maybe, just maybe, the tide was turning our way.

## Membership – Judy Summerson

Thank you to everyone who has already renewed their membership. Your continued support is much appreciated. These magnificent birds of prey need all the help we can give them so if you haven't already done so, I do hope you will renew your membership for another year.

## Gibside Red Kite Family Fun Day – Harold Dobson

Our second "Red Kite Family Fun Day" was held on Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> July in the National Trust Gibside's Market Place.

A liveried Go North East red kite bus was the main attraction along with face-painting, a bubbologist and garden games provided by Go North East's entertainments team.

In addition, Friends of Red Kites volunteers were present to provide information about the red kites and their conservation. Kathy Palmer entertained us all by playing her Northumbrian pipes. Fiona & Jon Clapham organised a Tombola stall where major prizes included: a number of passes for Go North East travel, a family day pass to Gibside and a meal for four at Thornley café. A total of £158 was raised. Rena Holford and family, from Hagg Hill Farm, were present selling blown glassware items.

The weather was fine, apart from heavy rain early afternoon, and we chatted to a lot of visitors. Grateful thanks must go to our volunteers who manned the stalls.



## Wildlife Crime – Ron Hogg

As the Durham Police, Crime and Victims' Commissioner, I would like to offer my full support and reassurance that any reports relating to the persecution of wildlife will be treated very seriously by Durham Constabulary. The Force's Rural Liaison and Wildlife Crime Co-ordinator monitors all incident reports across County Durham and Darlington and ensures that the appropriate level of response is given. The Constabulary works closely with other partner agencies including the RSPB, RSPCA and the National Wildlife Crime Unit, and ensures that all reported incidents of wildlife crime are thoroughly investigated.

Durham Constabulary provides regular awareness and developmental training to officers working in rural areas to enable them to deal with any incident relating to wildlife crime. The importance of raising public awareness via campaigns and social media is recognised and the public are encouraged to report this type of crime.

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