

Newsletter, Autumn 2019

Red Kite Breeding Summary – Ken Sanderson

Despite extremes in the weather this spring and early summer, red kites have done better than expected with a minimum of thirty-three chicks fledging from nineteen known successful nests this breeding season. This is the highest number since 2014. Four nests failed, one being predated by crows. The cause of the other failures could not be determined.

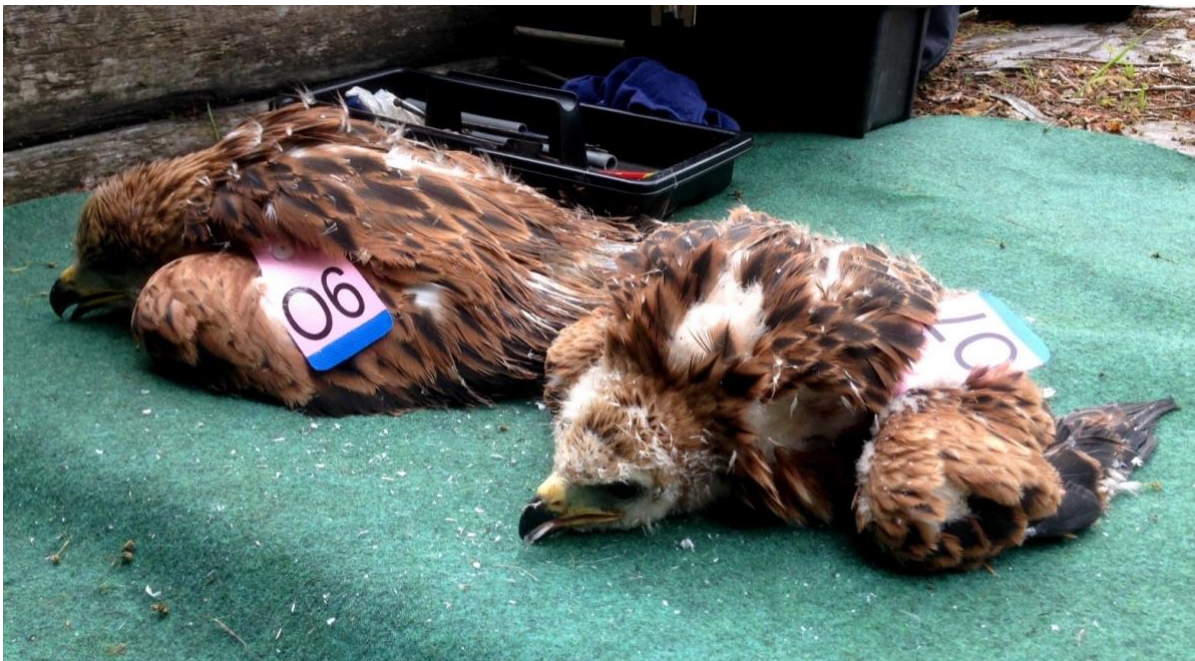
Twelve youngsters were ringed in June with eight of these being suitable to wing tag. The 2019 colour for the right wing tag is blue.

In early July, a wet and exhausted chick was found grounded on Medomsley bank. It was wing tag O2, so we knew that it was a fledged youngster from the nest near Derwentcote. The juvenile had not sustained any injuries so after being kept in rehab for several days, where it was well fed, it was successfully released back into the wild at the natal site.

The number of known occupied territories, after being stable the last couple of years, was slightly higher, at around forty-two to forty-four, but has not quite got back to the high of forty five of 2015.

There appears to be a drift of breeding pairs from the lowest part of the Derwent valley into the Hamsterley Mill/Derwentcote/Spen Banks/ Chopwell Wood areas. There is also evidence that pairs are spreading out from the Derwent Valley with two pairs breeding near Snod's Edge, one pair near Riding Mill and the regular pair at Causey Gill, near Stanley. Also, there is evidence of upto seven territories being occupied at Whitley Chapel, Harwood Shield, Viewley, Minsteracres, Hunstantworth, Blanchland, Edmundbyers and Muggleswick with, at least, two successful nests after juvenile kites were observed in two of the territories.

The focus for our monitoring teams in the early autumn will be to identify roost sites and counting birds at roost. Last autumn and winter roosts were fragmented with low counts so it will be interesting to see what happens this autumn/winter.



Wordsworth's Kites – Eric Nicholson

Red Kites were alive and well in the 1800s in the Lake District. I have found four separate references to kites in the poems of William Wordsworth and one mention by his sister, Dorothy. There may be more references than these but they alone prove that the iconic birds were a common sight in the Lake District just over two hundred years ago.

I'll quote just a couple of instances: the first from Wordsworth's narrative poem, *Michael* and the second from Dorothy's *Journal*, dated 11 Oct 1800.

Greenhead Gill, mentioned at the beginning of *Michael* is a mountain stream/ravine behind the Swan Hotel, which is north of Grasmere.

*If from the public way you turn your steps
Up the tumultuous brook of Greenhead Ghyll,
You will suppose that with an upright path
Your feet must struggle; in such bold ascent
The pastoral mountains front you, face to face.
But, courage! for around that boisterous brook
The mountains have all opened out themselves,
And made a hidden valley of their own.
No habitation can be seen; but they
Who journey thither find themselves alone
With a few sheep, with rocks and stones, and kites
That overhead are sailing in the sky.*

As was usual with Wordsworth, some of his lines were prompted by his sister Dorothy. It seems Wordsworth was writing the early drafts of *Michael* in Oct 1800. She writes in her journal:

After dinner we walked up Greenhead Gill in search of a sheepfold. . . The colours of the mountains soft, and rich with orange fern; the cattle pasturing upon the hill-tops; kites sailing in the sky above our heads. Sheep bleating and in lines and chains and patterns scattered over the mountains.

Note: I have been in touch with a curator-trainee at Dove Cottage (Wordsworth's residence at Grasmere) and she tells me kites have been seen recently soaring overhead, so that is good news!

MEMBERSHIP – Judy Summerson

The Friends of Red Kites have 235 members. 38% are enthusiastic health walkers who stride out every Monday afternoon spotting red kites and other wildlife in the Derwent Valley. The remainder are some of our very loyal supporters who have been members since the Group was set up in 2009 and some are people who have seen kites and want to support a worthwhile group who are working hard to conserve these magnificent raptors.

Members are very important to us: several of our birds have been needlessly persecuted. The more members we have the louder our voice to raise awareness of the problems facing the birds. Paying qualified tree climbers to ring and wing tag some of the young birds for recording purposes requires finance as does the monitoring and organisation of the Group.

At £7.00 for an individual and £10.00 for a household your membership will help raise the profile and support the running of the Group. We do hope you will renew your membership and we look forward to meeting you out on a health walk, at our red kite safaris, monitoring activities and other events.

Annual General Meeting - Harold Dobson

Our tenth AGM was held at Swalwell Cricket Club on Wednesday 26th June. 18 members attended the evening.

The business meeting was brief and efficiently run. Ken Sanderson, Harold Dobson and Hilary Johnson were re-elected as Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer respectively. They each provided a summary of their reports. Ken provided an update on this year's breeding figures. The following existing eight committee members were re-elected: Fiona Clapham, Roz Cowan, Sylvia Jones,

Jackey Lockwood, Karen Mathieson, Judy Summerson, Marian Williams, Allan Withrington and one new member, John Barrett, was elected to the Committee.

After the meeting, John Barrett (formerly of Natural England, English Nature and The Nature Conservancy Council) gave a very interesting talk on his experiences with red kites and aspects of his career which led to, and informed the reintroduction of, the red kites to the Lower Derwent Valley.

The Cricket Club provided a scrumptious buffer supper.



Harewood House Trip – Jackey Lockwood

As part of our 10th Anniversary celebrations it was decided to visit Harewood House in West Yorkshire. On 4th July 53 FoRK members and Health Walkers travelled south to visit this stately home and enjoy what it had to offer. It was a comfortable coach journey and we were there in under two hours. We were fortunate to have a warm, sunny day for our visit. Most of us had not been there before and Harewood House proved to be an interesting and imposing building dating back to the 18th century. Once inside the grounds we made our way around in small groups to see the various points of interest.

Inside Harewood House we saw the renowned collection of art work and interior decorations. During our visit the house was hosting a contemporary exhibition of crafts which was interesting. The Terrace looked stunning and the landscaped grounds beyond were designed by Capability Brown.

Outside in the grounds there was plenty of time to explore the various gardens and plants, walk beside the lake, return by ferry (until it broke down), see a selection of bird life and have time to relax and chat at the cafes or in the shops.

Harewood House was the location for the reintroduction of red kites in this part of England. We had good views of red kites close to the Terrace. After lunch Ken took most of our group for a walk through the parkland to look at where the birds had been released. We would have looked inside the church as well but unfortunately that was locked.

Everyone enjoyed the visit and it was a great way to start the celebratory proceedings. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who participated for being such good time-keepers and for making the day so enjoyable.



Gibside Red Kite Family Fun Day - Harold Dobson

Our fifth Red Kite Family Fun Day, held on Sunday 28th July at Gibside (National Trust), was a great success.

The Market Place was the home for our usual information and tombola stalls, staffed by volunteers. Bigger prizes on the tombola stall included a £20 voucher for use at the Red Kite pub, a family day pass to Gibside and a meal for two at Thornley Woodlands Cafe. The tombola stall raised an amazing £156.

Go North East kindly provided a Red Kite bus which parked next to our stalls. Their entertainment team offered face-painting in addition to youngsters being able to practice: hoola-hooping, plate-spinning and trying out a diablo.

Additionally, this year, we resurrected our 150 tile red kite mosaic which we laid out in front of the Chapel on the Avenue and, under supervision by our volunteers, gave children the opportunity of replacing the border tiles of the mosaic.

A big thank you must go to all the volunteers who helped on the day (particularly those involved in the movement of the mosaic to/from Gibside), anyone who donated prizes for the Tombola stall, the GO North East entertainment team and, finally, the Gibside staff for their support.



An Invitation – Fiona Clapham

You are warmly invited to join friends and enjoy home-made cakes and biscuits with a cup of tea or coffee at

The Red Kite Coffee Morning

AT: Fellside Church Hall, Ancaster Road, off Fellside Road, Whickham NE16 5BJ

WHEN: Saturday 26 October 2019

FROM: 10 am until 12 noon

Donations of cakes, biscuits or scones are warmly welcomed but not essential on the day. We look forward to seeing you.



10th Anniversary Celebrations: 'On Red Kites' – Karen Mathieson

The Eliot Smith Dance Company successfully received funding from Arts Council England (Lottery Funded Project Grants) and Northumberland Arts Development enabling the exciting initiative with FoRK to go ahead in Autumn 2019. Eliot is creating a new professional contemporary dance work 'On Red Kites'.

He and his dancers are planning to visit the Derwent Valley in early October to observe Red Kites roosting and Harold will give a 'Talk' to assist the dancers with their understanding and creative interpretation of our favourite raptor at the start of the ESD creation rehearsals in October. The work is set to Brahms Violin Sonata No.3 played by Kyra Humphreys of the Royal Northern Sinfonia.

Tickets are now on sale for the premier performance of 'On Red Kites' which forms part of a 'Double Bill' (Balbir Singh 'I am not an Indian Dancer') on Tuesday 26th November 2019 (8pm) at Sage Gateshead using the following link: <https://sagegateshead.com/whats-on/eliot-smith-dance-2019/>

The Arts funding also supports community dance work aiming to improve the mental and physical health and wider community. Eliot will be working with a mixed cast (approximately 20) of different ages and dance experience to create a short dance piece, titled 'Flying High' to be performed outside at The Land of Oak and Iron Heritage Centre, Winlaton Mill, Gateshead, as well as a teaser/preview performance of 'On Red Kites', on Saturday 12th October 2019 (2pm).

At the beginning of the new academic year six primary schools in Gateshead/Newcastle will be offered the opportunity to host a 1 x 2 hour Red Kite dance-themed workshop (Years 3-4) with Eliot Smith professional staff. Students from Newcastle College Foundation Degree will also have the amazing opportunity to work with ESD. FoRK have provided a support letter to encourage schools/college to host the dance workshops and will provide qualified members to deliver thirty minute talks about Red Kites to support pupils/students learning for those accepting the offer.

Diary Dates - Autumn 2019

Saturday 12th October 'Flying High' Community/'On Red Kites' Taster
The Land of Oak and Iron Heritage Centre (2pm) - free

Tuesday 26th November 'On Red Kites' Premier (Double Bill)
The Sage Gateshead (8pm) - ticket required