



Friends of Red Kites

in the North East of England

www.friendsofredkites.org.uk



Newsletter, Autumn 2017

2017 Red Kite Breeding Report - Ian Kerr & Ken Sanderson



A full programme of monitoring again took place both before and during the breeding season to try and establish the size and range of our Red Kite population.

Early indications between February and April involved pairs or single birds showing territorial behaviour in around 38 regular and potential breeding localities across the region. Most were again in the core areas of the Derwent Valley within Tyne and Wear and the immediately adjacent localities in County Durham and Northumberland. However, one pair was regular in the Evenwood and Staindrop area of Teesdale, giving hope for future and much-needed range expansion.

As the breeding season got underway, a total of 17 active nests were located where pairs went on to lay eggs. In several other areas nests were built but pairs did not produce clutches. Of these 17 active nests, 14 pairs went on to fledge a total of 24 young.

The three other pairs failed for unknown reasons. A total of 13 young were ringed and ten were wing-tagged. Others were too advanced to safely handle.

We emphasise that the number of successful nests must be regarded as an absolute minimum. The size and range of the potential breeding area and the difficulties of access to some areas of suitable woodlands meant that a few nests were likely to have gone undetected. The 14 successful pairs and their 24 young was an improvement on the 2016 season when only 9 known pairs were successful in producing 18 young to fledging. However, it was well below our best year of 2014 when 21 pairs were successful and fledged 34 young.

Once again most of the successful nests were in the core areas of the Derwent Valley and nearby areas within County Durham. Of the two nests in County Durham, one nest failed and one successfully fledged two chicks. There were also two pairs just over the county boundaries in Northumberland producing three chicks between them.

The 2017 results again show that the population is continuing to face difficulties in expanding outside the core area. This is a matter of great concern as it means that the aim of establishing a sustainable breeding population across the region as a whole has still to be realised.

Although there were no known instances of illegal persecution during the breeding season, the fear remains that such activities, particularly in game-shooting areas where kites have perished in the past, are still impeding the expansion of the population.

FoRK Chairman Ken Sanderson said: "It's good to see the population expanding again after a fall in the number of occupied territories. The monitoring team have also recruited five new volunteers, so this should improve monitoring in the future."

Summary of 2017 Breeding

Number of known territories: 38 (35)
No. of incubating females: 17 (14)
No. of known successful nests: 14 (9)
No. of known fledged chicks: 24 (18)
No. of chicks wing-tagged: 10 (13)
No. of chicks ringed only: 3 (2)
No. of failed nests: 1 definite, 2 probable (5)

(Numbers in brackets are last year's figures)



2017 Red Kite Breeding Report - Continued

This autumn and winter, FoRK's regular Monday and Thursday monitoring teams will be making their regular checks on regular and potential roosting sites to gain information about the movements of both adults and this year's chicks as part of efforts to establish the current size of the population.

Red Kite Family Fun Day - Sylvia Jones

On Sunday 23rd July we held a joint event with Go North East at the National Trust (Gibside). Geoff brought a Red Kite bus which was used as a base for the face painting and balloons. Once again the bubbleologist was a huge success and attracted a lot of children (old and young) who were very eager to catch and burst bubbles. The extra large bubbles made a big impression and she also showed everyone how to create and catch bubbles of many different sizes. The red kite bus selfie frame was also very popular.

Friends of Red Kites had an information stall though most of the people we talked to seemed to know about the kites and were keen to share information about kites they had seen. Jon and Fiona Clapham and their team of helpers set up a tombola stall which was very popular. The total sum raised was £145 which was very good.



The weather in the morning was cool but generally dry. However, the afternoon weather was rather wet so the team decided to finish earlier than originally planned.

A very big thank you to the following who donated tombola prizes: Go NorthEast, The National Trust, Wylam Brewery, Gardner & Wake garage, The Red Kite pub, Thornley Café and in Sunniside: Hebe & Co, MR Crowder (Chemist) and the Co-op; In Whickham: R Martin (Butcher), Well (Pharmacy), Cards & Gifts, Martins (Newsagents), McColls (Newsagents), Tesco and the Co-op plus all our generous friends in FoRK, Gateshead Health Walkers and the Whickham Walkers.

Thank you to everyone who helped to make the day so successful.

Annual General Meeting - Sylvia Jones & Harold Dobson

Once again, we held a successful AGM at Lintzford Garden Centre. 30 members attended the evening. The business meeting was brief and efficiently run. Ken, Harold and Hilary 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 existing seven committee members were re-elected.

Keith, and his team, from Lintzford served our pre-selected meal with a selection of cream cakes, orange juice and tea and coffee.

This represented excellent value for £8.00. The raffle raised £37.10.



Flirtations in the Sky – Part 2 - Margaret Webster



Following on from the article in the last Newsletter......what happened to hapless Red Philip after he was rejected by Flag in 2010? Well, he bounced back the year after Flag deserted him and paired up with Swift, a Chilterns female of 2005. She had paired with Sky Diver in 2010. Remember him? His lady love of 2007-09, Parochial Poppy, had flirted with Red Philip's son RJ. 'Poppy' has not been seen again, but she made two previous visits to Gigrin Farm in Wales, so may have returned there. Sky Diver was more successful with Swift and they raised a chick in a lime tree in Blaydon Burn, called Bomber Bird (who was found dead in woodland in January 2017). Sky Diver has not been seen since 2011. Red Philip moved in on the now single Swift and they fledged *three* chicks; they had the head of a toy bear for company in their nest. Red Philip was living up to his mighty name at last. Two chicks were tagged and

given names by local Primary Schools although Red Sarah and Geordie have not been seen in the area since 2012. The pairing proved successful the next year too and resulted in one chick, Fiona Firefly. Mum, Swift decorated her nest this time with a fingerless glove and a white sock.

Swift may have been an attentive mother but she left poor Red Philip the next year for an untagged male. Red Philip tried to woo her back when the male was elsewhere but to no avail. Swift had two chicks to her new beau in 2014. Red Philip meanwhile had found himself a Yorkshire lass called Soar. She had had a very successful partnership with Lyons Lightning from 2008 when they fledged one chick (Sunny Solar) and a further two in 2009, one of which, a female called Petra, may have moved off to Edmundbyers in 2014 [a dangerous place to be that year after what happened to Flag's penultimate chick, J1].

Their last two chicks of 2013 were raised in Thornley Woods. But in stepped Red Philip to disrupt the love match; Lyons Lightning has not been seen since. 'Philip' and Soar set up home near Winlaton Mill and had two chicks. Red Philip's woes were not over, but it was not his love-life, but a road accident on March 16th 2015 that halted him in his tracks. He was taken to an avian expert in Morpeth where he received treatment for tissue damage and internal bleeding. Two weeks later he was released back onto his territory, but Soar didn't hang around at their old nesting site and was last seen in the company of an untagged male. Now an ageing bachelor, Red Philip takes short flights round the district, seen mainly in the company of other males like Chester. Although on one occasion he was with his son Crimson Ray's 'unnamed' love interest H2. Was he trying to flirt?

Flag seems settled but Red Philip is no longer so mighty. He came a cropper only this February when he flew into a window and was left dazed. After a short rest on a nearby wheelbarrow he regained his equilibrium to fly another day.

As I write two red kites are together in the distance, draw away and circle at different heights, then join in tandem carried on the breeze. This is a sky dance often seen; displaying, not for human eyes but for each other. Another pairing may result from this aerial ballet, so another story will begin ... and I will watch.

Membership - Judy Summerson

We have 278 members and 9 Corporate members. The majority of our members are from the north east with 20% of them being health walkers.

Membership is very important to us as it brings in essential finance to pay for the ringing and wing-tagging of the birds and helps to cover our administrative costs. Membership is still only £7.00 for an individual and £10.00 for a household, so it's not expensive.

Please do encourage your friends and neighbours to join the Friends and help to conserve the red kites for future generations.

Heritage Bus Tour & Afternoon Walk - Harold Dobson



On Sunday 24th September, the Land of Oak & Iron, facilitated by FoRK and Go North East, is organising a free Heritage Bus Tour up the Derwent Valley starting at the Swalwell Cricket Club/Blaydon Tennis Club car park off the A694 (east of Winlaton Mill) at 10.00 a.m. and returning there by 1.00 p.m. Mark O'Keeffe, an experienced Blue Badge Tour Guide, will lead the tour on a Go North East liveried red kite bus through Rowlands Gill, Ebchester, Shotley Bridge and Consett and talk about the industrial heritage of the Valley, with stops at Derwentcote Forge, The Lodge Heritage Centre in Blackhill & Consett Park and the Whinfield Beehive Coke Ovens in Highfield.

Although free, booking is essential through the Land of Oak & Iron website: <http://landofoakandiron.org.uk/whats-on/>

The Red Kite pub, in Winlaton Mill, is happy to pre-book lunch by ringing 0191 414 5084 or bring a picnic and go alfresco!

At 2.30 p.m., Noel Adamson & Colin Douglas, members of Sunnyside History Society, will lead a 2 hour leisurely walk, starting and finishing again at the Swalwell Cricket Club/Blaydon Tennis Club car park, around Derwenthaugh Park and talk about: the Butterfly Bridge, Ambrose Crowley's 17th Century water-powered Ironworks and "model village" for his employees and the Derwenthaugh Coke Works which started operating in 1929 and polluted much of the lower Derwent Valley for over half a century. Towards the end of the walk, I'll give a briefing about the Red Kites. No booking is necessary for the walk.

These free activities are being held as part of Land of Oak & Iron's Discover Fest, a week long programme of activities exploring the heritage of the Derwent Valley and surrounding areas.

Young Kite Down - Allan Withrington

At the end of June a young red kite was found, near Shotley Bridge, grounded and waterlogged by the recent rain. The finder took it home, commandeered the dog's basket and placed the basket and kite close to the Aga. That wasn't good enough for his wife as she got her hair drier and proceeded to blow-dry the kite! They fed it strips of chicken breast.

They were trying to find out who could take it off their hands and, as a last resort, they called the owner of the local dog kennels who is also a falconer. All the while they had thought it was a buzzard! When they got to the kennels they were enlightened as to the species and were told to leave it with him and he'd sort it out. Following contact, I went to collect the bird, brought it home and bought it some mice. Ashfield Vets, in Lanchester, carried out a medical check. It rained most of the next couple of days so it remained with me.



I was able to arrange for Keith Bowey to ring, but not wing-tag, the bird and, after checking there were kites around, on the morning of 6th July the bird was released where it was found. When the carrier was opened the young kite was reluctant to leave then suddenly, with a rush, it lifted and flew directly towards me and the camera. I felt a wing brush my head as it passed straight into a larch tree 30m beyond. It stayed there momentarily then took off again across the drive into the wood where the parents had been the previous day. Then the calling began and within 15-20 mins the fledgling and parents were re-united. Subsequent checks reassured me that it was safe and with its parents.

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