



Newsletter, Autumn 2020

Red Kite breeding – Ken Sanderson & John Barrett

Red kites have had their best breeding season ever this year. A minimum of forty-two chicks are known to have fledged from nineteen nests with a further five nests getting to the incubation stage but sadly failing. The kites almost certainly benefitted from the early spring and summer Covid-19 restrictions which limited people's activity during the early incubation period in April.

Those same Covid-19 restrictions did not allow FoRK to carry out any monitoring from March 24th (BTO directive) but with the easing of Lockdown in the middle of May we were allowed to carry out the finding and monitoring of nests. A significant number of these nests had been reported to us by local residents, so a big thank you goes to them.

Ringling and wing-tagging of kite chicks at nest sites took place in June with nine nests visited. Sixteen chicks were wing-tagged with a further seven chicks ringed only, being too small to fit wing tags. This year one of the nests contained a brood of four chicks. This is only the second time ever this has occurred in our region. The first time was in 2015.

This summer's breeding success continues the story of a steady improvement in our regions red kites' fortunes in the last couple of years. With last winter's encouraging roost numbers and a significant increase in the number of red kite sightings outside the Derwent Valley we remain optimistic, even though it is disappointing that our birds are still suffering from persecution, that this will continue and look forward to witnessing the spectacular sight of large numbers of these birds coming into roost from September onwards and throughout the autumn and winter.



Update on our satellite-tagged birds– John Barrett and Allan Withrington

We sadly reported in the summer newsletter the disappearance of one of the satellite tagged birds, KK. We now have to report that our second tagged bird, BB, also sadly disappeared. This happened in June in the same general area as KK stopped transmitting. BB was a sibling of KK and fitted with a satellite tag in June 2019 at a nest near Hamsterley Mill. Neither bird has been seen subsequently nor any bodies recovered.

BB had just reached its first birthday before disappearing. It had become a regular visitor to the upper dale foraging over the edges of the moors. Latterly it had become more resident in the area and, rather than travelling up the valley on a daily basis, had taken to staying overnight, roosting in and around the Derwent Gorge.

We have learned much about the early lives of these young red kites from the data received from the sat-tags. It confirms that our birds travel regularly outside the lower Derwent Valley and that they also regularly forage over the edges of grouse moors. Sadly, we will not be able to follow their lives further.

The data from the birds will be analysed in detail over the coming months and it will be used to develop a strategy to improve our understanding of the behaviour of the red kites and hence support their long-term conservation.

The RSPB and police have been involved in investigations over the disappearance of the two birds and we have started conversations with the local land managers and the Moorland Association to raise awareness of the plight of our birds. Whilst KK and BB are no more the data from the birds provides a wealth of evidence to help in these discussions. We will keep you updated in future newsletters.



Wing and satellite tagged chicks (June 2019): KK is on the left & BB is in the centre

Membership – Karen Mathieson

The Friends of Red Kites have 218 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 Members' Nights, roostwatches, monitoring activities and other events.

Health Walks (Jackey Lockwood)

It has been 24 weeks since the last organised Friends of Red Kites Health Walk. Hopefully throughout Lockdown and afterwards, as restrictions have eased, Walkers have been able to maintain their fitness by walking regularly with friends, family or alone. We are certainly fortunate in Gateshead to have so many accessible green spaces.

I have regularly studied and reviewed Government guidelines concerning outdoor meetings / activities and been in touch with Health Walk Leaders. Due to the continued level of coronavirus infection I do not intend to restart Health Walks yet. It may be possible to restart the Health Walks later this year but that is only an aspiration and will be subject to regulations I am sure.

Any change to the current situation of "All Health Walks cancelled until further notice" will be made after consultation with Leaders and will be announced via our website. Due to the need for social distancing and other necessary mitigation requirements the restarting of Walks is not practical at the moment. So, in the meantime, I hope all Members keep fit, well and continue to exercise outside as much as possible.

Annual General Meeting – Harold Dobson

As you may recall our AGM was scheduled for Wednesday 24th June. With the Covid-19 pandemic prevailing the AGM was provisionally postponed to Wednesday 26th August and subsequently to 23rd September.

Swalwell Cricket Club is still unable to confirm the booking so the Management Committee considered how to progress this and agreed that it would be sensible and safe to postpone the AGM until next June. Therefore, included in this mailing are the Annual & Financial Reports for 2019-2020. If you have any queries about the reports then do please let me know (email: hfdobson@btinternet.com).

Considering these unprecedented times, it has also been agreed to exceptionally extend the election of FoRK Committee Members and Officers for a year.

Events – Sylvia Jones

We had planned to hold a Members' Night-cum-AGM at the Red Kite pub in October but it was agreed that, despite social distancing, the Covid-19 health risk to members would be too great particularly as recent spikes have arisen from contacts in public houses. We do hope to start to organise Members' Events in the New Year.

The "must-have" accessory of 2020 - a re-usable face mask! – Allan Withrington

As of Monday 15th June 2020, it became mandatory to wear facial masks or coverings when using public transport in England. As you will all be aware it is now mandatory to wear them in

shops too – it's inevitable that we've seen a MASSIVE increase in the use of PPE, or personal protective equipment.

According to an analysis by scientists at University College London, if every person in the UK used one single-use mask each day for a year, an extra 66,000 tonnes of contaminated plastic waste would be created and have ten times more climate change impact than using reusable masks.

The good news is that the government has advised 'that a face mask doesn't mean surgical masks, which we must keep for clinical settings, it means the kind of face-covering you can easily make at home,' according to Transport Secretary, Grant Shapps. Using a washable, reusable face mask means that supplies of clinical PPE remain available for the people on the frontline who really need them, and we can also massively reduce the amount of single-use plastic waste being created. Double win.

Find out everything you need to know about the problem with PPE, buying and using a reusable mask: <https://www.citytosea.org.uk/ppe/>
and even how to make your own: <https://www.citytosea.org.uk/how-to-make-a-reusable-mask/>

www.friendsofredkites.org.uk