



Newsletter, Summer 2020

Remembering Judy – Sylvia Jones



Judy Summerson was a very special person. She had so many talents it's difficult to know where to begin. Sadly, Judy passed away peacefully at home on Sunday May 3rd. Her husband, Andy, and her son, Robert, were with her. She will have a private woodland burial and, next year, a commemorative event in her memory.

Judy was an amazing person and lived a full and rich life. She had a huge knowledge of the natural world which she shared with many people through her volunteering over the years. She was a member of many wildlife organisations and an Officer for most of them. However, it was her expertise in botany that she will be remembered most. She completed many important surveys. She was acknowledged as a local expert.

At the funded Northern Kites project (2004-2009), Judy was well known for her passion for the Red Kite reintroduction programme in the Derwent Valley. She dedicated much of her time over the years encouraging the community to engage in the protection and welfare of the Red Kites. She was an active member of the monitoring team. Judy was also part of the team who prepared the birds for release in 2005 and 2006. We also enjoyed many entertaining sessions over a very hot photocopier as we helped with a number of administrative tasks at the Northern Kites office in Whickham.

The Northern Kites project was followed by the formation of the Friends of Red Kites (FoRK) in 2009. Judy joined the Management Committee and made many important contributions. She became Membership Secretary and set up an impressive membership database which was used very successfully for organising our events and Newsletter distribution. Judy was our main link with members and organised this with great diligence and efficiency. She retired from this role at the end of January 2020.

The "Adopt a Kite Scheme" was introduced to involve local schools in the care and conservation of red kites. Judy brought her knowledge and enthusiasm into schools and helped to engage children and to enable teachers to develop this vital work.

As a health walk leader, Judy was able to identify many plants and birds on the walks which was much appreciated. Team work was a vital aspect of this role.

She took over the role of organising and delivering the community presentation "The Red Kite Returns". The talks developed very successfully under Judy's leadership and also generated a good income for FoRK funds.

Judy will be sadly missed by so many people. Her death leaves a big gap in our lives. Words like loyal, trustworthy, reliable, thoughtful, kind, organised and knowledgeable are all true; Judy was all of that and more.

My thanks to Harold Dobson, Jackey Lockwood, Karen Mathieson, Ken Sanderson & Allan Withrington for their input into this article.

Red Kite Breeding – Ken Sanderson & John Barrett

Whilst our lives were changed forever when the government announced the Covid-19 restrictions and imposed a Lockdown, the natural world around us just carried on as normal and the red kites were no exception to this.

On the run up to that historic date of March 24th the monitoring of our red kites was going well with over forty territories being confirmed with lots of evidence of nest building in the fine early spring weather to suggest a good breeding season was in the offing. The British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), who control monitoring and survey work, also issued restrictions that were aligned to Government policy and official monitoring ceased. However, despite this, we have been receiving information regarding kite activity and the location of nest sites from residents, dog walkers and people taking their daily exercise with a total of ten active nests being reported in this way.

Since the easing of "Lockdown" the BTO have now allowed monitoring/survey work to resume as long as social distancing is carried out and involves no more than one person from another household. A further four nests have been confirmed.

The directive from the BTO also allows for some ringing and wing-tagging to take place and risk assessments for carrying out this work have to consider Covid-19 e.g. social distancing. Ringing and wing-tagging have been provisionally arranged for the 10th and 11th June when the chicks are approx. five weeks old. This will involve a smaller team than normal because of the current Covid-19 restrictions.

How people have used open areas during lockdown has been very different. Some areas have been completely closed to the public whilst others have remained open and been subject to a large increase in visitor pressure. It will be interesting to see how the red kites, who are normally sensitive to disturbance, respond to the changed situation.



KK lost without trace near the Derwent Gorge – Allan Withrington

Fortunately, we were able to source funding last year to i) purchase 2 satellite transmitters (sat-tags) and ii) cover the admin costs of acquiring regular location updates. The sat-tags were fitted during the ringing and wing-tagging in June 2019 to two siblings from a nest close to Hamsterley Mill. Their wing tags were O0 & O1 and their nicknames were KK and BB respectively – the latter was in consultation with the funder of the sat tag.

Throughout last year and this, we have received regular data reports on the location and behaviour of KK and BB from the RSPB. The content of these reports has varied to the extent that each bird has done different things. The main pattern though was that each stayed close to home in the early days but then ventured further afield in different directions. BB, for example, left home each morning and travelled out to North Durham moors area, then every afternoon came back home. KK, on the other hand, stayed fairly close to home until it decided to go travelling. And travel it did, over to Lancashire on into the Peak District, then, worse again into the Dales and Nidderdale in particular. However, KK survived and returned home.

KK's tag had been functioning normally until it suddenly and unexpectedly stopped transmitting in mid-April this year. The last fix came from an area of driven grouse moor near the Derwent Reservoir. It has not been heard from since.

Inspector Ed Turner, the lead for wildlife and rural crime for Durham Constabulary has said: "The fate of this red kite is not yet clear; we are working with the RSPB to establish what has happened since its transmitter unexpectedly stopped on 17th April 2020. Until we can rule out the possibility that a crime has not been committed, then we will be taking this matter very seriously".

BB's is, so far, continuing to give transmissions albeit rather irregular.



Annual General Meeting 2020 – Harold Dobson

Our Annual General Meeting (AGM) was originally scheduled for Wednesday 24th June but, unfortunately, due to social distancing caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, it has had to be postponed. The **provisional** date for your diary is Wednesday 26th August and it will be held at the Swalwell Cricket Club.

If given the green light, we will email your official invitation and the accompanying paperwork in early August. The meeting itself should last no more than 30-40 minutes and will be followed by a buffet supper.