



Newsletter, Spring 2020

The kites have been coming home to roost - Ken Sanderson

I reported in the Winter Newsletter that, following a good breeding season and higher than normal roost counts up to the end of November, expectations of counting best ever numbers of roosting kites were high.

These expectations were buoyed when, in early December, the highest number of red kites for three years were fifty-eight kites from two locations were recorded. On that evening the Pontburn Wood roost, near Hamsterley Hall, held thirty-eight kites, with thirty-four being seen in the air together, and twenty kites dropped into the Gibside Estate roost.

The FoRK monitoring teams took part in the National Roost Count on the 12th of January and this was set to be the defining event of the winter for us as this month is traditionally the month when the highest roost counts are made. Sixteen enthusiastic volunteers covered five locations in the Derwent Valley.

The survey produced a fantastic result, a record best ever count of eighty-five kites was achieved, providing further optimism that the fortunes of red kites in the north east are changing for the better. The majority of the kites were noted at the two main roost sites: Forty at Pontburn Woods and forty at Gibside. The UK numbers will be collated and will contribute to the European Roost Count held on the same weekend.

The following week, on the 19th, another annual event took place. Our Thursday monitoring team, led by Tim Watson, hosted another successful roost watch from the Nine Arches Viaduct on the Derwent Walk. Twenty-seven members of the Natural History Society of Northumbria attended the event which has been running for several years now. They got more distant views than they've had in previous years but still had three kites showing well near to the viaduct. With a fabulous sunset building they had circa twenty kites and 2 buzzards circling around the Column to Liberty on the Gibside Estate. Feedback from the group suggested that everyone had had a good time.

Many thanks to all those who contributed to the winter roost watching and, with the red kites now moving back to their breeding territories, we are hopeful for another productive year.



Kites, People and disturbance - John Barrett

Red kites are thought of as large, robust birds. They often can come into close contact with people. They will venture into gardens and scavenge off the bird table particularly over the winter period when food may be more scarce.

During the months of February and March, as the breeding season approaches, they are particularly active and we may see them quite close to us. At this time they appear to ignore humans as they are busy finding a mate, defending their territories from unwelcome incomers, refurbishing old nests or building new ones. As nesting approaches their behaviour changes: they are much more aware of what is going on around them and they become more secretive as they start to think about egg-laying. At this time and during incubation they require peace and quiet and are sensitive to human disturbance. They will leave their nests if people come too close and may not return for a considerable period. If the weather is cold this may affect the viability of the eggs if the bird is off the nest for a prolonged period. If disturbance persists they may abandon their nests altogether resulting in a failure to raise any young.

Monitoring by FoRK volunteers and reports from residents who have nesting red kites nearby has helped provide an understanding of the impacts of disturbance on kite breeding success. Two effects have been noticed. Firstly, it appears that kites now tend to avoid nesting in some areas which have considerable public recreation pressures despite birds having used these areas in the early years after the re-introduction programme. This is part of a process of them learning to adapt to the environment of the valley. Fortunately there is plenty of suitable habitat within the valley and the birds will, over time, select those areas which provide the peace and quiet they require.

Secondly, we are noting that individual site-specific disturbance events cause nests to be deserted prior to egg-laying or fail during incubation. This can be as a result of a range of activities. Most commonly these include house building/renovation, tree works and prolonged activities in gardens near to active nests.

Whilst red kites will have to learn to live with the first effect we can help to reduce the impact of the second effect by taking some simple measures. If you know you have kites nesting on your property or nearby then please program any potentially disturbing activities to take place outside the period mid-March to early July. If you notice a bird come off the nest whilst you are nearby retreat as quickly as possible to allow the bird to return. If you have neighbours with red kites be proactive in alerting them to the potential effects of disturbance and remind them that if they are planning any works to avoid the breeding season.

As the red kite population increases and expands its range it becomes more difficult for the monitoring team to locate every territory. Do let FoRK know if you are seeing new activity near you and we can check it out.



The Pioneering Life of Red Philip - Harold Dobson



Red Philip was an iconic bird being one of the first of 94 red kites reintroduced in the Derwent Valley between 2004-2006. He was born in the Chilterns in 2004 and brought to the Derwent Valley in that year as one of the first 20 red kite chicks which were tagged and released from Gibside (National Trust) as part of the Northern Kites Project.

Red Philip was named by the St Philip Neri Primary School in Dunston which adopted him as part of a special scheme for schools.

In April 2006, he paired up with a female called *Flag*; they successfully built a nest and, in late May, hatched and raised one chick: the first red kite chick in the region after an absence of 170 years. The fledgling was nicknamed 'Geordie'.

Red Philip remained paired up with Flag until 2010 when he was dumped. In 2011, he paired up with *Swift* who abandoned him in 2013. His final partner was a Yorkshire-

born female called *Soar*.

In March 2015 - Red Philip was injured in a road accident at Winlaton, the RSPCA were called and he was taken to a vet and X-rayed. There were no fractures, but some tissue damage and internal bleeding. Following a course of treatment and a period of recuperation he was re-released back in to the wild.

In February 2017, Red Philip had once again been in the wars, having flown into the window of a bungalow near Barlow. He appeared slightly dazed but, after perching on the wheelbarrow for a while, he flew off. It is believed he was after a swallow motif on the window.

At the end of 2019, Red Philip was found on the Gibside Estate in a distressed condition. He was taken to the vets; the injury sustained showed signs of arthritis and Red Philip would be unable to fly very far without considerable pain and discomfort. Reluctantly, the decision was taken to euthanise him at the age of 15.

Red Philip had a full life and, with his three partners, had fathered 11 young. His body was, fittingly, buried on the Gibside Estate with nine FoRK friends in attendance. His grave is marked with a small tree and plaque.



Earth Walk around Chopwell - Jim Third

Come and join us for an Earth Walk around Chopwell led by Phil Macari, from Wildcraft Earth Walks, on a light refreshing experience using our senses to connect with Nature.

Meet up at Chopwell Community Centre (Derwent Street, Chopwell) on **Saturday 28th March 2020** at 11.00 a.m.

Presentations to Raise Awareness - Harold Dobson

Following red kite conservation, raising awareness about our magnificent birds of prey is arguably the next most important task for members of FoRK.

Currently, a lot of information about the red kites is on our website and Facebook pages. We are also happy to offer a 40-minute powerpoint-assisted talk called "The Red Kite Returns" to various groups e.g. WI's, Church, U3As, Photographic and Wildlife groups.

The talk chronicles the fascinating story of the re-introduction of the red kite in the north-east of England between 2004-2006 and includes the history and annual natural history of this raptor and outlines the work done by FoRK to conserve the red kite.

Our presentation can be booked via our website. We ask for a £25 donation and travelling expenses. If the audience is in excess of 25 then the cost will increase on a £1 per head basis (capped at £50).



Eliot Smith Dance's Spring Regional Tour - Karen Mathieson

Following the successful performance of "Double Bill" which was premiered at Sage Gateshead last November, Eliot and the Team are now doing a Spring Tour of **TRIPLE BILL** comprising:

- Balbir Singh's **I AM NOT AN INDIAN DANCER?**
- Eliot Smith's **ON RED KITES** and
- Jake Deibert's **ONWARD**

The dates and locations of performances are as follows:

Saturday 18 April 7.30pm, Gosforth Civic Theatre
Friday 24 April 7.30pm, Dovecote Centre, Amble
Friday 08 May 7.30pm, The Maltings, Berwick-upon-Tweed
Thursday 14 May 7.00pm, Bowes Museum, Barnard Castle
Saturday 16 May 7.00pm, Bamburgh Pavilion
Friday 29 May 7.30pm, Pegswood Community Hub
You can buy your tickets on-line: www.eliotsmithdance.com/tickets





Friends of Red Kites

Spring Members' Night

It's time to announce our Spring Members' Night. This will be held at the Red Kite Pub, Spa Well Road, Winlaton Mill (NE21 6RU) on **Monday 23rd March** at 6.30 for 7.00 p.m.

The cost of the two-course meal is £10.00 per person and the menu choices are:

Main

Vegetable Lasagne, garlic bread & chips (v)
Half Haddock with chips & mushy peas
Chicken Chasseur with chips & vegetables
Mince & dumplings with peas & vegetables

Dessert

Fruit crumble & custard/cream
Lemon Posset
Eton Mess
Mixed ice cream

If you are able to come then please complete and return the slip below, along with your payment, by Friday 13th March. Please book early in order to avoid disappointment !



Friends of Red Kites Members' Night (Monday 23rd March 2020)

Name(s) i) _____ ii) _____

Contact Email or Tel. No. _____

Main Course(s) i) _____ ii) _____

Dessert (s) i) _____ ii) _____

Enclosed £ _____ (Please make cheques payable to "Friends of Red Kites").

Please return to:

Harold Dobson, 19 Milverton Court, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, NE3 2RD.

www.friendsofredkites.org.uk