



Newsletter, Spring 2024



Winter Roosting Red Kites – Ken Sanderson

In the last Newsletter I reported that the winter roosts had formed and that numbers were low with only 28 red kites being recorded at two locations by November. Since then, as expected, numbers at roost did build up and by mid-December 55 kites were counted at two locations, which was still down from previous years at that stage.

The highlight of the winter, as far as roosting red kites is concerned, is the National Red Kite Roost Count Survey which this year took place on Sunday January 14th. It gave FoRK the opportunity to get an accurate count by getting volunteers out in numbers to cover several locations within the kites' breeding range. In all, 18 people surveyed 7 sites and this concerted effort produced a record count of 122 red kites. Only 3 of the 7 locations held kites. These were the Gibside Estate, with a split roost of 13 and 12 birds, Lintzford with 35 kites and Hamsterley Mill, where 62 kites were recorded dropping into final roost.

Feedback from the UK Co-ordinator indicates that there is a general increase in roosting kites, with Scotland and England recording the gains of 30% and 10% respectively. Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland showed decreased numbers. There were no counts reported from Wales.

At this time of the year, roost numbers are decreasing as the red kites are moving back onto their territories. Birds have been observed displaying and nest-building /refurbishment has been noted.

Let us hope for another good breeding season.



2024 Events Update – Sylvia Jones

We are planning an informal Sunday lunch on 24th March and Members' Night on Monday 8th April. Details are provided, along with the booking forms, at the end of the Newsletter.

Good progress has been made in the planning of our 20th Anniversary events:

Members meal at the SKIFF INN on Monday April 8th. (See invitation at end of Newsletter). The menu choices are a good mix of old and new favourites. The two courses are still £19.95.

The *AGM* has been booked at LITTLE GRANDMA'S CAFE on Wednesday June 26th. Kathy Palmer will play the Northumbrian pipes.

Gibside Red Kite Family Fun Day (Sunday 7th July) will be held in the Market Square at Gibside where we will have information and tombola stalls. As in the past, Go North East will supply a red kite-liveried bus and entertainment e.g. a face painter. The 150-tile red kite mosaic will be laid out in front of the Chapel. In addition, the sewing groups at Gibside and the Land of Oak & Iron have been provided with red kite photographs which they will use to sew 6 large panels to illustrate the red kite year. These will be displayed on large, waterproofed units in Gibside's Walled Garden.

The *Red Kite Trail Walk* has been confirmed with Steve & Jackey Lockwood for July 14th.

Thornley Woodlands Centre will host a *Children's Event* between 10.00-12 noon on Thursday August 15th. A similar event will be held at the Land of Oak & Iron Heritage Centre (Winlaton Mill) on Thursday 29th August,

In consultation with the Land of Oak & Iron and Groundwork we are planning to support their bid for funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Update on Health Walks – Jackey Lockwood

There is an error on the printed A5 fliers for the dates of the final Health Walks in March and April. The correct dates are:

March 4th, 11th, 18th, 25th

Winlaton Mill car park (NE21 6RT), Derwenthaugh Park & Derwent Walk

April 1st, 8th, 15th, 22nd, 29th

Watergate Forest Park car park, Whickham Highway, (NE11 9RQ), Watergate Lake & Washingwell Wood

Michael Turner, an expert bird watcher, will be on the health walks on 25th March and 22nd April to help walkers identify the birds by sight and/or sound.



Poem for Spring – Jim Third

I thought the following poem called "Weathers" by the famous writer, Thomas Hardy, would be appropriate for the Spring Newsletter:

*This is the weather the cuckoo likes,
And so do I;
When showers betumble the chestnut spikes
And nestlings fly;
And the little brown nightingale bills his best,
And they sit outside "The Traveller's Rest",
And maids come forth sprig-muslin drest,
And citizens dream of the south & west,
And so do I.*

*This is the weather the shepherd shuns,
And so do I;
When beeches drip in browns and duns,
And thresh and ply;
And hill-hid tides throb throe and throe,
And meadow rivulets overflow,
And drops on gate-bars hang in a row,
And rooks in families homeward go,
And so do I.*



Visit by American Ornithology Students – Harold Dobson

We have been approached, via our website, by Christine Stracey from Guilford College, North Carolina, in the US. She's leading a Field Ornithology study abroad course, at Alnwick Castle, between April 25 to May 14 and would like to connect with local Ornithologists and, specifically, our red kites. John Barrett and I have agreed to give talks to the group with John focussing on "kite issues". We have offered to give these presentations on the morning of Tuesday 30th April followed by a field trip in the afternoon.

Presentation to Groups to Raise Awareness of Our Red Kites - Harold Dobson

After red kite conservation, raising public awareness about our magnificent birds of prey is arguably the next most important task for us. Currently, a lot of information about the red kites is on our website and Facebook pages.

We are 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, after an absence of over 170 years. It includes the history and annual natural history of this raptor and outlines the work done by FoRK to conserve the red kite.

We are willing to consider any request for the talk subject to my availability. We have a basic minimum charge of £25 on a sliding scale, depending on the size of the group. Travel expenses are also requested as we are not funded by any external group. Please get in touch for a booking form via the "Contact Us" page on our website or by emailing me: hfdobson@btinternet.com

Joining FoRK - My Perspective – Neil Stephenson

I came to the Friends of Red Kites in 2019 as I wanted to join a walking group.

We meet every Monday afternoon for 1.30 pm on various routes along the Derwent Valley. The venue changes each month. We come across various species of wildlife such as deer, heron, cormorant, kingfisher, goosander and, of course, red kites.

I joined FoRK after a few weeks and was also invited to join one of the monitoring teams where three of us (Harold, Jim & I) go out on a specific day each week from February to May to look for and monitor the red kites' nests which, if successful, the fledglings are wing-tagged in early June. We are also out between September and December trying to find where the red kites are roosting at/around dusk. [We normally end our monitoring outing with coffee and cake at a nearby eatery !!]

In summary, joining and volunteering with the Friends of Red Kites has created interest as well as the opportunity to meet new like-minded walkers. It has/is a very worthwhile experience.

