



## Newsletter, Spring 2026



### National Roost Survey 2026 – Ken Sanderson

Friends of Red Kites volunteers took part in a winter survey of roosting red kites on Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> January. The survey had been planned, originally, for Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> January but had to be postponed due to bad weather. Our figures contribute to the UK National Wintering Red Kite Survey, collated by RSPB Scotland, and forwarded to their European counterpart.

The afternoon was cool and cloudy with a light to moderate south easterly wind blowing for the kites to enjoy. Fourteen volunteers turned out to survey 6 selected sites which had either held roosting kites in the past or had the potential to be a roost location.

There was the usual build-up of kites at the pre-roost gathering with circa 35 seen in the air at one point on the Hamsterley Mill Estate in Gateshead's Derwent Valley. The birds gather there waiting to be fed by some of the residents just before dusk.



A total of **107** kites were recorded at roost that evening; the count being well up on last year's disappointing figure of 69 but still short of the best ever count of 122 in 2024.

Summary of the six locations surveyed:

**Pontburn Valley and Southfield Farm** (south west of Hamsterley Mill) - **58** kites dropped into the final roost.

**Lintzford** (Lower Derwent Valley) - **29** kites roosted behind the garden centre.

**Gibside Estate and Far Pasture** (Lower Derwent Valley) - a total of **20** kites were recorded at several locations (2 in Ladyhaugh conifers, 6 in the larches above and south of Gibside's Column to Liberty and 12 which rose from near The Avenue at Gibside and drifted towards Far Pasture).

**Castle Nook** (South Tyne Valley) - no red kites noted

**Snods Edge** - from the crossroads - a full adult was seen at 14.35hrs which had emerged from the west, circling slowly at low altitude over roadside trees, where it was lost to view. As it didn't head any further east it was assumed that it landed in trees. No kites were seen dropping into final roost around dusk.

**Carterway Heads** - no red kites noted.

Thanks to all who took part in the survey. We now look forward to the kites moving back onto territory and preparing for the forthcoming breeding season.

### Winter Members' Evening - Vic Lawson

This year's Winter Members' evening was, once again, held at the Skiff Inn and was enjoyed by twenty-four people. As the event was delayed until the first of December, the management kindly offered us a Christmas option of roast turkey and Christmas pudding at the reduced, standard price of twenty-one pounds. This proved a popular choice with twelve people opting for the turkey and ten for the Christmas pudding.

Ken organised two different quizzes, which showed how little we know about our own bodies and capital cities of the world.

Thanks are due to Geraldine Smith for providing a plate of her red kite biscuits at the head of each table. [Rumours were circulating that some had these as starters !!]. Thanks also to those who donated prizes for the raffle which raised £48.



Please see page 4 and 5 of the Newsletter for invitations to the Spring Members' Night and the Informal Sunday Lunch.

## Presentations – Harold Dobson

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



We are happy to offer a 40-minute powerpoint-assisted talk called “*The Red Kite Returns*”. Last year, we gave talks to over 140 people in various groups e.g. WI’s, Church, U3A, Photographic and Wildlife groups. Our 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 our work 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 (35p per mile). If you know of any interested party then do encourage them to get in touch either via the “Contact Us” page on our website or by emailing me: [hfdobson@btinternet.com](mailto:hfdobson@btinternet.com)

### Petition to stop the Criminal Killing of Birds of Prey

The “Friends of the Dales” have set up an e-petition to better protect our birds of prey. If it achieves 2000 signatures, the petition will be presented to the Under-Secretary of State for Nature.

In it, they are asking for the following three key reforms:

#### **Sentencing guidelines and the strengthening of penalties for offenders**

Introduction of sentencing guidelines with more meaningful fines and the effective use of custodial sentences or community orders to deter continued offending.

#### **Creation of a National Wildlife Crime Database**

Making wildlife crime a notifiable offence would ensure consistent reporting, better intelligence sharing and targeted enforcement.

#### **Introduce regulation and licensing of the gamebird-shooting industry**

If you would like to sign the e-petition, which we fully support, then please use the following link: [https://actionnetwork.org/petitions/help-us-stop-the-criminal-killing-of-birds-of-prey?source=direct\\_link&](https://actionnetwork.org/petitions/help-us-stop-the-criminal-killing-of-birds-of-prey?source=direct_link&)

## Informal Sunday Lunch

You are cordially invited to an informal, 3-course Sunday Lunch at one of our member's Whickham home on **Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2026**.

The meal comprises:

- Starter – a selection of Indian snacks
- Chicken curry and rice (a vegetable curry is available – see \*\* below)
- Trifle and cakes for dessert
- Cheese

The meal will cost £10.00 and run from 1.00 pm – 5.00 pm. All proceeds will go towards part-funding the cost of the tree climbers' fee for the June ringing/wing-tagging of this year's fledgling red kites.

There are **15** places available which will be offered on a "*first come, first served*" basis. If you are interested then please complete and return the slip below, along with your payment, by Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> March and we will confirm with the address.

Many thanks

Vic Lawson (Events Co-ordinator)



**To: Harold Dobson, 19 Milverton Court, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE3 2RD**

I would like to attend the informal Sunday lunch on Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2026

Name(s) [Please print]: .....

Address: .....

..... Post code.....

Email address: .....

Telephone number: .....

\*\* Would you require a vegetable curry: Yes / No (please delete as appropriate)

Enclosed cheque for £            (Please make cheque payable to "Friends of Red Kites")



## Friends of Red Kites Members' Night

It's time to announce our next Members' Night. This will be held at the Skiff Inn, Clasper Way, Swalwell, Gateshead (NE16 3BE) on **Monday 27<sup>th</sup> April** at 6.30 for 7.00 p.m.

The cost of the two-course meal is £24.00 per person and the menu choices are:

### Main

- Fish & chips served with mushy peas
- Mince & dumpling served with mash & vegetables
- Chicken alfredo pasta (GF if required)
- Corned beef pie with chips & mushy peas
- Butternut squash & almond wellington with mash & vegetables (V)

### Dessert

- Sticky toffee pudding served with custard
- Apple pie served with custard
- 3 scoops of ice-cream (chocolate/strawberry/vanilla)
- Fruit Cake (GF)

(GF = *Gluten free*, V = *Vegetarian*)

If you are able to come then please complete and return the slip below, along with your payment, by **Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> April**. Please book early to avoid disappointment!



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**Friends of Red Kites Members' Night (Monday 27<sup>th</sup> April 2026)**

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: *Vic Lawson, 70 Bowmont Walk, Chester-le-Street, DH2 3JB*

## Happy 20<sup>th</sup> Birthday, Chester – Harold Dobson

Chester was born in 2006 and was part of the third cohort of young red kites which were brought up from the Chilterns project (which started in 1989) and released in the lower Derwent Valley between 2004 and 2006 as part of the five-year funded “Northern Kites” project.

His wing tag number is 76 (left wing tag = pink, right wing tag = green) and he has a radio-transmitter which was fitted in the early days.

His name was given by Brighton Avenue Primary School, in Gateshead, as part of the Adopt-a-Kite scheme. This year marks Chester’s **20<sup>th</sup> Birthday** which is quite remarkable as the average lifespan of a red kite in the wild is c 10 years.

After release, Chester spent his first summer exploring the lower Derwent Valley looking for food and socialising with other red kites released in the previous two years. He was regularly seen around the Lockhaugh, Rowlands Gill & Gibside areas.



*Photo of Chester taken by Iain Clyne (2024)*

In Spring 2008, Chester was seen displaying with Red Arrow (wing tag 32) in the Derwent Valley. They built a nest together but, at a very early stage, their chicks were predated by a carrion crow.

In Spring 2009, Chester and Red Arrow built a nest on the Gibside estate and went on to successfully fledge two chicks. Ditto in 2011. In 2012, the pair successfully fledged three chicks and the whole family were seen flying together at Far Pasture in July. Three chicks were also successfully fledged in 2013.

In March 2014, Chester and Red Arrow were seen on territory, near Far Pasture, refurbishing their nest. In May of that year the pair had moved back to their previous territory at Cappy Scar (Rowlands Gill) and went on to successfully fledge two chicks.

In 2015, Chester and his partner were seen on territory at Cappy Scar and their nest appeared refurbished. By May, the nest was not being used and no new nest was found. Sadly, no nests have been found from the pair since. Chester is regularly seen perched on electricity pylons at Far Pasture so keep any eye open for him.