



Newsletter, Summer 2016

Road-sign carers keep village pretty - **Allan Withrington**

Over the years since Gateshead Council, in association with Friends of Red Kites, located the "Kite Country" road signs at each end of Rowlands Gill, a group of ladies at the Dipwood end have planted and cared for many flowers and miniature shrubs.

I did call one of these ladies in an attempt to meet up and photograph them at their labours. However, they must be very shy because the photograph shows a change of plant-life: it was tulips until two days before and I was not told they were planning to do any changes. I did receive a telephone call to say that some flowers had been left on site – so they planted them.

Things do get a little more mysterious however, because only a few days earlier, I had emailed a gentleman saying that I was trying to meet up with these ladies to get a couple of pictures for this newsletter, was there any chance of a small grant to buy some plants?

It only remains now for me, on behalf of the Friends of Red Kites, to say "Thank you" to all concerned – 'Gardeners and Giver' for their very kind donations of goods and time and in making & keeping the sign site beautiful.



Breeding report - **Ken Sanderson**

Following last year's historic event, when four young kites fledged from a nest at Hamsterley Hall for the first time in the north east, hopes were high that the pair of kites breeding there would repeat this remarkable feat this year. Two members of the monitoring team were delighted when four little heads were seen bobbing above



the nest edge when they visited in May. Sadly, one of the chicks must have died as there was only three in the nest when they were ringed and wing tagged a few days ago. It's very likely the youngest of the four chicks died, having struggled to get enough food. Being about six to nine days younger than the oldest sibling it would not have been as strong.

Elsewhere, the kites have had another poor breeding season with 50% of the known eighteen active nests failing. The total number of chicks is not known yet but so far thirteen have been ringed, with twelve of these being wing tagged as well. Poor weather in the spring was a significant factor and predation by crows has also occurred; more worryingly human disturbance is becoming more evident.

Wing tag K6 - This chick, from a nest on the Gibside Estate, was the first to be ringed and wing tagged

Annual General Meeting - **Harold Dobson**

By the time you read this, our 6th Annual General Meeting (AGM) should about to be held on Wednesday 22nd June at Lintzford Garden Centre. AGM's tend to have a reputation of being a bit staid and "dry" but our aim is to get through the formal meeting part in half an hour, or so, which gives an opportunity for members to talk and enjoy the meal served by the Centre staff.

It is also fitting to have an active red kite's nest no more than 300 metres from the Garden Centre !

Tanfield Railway Gala Event - **Sylvia Jones**



On June 11th and 12th we reinforced our partnership with Tanfield Railway and Go North East at the Tanfield Railway Gala Weekend. Fourteen FoRK volunteers enjoyed conversations with railway enthusiasts; many of whom had travelled a long way including Belgium, Somerset, Dundee and the M40 corridor at High Wickham. We exchanged some interesting red kite stories. It was cool and wet but many found time for a 'selfie' with the red kite bus board which is always popular. Geoff brought the red kite bus on Sunday. Two special steam engines were there to celebrate the weekend: one having recently returned from America. Thank you to Tanfield Railway, Go North East and our loyal volunteers who supported us through the weekend.

Our next event is the Gibside Red Kite Family Fun day on Sunday July 24th. As last year, the Go North East entertainments team will be joining us for this event. Please come to join us for a fascinating day. Face painting and varied games will entertain the children. The bubbleologist is amazing to see. You will be able to chat to us for uptodate information about the red kites and, hopefully, you will see the kites flying over Gibside. There will be a tombola to raise funds for Friends of Red Kites. A special thank you to everyone who is able to help on the day.

If you have any ideas for events, or wish to join our team, please contact me: mobile: 07974810364 or e-mail: sylvia.david@yahoo.co.uk.



Red Kite Information Panels - **Jackey Lockwood**



Friends of Red Kites are grateful for the support they receive from many of their Corporate Members. Prism Financial Advice Ltd have sponsored the production of two new information panels to replace the rather out-of-date, slightly damaged ones from the Northern Kites Project days. Ken Sanderson and a small team of volunteers worked hard to put up the new panels securely. Members of the public are already very appreciative of the information given on the panels. The panels are located at the Sherburn Towers bus turning circle and on the Derwent Walk to the south of Stirling Lane, both in Rowlands Gill. A third panel has been erected at the Nine Arches Viaduct funded by Marian Williams in memory of her late mother. The information on the boards will help to ensure that red kites remain in the forefront of public awareness.

Many thanks to all involved.

L-R: Mike Smith from Prism, Jackey Lockwood and Ken Sanderson from FoRK

My grouse with grouse shooting - Dr Mark Avery

Driven grouse shooting is an unsporting and pointless sport that damages the ecology of our hills and depends on illegal killing of protected wildlife.

Some say birdwatching is an odd hobby but compare it with driven grouse shooting and we all seem completely normal. In driven grouse shooting, a line of people with shotguns wait for a line of people with flags and whistles to drive Red Grouse past them so that they can shoot at them as they fly over. There is no hunting involved in this – it's merely using wildlife as living targets. An individual may pay upwards of £5,000 for a day of such 'sport'.



The record 'bag' for a day of such shooting is 2929 birds, shot by eight guns in the Trough of Bowland in Lancashire on 12 August 1915. That's over 350 birds/gun that day. Modern bags are approaching such levels again.

To generate such high densities of Red Grouse, to justify such high prices: heather moorland is burned into a patchwork of long and short vegetation; Foxes, Stoats, Carrion Crows etc are killed in large numbers; Mountain Hares are killed off too (because they carry a tick which can transmit a virus to the grouse); the moorland is drained and medicated grit is provided to kill intestinal worms. Red Grouse are not reared and released (like Pheasants), but driven grouse shooting depends on intensive management of the prey, their predators and their habitat.

Many raptors are illegally killed because they are unsporting enough to include Red Grouse in their diet, e.g. Golden Eagle, Goshawk, Peregrine, Hen Harrier....and, of course, Red Kites too (which don't take grouse chicks) as the work by FoRK has shown. Your work has indicated that grouse moors are a barrier to the spread of Red Kites in the north east and probably persecution on grouse moors is limiting population increases in the area generally. This year is a survey year for Hen Harrier – the last, in 2010, found c650 UK pairs whereas the science shows that there should be c2600 pairs. English uplands should hold around 300 of those 2600 pairs and yet in recent years breeding numbers have rarely reached double figures and this year we are told there is just 'a tiny handful'.

A scientific study at the Langholm grouse moor in Scotland in the 1990s showed that when birds of prey are properly protected, as the law requires, then their numbers will rise and they can remove much of the 'shootable surplus' of birds on which driven grouse shooting depends. There is a real conflict, you can't have protection of birds of prey and massive grouse bags. You have to choose! What is your choice?



Photograph of Male Hen Harrier courtesy of Gordon Yates, it is stunning.

The grouse shooters say that it's only a few bad apples that kill raptors, but they don't deny the massive impacts that bad apples (I believe there are more than a few) have on protected wildlife. So, you do have to choose whether you want an unsporting sport to continue or whether you want the legal protection given to birds of prey to be real. I choose legality and birds of prey over criminality and a pointless 'sport'!

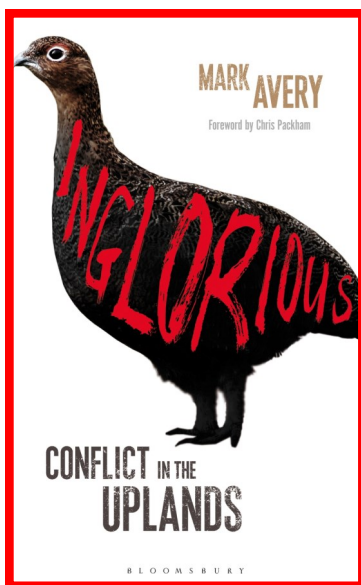
Grouse shooters contend that other ground-nesting birds benefit from grouse moor management (some do, it's true, but not all), that the hills would be covered with conifers, sheep and windfarms if grouse shooting were stopped (they wouldn't – it's environmental legislation that controls these activities not grouse shooters) and that all those people paying for grouse shooting are delivering wealth to the economy (economists say the figures are greatly inflated and do not take everything into account anyway). You must choose who you believe.

My grouse with grouse shooting - Continued

All that intensive management for grouse, the burning and the drainage, have other important ecological impacts. Grouse moors shed water more quickly than moorland not managed for grouse shooting - and this increases flood risks for masses of people downstream, people who never go grouse shooting and have never heard of a Hen Harrier. Greenhouse gas emissions are higher from grouse moors where burning occurs on peatlands; grouse moor management was criticised by the Committee on Climate Change last year. Water companies spend more money on water treatment in catchments dominated by grouse shooting and those costs go to the customer not the grouse shooter. Aquatic biodiversity is lower in watercourses draining managed moorlands too. Intensive grouse moor management that imposes big costs on the rest of society. And so, again, you have to choose – grouse shooting or sustainable uplands?

Over the years of wrestling with these issues my views have hardened and I have realised that our uplands are the scenes of unrelenting wildlife crime, and all for a hobby/sport/pastime that is enjoyed by the few and which imposes costs on the many.

I've made my choice and it is that we should do away with driven grouse shooting which is why I have launched a number of e-petitions to ban this sport. The current e-petition has far surpassed the total signatures of the previous two and runs until 20 September. If it reaches 100,000 signatures by then this whole issue will be debated in Parliament and that will flush out the arguments and put them even more strongly in the public domain. If you are keen on wrecked uplands and wildlife crime then please don't sign my e-petition, but if you choose change in the uplands, even if you don't favour a total ban (and I think you should!) then please sign because this is the strongest way you can make your voice heard. It really is your choice!



Sign the e-petition for a debate in parliament here <https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/125003> Grouse shooting areas of Yorkshire are great supporters of the e-petition but the enthusiasm has been much less from Durham and Northumberland – I can't understand that. Every signature counts so please give yours now and then spread the word please. For more information then check out my blog at www.markavery.info/blog/ and/or read my book ***Inglorious – conflict in the uplands*** for the 100,000 word version of the case against driven grouse shooting. But thank you for letting me have 1000 words here.

Dr Mark Avery is an author, blogger, birder and campaigner. He worked for the RSPB for 25 years until 2011 and for 13 of them was the RSPB Conservation Director.

Are you looking for a speaker for your group?

The Friends of Red Kites can help you ...

Our 40 minute illustrated presentation relates the fascinating story of the re-introduction of the red kite in the north-east of England after an absence of over 170 years and outlines the work of FoRK as custodians of the red kites.

Cost: £25.00 donation plus speaker's travel expenses. However, if the audience is in excess of 25 then the cost will increase on a £1 per head basis (capped at £50.00). Concessions are available.

To book a talk contact Judy Summerson at:

Judith.summerson@blueyonder.co.uk or ring 0191 488 3597 or 07811927330.

Health Walks update - **Jackey Lockwood**

At this mid-point in the year it is good to be able to report on a successful programme of Health Walks thus far. Gateshead's "Year of Walking March 2015-16" proved to be a motivating and inspiring initiative across the Borough. Our contribution in statistics looks like this:

Number of walks = 42

Number of participants on those walks = 1145 (often the same people but including 65 new walkers to our group)

Total distance covered = 135 miles.

We closed the year with a ramble of approximately 4 miles on the Clockburn Circular Trail (orange way markers) in Gateshead's stunning Derwent Valley.



The regular Monday afternoon Health Walks have gone ahead at each of our walking locations along the course of the River Derwent. In January the start point was the Sands Road car park for the lower Derwent section. In February we started at Winlaton Mill and walked in the Derwenthaugh Park to the Nine Arches viaduct and beyond. March saw us walking from Stirling Lane to Lintzgreen and back; then, in April, we used the Derwenthaugh Park and Derwent Walk before returning to Sands Road in May. Each location gave us a variety of wildlife to see and hear which changed with the seasons. The number of walkers has steadily increased and now stands at an average of 35 people out each week.



Each year we do a few longer walks in a different location. This May we did one of our favourite walks along Northumberland's outstanding coast from High Newton via Dunstanburgh to Craster and on to Cullernose Point. 33 walkers enjoyed fine weather, good views of a variety of birds and flowers as well as the spectacular scenery.



Friends of Red Kites have 12 trained Health Walk Leaders who volunteer on a rota basis to lead the walks. I would like to take this opportunity to thank them for their continued commitment and enthusiasm. Their knowledge of the wildlife and the area adds to the enjoyment of the walks. I would also like to thank the regular Health Walkers themselves who help make the walks a pleasure to organise and who do so much to support our activities. Thank you and enjoy the walking in the rest of 2016.