



# Friends of Red Kites

in the North East of England

[www.friendsofredkites.org.uk](http://www.friendsofredkites.org.uk)



## Newsletter, Summer 2021



### **Red Kite Breeding** - Ken Sanderson

When Lockdown restrictions were eased, at the end of March, the focus was immediately on finding red kite nests. Twenty-six active nests were confirmed but, sadly, we had two early failures. Both involved one of the pair being found dead. One was retrieved from directly below its nest in Chopwell Wood. It appears to have got itself caught in branches below the nest. The bird looked to be in pristine condition, an X-ray showed no breakages, and the bird has been sent away for toxicology testing. The other red kite was found dead in Spen Banks and is also being processed to try and find the cause of death.

To date, only two active nests have been confirmed in Northumberland. Last year's nests at Snod's Edge and Dipton Wood are not being used and very little has been seen of the birds on territory. On the plus side, an active nest has been confirmed near Slaley with potential territories being investigated at Dukesfield (Slaley area), Houxy (north of Wark) and Brockbushes (west of Hexham).

We will now start the process of re-visiting nest sites to check chick development and hope to ring and wing-tag a number of broods to aid the future monitoring of the population.

NB. All the above activity is carried out under a Schedule 1 licence and permit.



A feature of this year's red kite breeding is the number of gardens that red kites have chosen to build a nest and rear their young in. There are five that we know about and below are brief accounts from three of the residents who are fortunate to see a red kite's nests from their homes:

From Julie:

*"We feel very fortunate to wake up to the sound of red kites every day. We have been fascinated to watch them build their nest over the months and are now so pleased to see them take up residence ready for their first brood. The pair have given us great pleasure and we have been able to identify the mother, wing tag O6, who we have fondly named 'Ginger'. Ginger is a young female who is very probably breeding for the first time. The father 'Fred' has done a fantastic job at building a much-needed warm nest given this strange weather. We cannot help but smile when we see him in the morning; you can almost sense his pride as he sits in a tree, by our bedroom window, almost acting as a lookout sentry to allow 'Ginger' to stretch her legs and wings."*

From Margaret:

*"The sight of a great spotted woodpecker in the garden helped us decide to buy the house which I'm still living in 45 years on. The dene we overlook teams with wildlife and we were especially delighted when a pair of red kites made it their home in 2019. Sadly, the nest failed that year when the chicks became prey to crows. Last year they returned to the old nest, as fast as they were repairing it with twigs the crows and jackdaws were stealing them. Eventually they gave up and moved to a site beyond our view.*

*However, this year they started to build a nest not far from their original one. The perfect distraction for a Covid lockdown. The female sat on the eggs for about a month and I was overjoyed to see first one, then two and, finally, three little white heads bobbing about being feed. She seems a very conscientious mother protecting them from the weather and gently feeding them choice morsels. Like all babies they are very active when being fed followed by a period of sleeping. I've got my fingers crossed that this will be third time lucky for this pair of kites though, with the leaves coming out on the trees, I am quickly losing the ability to spy on them.*

*I've seen kites flying around the Derwent Valley and have witnessed large numbers at a feeding station in Wales but I realise how incredibly lucky I am as not many people can say that they can lie in bed and watch red kites in their nest.*

*I'm wishing all red kites a successful breeding season this year."*

From Catherine:

*"For more than a decade I have had the privilege of watching red kites frequent my woodland garden and, during the spring, see them nest build, mate, feed, guard their territory with the hope they raise healthy chicks. I have only ever seen one chick successfully fledge back in 2011 and witness a nest fail for two consecutive years in 2018 and 2019. With the joy of seeing the kites in their natural habitat there is also disappointment too and it's very sad to witness.*

*However this year F9 (Arrow) and her untagged male partner are well and truly back and have built a new nest and, dare I say, have two healthy chicks. To see their little fluffy white heads pop up with shiny, black beady eyes as they are fed by their parents fills me with joy. I just hope their parents can keep them well fed, warm and safe as they battle the elements of this depressing May weather. And, as the crows descend, I watch nervously when both parents leave the chicks alone for short spells to gather the much-needed food but I am so relieved when they return."*

### **Update on Resumption of Health Walks - Jackey Lockwood**

Further to the item in the Spring Newsletter and all being well with the final phased lifting of the Covid-19 restrictions on 21<sup>st</sup> June, we hope to restart our Monday Health Walks in early July. Please keep watching our website for details of the when & where.

### **Feeding Red Kites in your Garden - Harold Dobson**

We are often asked if it's OK to feed red kites. Our response is there's plenty of natural food in the Derwent Valley to sustain a healthy red kite population so, unless there's a really severe winter, supplementary feeding is **not** really necessary. Indeed, it may even discourage the kites from spreading out and finding their food naturally.

If you do decide to feed the kites in your garden, then please bear in mind the following points:

- Do not provide cooked foods. They have minimal nutritional value.
- Do not supply processed meat. It contains salt which may be harmful.
- Ensure the meat has:
  - i) skin and/or bone to provide calcium. A lack of calcium has been linked to growth and bone disorders in some young kites and
  - ii) fur or feather as this binds with undigested material which is regurgitated as a pellet.

Also, it would be wise to check with your neighbours as supplementary feeding could attract other birds, e.g. black-backed gulls, or rats.

### **Using the Derwent Walk as a rail link - Harold Dobson**

An article appeared in a recent issue of the Newcastle Journal regarding a proposal by the local North-West Durham MP, and consequent feasibility study (75% funded by the Dept of Transport) to re-introduce a rail line between Consett and Newcastle via the Derwent Walk.

Over 6000 people have already joined a community action Facebook group called "Help Save Our Derwent Walk" to strongly oppose the idea.

We responded to this proposal and our letter of objection appeared in the Newcastle Journal on 27<sup>th</sup> April. The letter read:

*"With, in excess of 75,000 visitors per annum, the Derwent Walk is a very popular multi-user track used by walkers, cyclists, runners and horse-riders. It provides physical and mental health benefits to the public (it is included in three of our heath walks); it also has a fascinating industrial heritage and offers a rich and varied corridor of wildlife habitats.*

*Our main concern relates to the potential impact such a proposal would have on the red kite population. The kites were reintroduced to the Derwent Valley between 2004-2006 and we have many records of red kites nesting within 300 m of the Derwent Walk. There is a high risk of disturbance to the red kites by the construction of a rail line and the subsequent running of trains. The red kites do have full legal protection and, according to the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981), it is an offence to recklessly disturb nesting kites.*

*Our group does sincerely hope that this unrealistic proposal is quashed."*

## **Member's photographs**

Here are a couple of images provided by our member, Geoff Brown.



**Heron with frog**



**Roe deer**

This photograph was kindly sent to us by Derek Davison.



**Red kite**

If you have any wildlife photographs, then please do send them in for future issues of the Newsletter. Don't forget to let us know if you see a red kite via the "[Contact us](#)" page on our website.