



Newsletter, Summer 2023



We start this Newsletter with some upsetting news. Our dear friend and secretary Harold Dobson has had a serious and unexpected illness. Our sincere good wishes go to him, his family and friends and we hope that Harold has a full and speedy recovery.

Breeding Red Kites – Ken Sanderson and John Barrett

Generally, so far, this is a very similar season to last year, with a similar number of active territories and nests found. The kites appear to be holding their own with no apparent increase in distribution and population.

Monitoring in the early spring was focused on confirming occupied territories in areas outside of the core area of Rowlands Gill and at those locations where breeding had been recorded in the last few years in SW Northumberland e.g. the moors and moorland edges from the Derwent Gorge to Newbiggin, below Hexham. No new territories were recorded. Subsequent monitoring overall has provided 36 occupied territories (slightly up on last year), 5 of which are in SW Northumberland.

From the 36 active territories, 20 nests are being monitored. Two nests have failed. One very early in incubation but the female may have relayed at another nest site in the territory. The second nest failed after hatching, predated by crows. Given that we are only part way through the breeding season, most chicks will be approx. 3-4 weeks old, there is enough time to discover more nests before the youngsters fledge, which is usually around 6 weeks old.

In June, a small number of the chicks will be ringed, and wing tagged, all done under a Schedule 1 licence. After fledging the juvenile kites can be identified in the wild and this helps in determining movements and distribution of the species.



Photograph courtesy of Willy Cowgill

Edmundbyers Gathering – John Barrett and Ken Sanderson

The shooting of a red kite in March close to the village of Edmundbyers was the last straw for the villagers.

This followed a spate of incidents over the last few years, including the loss of two satellite tagged birds. Caron Kerr who had previously recovered one of the dead kites and who is closely interested in the plight of the red kites locally contacted Friend of Red Kites (FoRK) and John Barrett (FoRK Kite Welfare Officer) and Caron met to discuss the situation. A plan was hatched and Caron agreed to arrange a meeting of interested locals to discuss the situation and what could be done.

The meeting took place on 30th May with about 30 locals attending. John Barrett and Ken Sanderson represented FoRK with attendance also from the Police Wildlife Liaison Officer, David Williamson and the local estate's new Head of Conservation Manager Dr Marc McMillan.

John gave a presentation on the status of the kites which prompted numerous questions and great concern that our kite's future was at stake. There was agreement that much of the problem rested with illegal persecution of the birds which was taking place in the local area. The new Estate Manager responded very positively to the presentation and the discussion and accepted that the situation had to change. He agreed that we should meet to explore the issues in greater detail, and we will be making contact immediately to take this forward. The police and the local community also responded positively to his offer and will also be arranging to meet with him.

We all agreed that that the meeting had been informative and constructive and that a way forward had now been identified. We agreed we would all meet again to review progress with the Estate.



Events

The annual general meeting will still go ahead on Wednesday June 21st at Little Grandma's café with one administration change due to Harold's illness. – All booking and payments now go to our treasurer: Hilary Johnson, 28 Kimberley, Teal Farm, Washington, Tyne and Wear, NE38 8TT. This includes those who have already booked with Harold. The cost is £10 for a premium buffet! There will be a raffle so donations for prizes are welcome.

On Monday April 24th 24 members had dinner at the Skiff Inn. The two-course meal had been pre ordered but the choices were not served as expected. It was chips with everything. We expected mash and vegetables with the mince and roast potatoes and vegetables with the pie. The pub was very busy so service was rather slow, thank you to the staff for their efforts.

The raffle, with many donated prizes raised £38. Everyone enjoyed Ken's bird bingo which was a lot of fun. Harold also managed to sell the majority of the tomato pants kindly donated by Steve.

We have decided to postpone the Family Fun Day at Gibside proposed for September 3rd. We will re book this for next year as part of the 20th anniversary of the release of the first red kites in Gateshead in 2004.

Future ideas include a red kite calendar for 2024 and the sale of some merchandise. Any ideas for this anniversary should be sent to Sylvia Jones at sylvia.david@yahoo.co.uk.

Thank you for your continued support.



Photograph courtesy of Sylvia Jones