



Newsletter, Summer 2024



Summer 2024 Breeding – Ken Sanderson & John Barrett

The wet and cold spring has had a significant impact on kite breeding and also our monitoring schedule. For the kites, bad weather makes foraging for food more difficult which can delay them coming into breeding condition. Some pairs may not have attempted to breed at all. Kites have been seen recently coming into moult so it is likely they have come into condition too late to breed and have instead channelled their energy to replacing feathers, something that usually happens later in the season.

Only 24 territories have been confirmed so far. Last year there were 42 occupied territories. Eleven active nests have been confirmed with a further 3 probable; nest sites not visited have been monitored from a distance. There were 23 active nests monitored from the incubation stage last year.

Out of last year's 23 nests only five pairs are using the same nest as last year.

In early June, we ring and wing tag a sample of chicks from some of the nests under special licence. The wing tags give a visual identification for an individual (see photo below). This allows us to monitor the birds once they have fledged, giving us important information on distribution and breeding.

A more detailed breeding report will appear in the Autumn Newsletter.



Ode to FoRK – Neil Stephenson

*I wandered lonely as a dove,
watching the wondrous kites above.
They dance in the wind
and circle around.
At the sight of food
they swoop to the ground.
We monitor them weekly
to find where they nest.
A practice worthwhile
and a wonderful sight.
We are their protectors
The Friends of Red Kites*

Events – Sylvia Jones

Informal Sunday lunch

An informal Sunday lunch was held at the home of FoRK member, Jenny Peace. A two-course lunch was served at a cost of £10 per head. 15 guests attended on March 24th and all the money was donated to FoRK. Thank you, Jenny for this generous donation.

Members' Night

On Monday 8th April, 22 FoRK members had dinner at the Skiff Inn. As usual the two-course meal was very large and of good quality. Ken ran a quiz and the raffle raised £49.00.

Jenny Peace brought copies of her book 'Saving the Bees'. This is a beautifully illustrated, children's book which is selling for £2.50 or donations. All money raised is going to FoRK funds.

American Research Group Visit – Ken Sanderson

On Tuesday 30th April Friends of Red Kites hosted a group of research students, led by Professor Christine Stracey, from Guilford College, North Carolina, in the USA. The students were in the north east for 2 weeks and were based at Alnwick Castle.

The itinerary for the day was for two presentations to be delivered to the group in the morning at Swalwell Cricket Club and, after a buffet lunch, a field trip to see kites in the afternoon.

Michael Turner, a local ornithologist and author joined us for the day.



Harold Dobson gave the first presentation entitled "The Red Kite Returns" which details the history of red kites in the UK, and their demise in the 18th century which led to extinction in England and Scotland.

The Northern Kites project, which ran from 2004 to 2009 was responsible for releasing 94 kites back into the wild.

Photo Credit: Ken Sanderson

Home-made red kite shortbread biscuits, supplied by Geraldine Smith, were a point for discussion during the coffee break between presentations.



Photo credit: Harold Dobson

John Barrett gave the second presentation on "The Status of Red Kites in north east England" which details the monitoring of the kites after release and the analysis of 20 years of data.



Photo credit: Ken Sanderson

Both presentations were very well received.

After a buffet lunch, the field trip to see red kites was a circular walk, starting and finishing at Lintzford Garden Centre, taking in the Hamsterley Mill estate and the Derwent Walk, returning via Lintz Mill Lane. The group were not disappointed with great close-up views of the kites whilst walking through the estate and from Pontburn Viaduct.



Photo credit: Ken Sanderson



Photo credit: Christine Stacey

One of several kites seen at close quarters during the walk.

Time to go. The group prepare to return to their base at Alnwick Castle.



Photo credit: Ken Sanderson

Feedback from Christine, the group leader:

"Thank you all so much for such a wonderful program. We all learned so much and had a lovely time seeing the kites and getting to know you all, as well as all the volunteers. The students were thrilled with the great looks we got at the kites and Alex, my son, is still talking about how the kites steal people's laundry!"

Again, thank you so much for sharing your time and knowledge with us".

Thanks to Harold, John, Lori, Vic, Karen and Michael for helping to make the day a success.

Harold has been in touch with Sharon, Swalwell Cricket Club, and thanked her for the use of the facility and putting on a very extensive buffet.

Annual General Meeting – Harold Dobson

Our 14th Annual General Meeting will be held on Wednesday 26th June at 6.30 for 7.00 pm at **Little Grandmas' Cafe**, Little Ollie's Garden Centre, Bridgefields, Newburn Bridge Road, NE15 8NR. The meeting itself should last no more than 40-50 minutes.

The meeting will be followed by a buffet supper (£12.00 per head). The formal invitation to, and the paperwork for, the AGM are included separately in this mailing.

20th Anniversary Events – Jackey Lockwood & Harold Dobson

As this is the 20th Anniversary since the first red kites were released in the lower Derwent Valley, we are organising a series of celebratory events which are also open to the general public.

Red Kite Family Fun Day (Sunday 7th July)

We have strong links with the National Trust, at Gibside, and the Go North East bus company (a corporate member). Once again, we join forces to allow families to enjoy the fabulous "Red Kite Family Fun Day" which will be held from 10.00 a.m. to 4.00 p.m. on Sunday 7th July in the National Trust Gibside's Market Place. [Normal National Trust admission rates apply].

A Go North East red kite bus will be the main attraction along with face-painting (not limited to children!!), etc provided by Go North East's entertainments team.



Our 150-tile red kite mosaic will be resurrected on the Avenue in front of Gibside Chapel. Also, the Gibside Sewing Group volunteers, with the support of the National Trust, have produced a series of pieces of artwork depicting "A year in the life of a red kite" which will be on display in Gibside's Walled Garden.

Friends of Red Kites volunteers will be present to provide information about the red kites and their conservation. They will also run a Tombola stall.

Red Kite Trail Walk (Sunday 14th July)

This is a led, circular walk along the Red Kite Trail on Sunday 14th July. There will be views of local landscapes and wildlife, hopefully including red kites. Participants should meet in the long lay-by at Lintzford, where the Trail crosses the A694, at 9.30am ready to start walking at 10am. Suitable footwear will be required and clothing that will give protection from sun, rain and nettles. This walk is not suitable for children under 14 and dogs should not be brought.



From Lintzford, the walk will go through part of Chopwell Woods, Victoria Garesfield, Hookergate, Spen Woods, High Thornley, Thornley Woodlands Centre (TWC), Derwent Park, Derwent Walk, Rowlands Gill and back to Lintzford. This is a distance of about 10 miles and will take between 5 and 6 hours. A reasonable degree of fitness is required because much of the first half of the walk (Lintzford to TWC) is uphill and over uneven and sometimes muddy ground.

Participants should bring a packed lunch and water. We will aim to be at TWC, the half-way point, by lunchtime but will only have about 20 minutes so not enough time to order food from the cafe

which is likely to be busy. Some people may wish to leave the walk at this point. Those people will need to have made their own arrangements to get back to Lintzford if they have left a car. There is a regular bus service along the A694 (X45).

The second half of the walk is mainly flat walking on surfaced paths/ roads except for the final descent into Lintzford which is quite steep and can be muddy. We will be walking by the side of a busy main road in Rowlands Gill for a short period. There are toilet facilities on this walk at Lintzford Garden Centre and Thornley Woodlands Centre (TWC).

You will be given a Red Kite Trail leaflet showing the route we will be walking and this is also available on the Friends of Red Kites website (www.friendsofredkites.org.uk/red-kite-trail). The Barlow section will be left out.

The walk is free but places are limited to 25 people so anyone wanting to participate will need to register by 7th July by email: admin@friendsofredkites.org.uk or via the "Contact Us" page on our website: (www.friendsofredkites.org.uk).

Childrens' Activities Events (Thursdays 15th & 29th August)

There are two Childrens' Activities Events planned for this summer. One is at Thornley Woodlands Centre, Rowlands Gill, on Thursday 15th August, and the other is at the Land of Oak & Iron Heritage Centre, Winlaton Mill, on Thursday 29th August. Both events will run from 10.00 – 12.00 noon.

After a brief welcome, undercover activities will include: face-painting, making a red kite mask, badge-making, "Guess the Red Kite names" quiz, draw and name your own red kite. Weather permitting, there will also be a 30-minute walk from Thornley Woodlands Centre around the Sculpture Trail. The Heritage Centre will be offering a Picture Trail.



Parents will be able to get refreshments at the nearby café in both locations.

www.friendsofredkites.org.uk