



Newsletter, Winter 2019

Roosting Red Kites: Autumn & early Winter - Ken Sanderson



Red Kites are very sociable; they form communal roosts in the autumn. The roosts in the autumn and early winter are made up mainly of juvenile birds and failed breeders. When the weather gets colder some of the more mature birds will leave their territories and join the roost. None-breeding kites will use the roost to find a partner and birds that have had a tough day scavenging for food will tag onto groups going out the next morning to forage together for a meal. Autumn/Winter pre-roost gatherings also allow us to identify kites that have been wing-tagged.

Kites at pre-roost can be seen in large numbers, at close quarters, and can give some fantastic flying displays as they soar on the thermals.

After our most successful summer breeding for five years, when 33 chicks were known to have fledged, there was a sense that the kite population was on the increase and we were optimistic that the roost counts in the autumn would also reflect this.

By the end of September these hopes were being realised as 18 kites were counted going into roost near Hamsterley Hall. A roost also formed in the Gibside area as well and, by mid-October, a total of 49 kites were counted in the two roosts: 32 at Gibside and 17 at Hamsterley Hall.

No joint kite count has been made since but individual counts suggests that numbers remain high with 25 kites being recorded one evening in early November at Hamsterley Hall and 13-16 kites being noted at Gibside. This suggests that kites are moving between the two roosts as numbers have fluctuated.

Also, during October, new sites and old sites, which were known to have held kites in previous years, were checked but held no significant kite activity. Kites were noted at Lintzford Garden Centre at pre-roost one evening but this was thought to be a staging post for kites making their way up to the Hamsterley Hall roost as they appeared to move on up the valley.

Roosting Red Kites: Autumn & early Winter - Continued

Numbers continue to increase at the Hamsterley Hall site; 27 were noted recently, whilst the Gibside roost remains steady.

Of the eight juveniles that were wing-tagged last summer five have been identified at pre-roost so far this winter season.

On Sunday 12th January 2020 members of the FoRK monitoring team will take part in a National Red Kite Roost Check and will count red kites at known roost sites in Gateshead's Derwent Valley. Other regions in the UK with red kite populations will also count red kites at roost during this weekend and a total number will be calculated. This total will be submitted to the European Red Kite Group along with all the other countries in Europe holding red kites so that the total number of roosting red kites can be determined. FoRK are inviting members of the public to assist in this survey. To register an interest please email Ken Sanderson at: admin@friendsofredkites.org.uk. More details will be sent out nearer the time of the event.

Long Health Walk - Jackey Lockwood

On a bright, breezy morning on Wednesday 2nd October 34 Health Walkers assembled at the Damhead car park, near Swalwell. The hired coach took us to Whitburn Coastal Park from where we walked to the grotto at Souter for a refreshment stop. The coast looked as stunning as ever and there were quite a few seabirds, mainly gulls and cormorants, to be observed.



From Souter we continued north to South Shields and our regular lunch stop at Colman's. Both of these venues lived up to expectations. Walkers made their way through the town to catch the Shields Ferry across the Tyne to continue the walk though North Shields. The relatively new statue to fishermen was seen for the first time by many.



The walk then continued around the headland and in to Tynemouth, about 6 miles in total. There was just time for a quick cuppa or look around the shops before the coach arrived to take us back to Gateshead. It was a day out enjoyed by all who participated and our thanks go to Glenn Dawson who does the organisation for these longer walks and to all health walkers for their continued support and enthusiasm.

Winter Members Night - Sylvia Jones

On Monday November 18th, 30 FoRK members met at the Red Kite pub, in Winlaton Mill, for our Winter Members' Night.

Once again Louise and her team served a superb two-course meal to the members.

I welcomed everyone and, after the meal, gave an update on the events this year which were to celebrate our 10th anniversary. I thanked the members and the volunteers who make our work so successful.

Ken gave a detailed red kite update and thanked all the monitoring teams. I organised an historic picture quiz which was fairly easy. The Geordie geography quiz was, however, more challenging but it made more sense once the answers were revealed. Roz and Karen raised a staggering £80 with the raffle. Grateful thanks are due to everyone concerned.



Fellside Church Coffee Morning - Fiona Clapham

A coffee morning was held at Fellside Church, Whickham on 26th October at which FoRK and Fellside Church, ably assisted by Avril Arbon, raised a magnificent sum of £321.

Despite the potential distraction of the Rugby World Cup semi-final there was a great turn out and tremendous support from the FoRK Red Kite walkers and the Church community. It was a happy and enjoyable occasion with some fine delicacies to tempt the appetite and disappoint the waistline!

Thanks to Fellside Church for hosting such a successful event and to all who contributed produce and effort.



Red Kite Call at Land of Oak and Iron Heritage Centre - Karen Mathieson

It's early lunchtime, Saturday 12 October and as I pull into the busy car park I'm filled with eager anticipation as to what the next few hours hold. Harold and I have been working on an exciting project as part of FoRK 10th Anniversary Celebrations with Eliot Smith Dance, a Newcastle-based contemporary dance company.

As I open the car door my attention is immediately drawn to the clear blue sky above as I hear the repeat whistle of a red kite. I expect to see a very timely aerial display but no sign of our favourite raptor. I walk to the open courtyard area at the back of the building and find the source! Eliot Smith, Artistic Director of Eliot Smith Dance, setting up the sound system for the planned community dance 'Flying High' and teaser performance of his new work 'On Red Kites' to be performed at Sage Gateshead on 26 November 2019.

Eliot is acknowledged as one of UK's contemporary dance choreographers 'One to Watch' and is committed into bringing dance to new audiences inspired through local history and community traditions. The reintroduction of the red kite into the Derwent Valley from 2004, after its near extinction through persecution, was the inspiration for Eliot's new 2019 work.

The Café Shrub is packed with diners and tables in the outdoor space are fast filling up with visitors and family and friends of the community dancers. The community dancers are close to the heart of ESD as they seek to promote the health and well-being through giving non-professional dancers the opportunity to share in the joy of dance.

Eileen Raby, a friend and volunteer of ESD, hands out flyers explaining the background of the dances. There is a real air of excitement and nervousness as sixteen dancers (many with no dance experience and performing for the first time) take their position in 'Flying High' with ESD principal dancer, Yamit Salazar. All is still until the recording of the 'kite call' stirs individual imagination and movements and the result is an awe-inspiring, captivating scene. The end comes too quickly for the audience as they enthusiastically show their appreciation, some with a tear in their eye.

*Community dancer Lesley Lofthouse describes how she was inspired by the red kites in this way: "When you are young you may not have a clear idea of where you want life to take you. Post-60 you are like a red kite, up high, viewing life for the amazing journey it is, welcoming new perspectives and challenges".

Everyone's eyes then settle on the two ESD professional dancers, Eliot Smith (Principal Dancer) and his partner Gemma Paganelli (Principal Dancer) as they perform the 'teaser' 'On Red Kites' to Brahms Violin Sonata No 3 played by Kyra Humphreys of the Royal Northern Sinfonia. A real privilege to witness two world class dancers showcasing their new work before its premiere at Sage Gateshead in November. Such beauty, grace, strength and fragility packed into five minutes!



There was, however, a pair of eyes scrutinising a different aspect of the performance - those of Andrew Gregson (Costume Designer) - 'getting it absolutely right' is paramount to the workings of ESD.

[Red Kite Call at Land of Oak and Iron Heritage Centre - Continued](#)

As I return to my car my thoughts are on how dance is such a wonderful way of engaging people in their communities.

Thank you to all the amazing community dancers for their time, talent and bravery and to ESD dancers Yamit Salazar, Gemma Paganelli and Artistic Director Eliot Smith (a more focused and talented young man I have yet to meet).

*<https://narcmagazine.com/features-flying-high-when-community-participation-works/>
NARC is the online independent guide to alternative music, art, literature, comedy, film, theatre and culture for Newcastle and the North East.



["On Red Kites" Premiered at Sage Gateshead - Harold Dobson](#)

Previous Newsletters have heralded the premiere of "On Red Kites" which formed part of a "Double Bill" which was held on Tuesday 26th November 2019 (8pm) at Sage Gateshead.

It was produced as a result of Eliot Smith's (Artistic Director of Eliot Smith Contemporary Dance Company) observations, with help from FoRK, and creative interpretation of our favourite bird of prey – the red kite. The work was set to Brahms Violin Sonata No. 3 (for Violin & Piano in D Minor) played by Kyra Humphreys from the Royal Northern Sinfonia.

The 24-minute performance was truly awe-inspiring. The first section, of four, was an expressive introduction to the four dancers embodying the red kite's heroic characteristics. The second section was romantic and nostalgic as two dancers intertwined offering each other love and protection. By contrast, the third section spotlighted one dancer with an impassioned, rhapsodic outburst of the soaring bird. The final section was the most virtuosic in which the passion and majesty of the red kite re-established itself and had its apotheosis in the vision of dancing red kites in all their glory.

Workshops and Outreach programmes have been offered to schools, colleges and community groups (Newcastle, Ashington, Rowlands Gill) including the Mental Health and Autism Centres (Newcastle and Choppington) linked to the theme of wildlife and birds.

The project was/is funded by Arts Council England (Lottery Funded Project Grants) and Northumberland Arts Development and Community Foundation.

Stage 2 of the Project is to tour "Double Bill" across the North East region, as well as to other cities and rural areas of the UK, in 2020.

As this is our final Newsletter of 2019, we would like to wish you, our members and your families a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

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