



## Newsletter, Winter 2020

### Autumn/Early Winter Red Kite Roosts – Ken Sanderson

Despite the Lockdown/Tier 3 restrictions Friends of Red Kites have been fortunate to have been able to carry out the monitoring of kites at roost albeit in a socially distanced way with a limited number of surveyors.

Red Kites roost communally, something not common in raptors; they gather just before dusk to roost in trees, usually in a large wood. In the depth of winter, when nights are at their longest, kites can spend up to sixteen hours at roost which does not give them a lot of daylight hours to forage for food to survive. Kites also tend to use traditional sites to roost so these are the locations that are checked out in early autumn.

The first indication that a roost had formed was on 30<sup>th</sup> September when twelve kites were noted at a pre-roost gathering near the Rowlands Gill viaduct. A few days later, twenty-four kites were circling around the Pont Burn viaduct near Lintzford. They eventually drifted up to drop down into roost near Hamsterley Hall.

In early October, a co-ordinated roost count by some members of the monitoring team covered two sites in the Derwent Valley: Hamsterley Hall and the Gibside area. A total of forty-nine kites, thirty-three at Hamsterley Hall and sixteen in the Gibside area, were counted. This number was high for an early season count and probably reflected the productive summer breeding when, at least, forty-two chicks were known to have fledged.

On the 25<sup>th</sup> October thirty-three kites were again counted at the Hamsterley Hall roost with a fewer number of kites being counted at Gibside. Since then, monitoring has been limited but it would appear that numbers are now building up at Gibside and dwindling at Hamsterley Hall which is a reverse of the trend of last year. Numbers have subsequently built up at Gibside to circa forty-five kites (noted on the 18<sup>th</sup> November) and on the same evening twenty-two kites were observed at Hamsterley Hall. High numbers are still being seen at pre-roost in the Lintzford area (e.g. forty-three on the 24<sup>th</sup>) but most are drifting down the valley towards Gibside. There have also been up to 30 kites seen in pre-roost gatherings around Sherburn Towers and Thornley Gardens, which were later observed drifting towards Gibside.

Apart from getting spectacular views of large numbers of kites, circling in pre-roost flight, it also allows wing-tagged kites to be identified when they come down to perch in trees. Of the sixteen juveniles, which were wing-tagged in the summer, eight have been identified since fledging.

On Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> January 2021 members of the FoRK monitoring team will take part in a socially-distanced 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 hosting red kites so that the total number of roosting red kites can be determined. In past years FoRK have invited members of the general public to help out at this event but we have decided not to

have any additional help this year because of the Covid-19 situation. This will reduce the risk of spreading the infection by limiting numbers at each roost site.

With the excellent early winter numbers being so high there is now an expectation that the record of number of roosting kites, eighty-five, counted in last January's National Survey, will be superseded.

Many thanks to all who have contributed to the monitoring carried out thus far.



### **The Joy of seeing Red Kites**

*Having moved into a house in Rowlands Gill earlier this year, below are items written by two young boys and their grandmother outlining their excitement in seeing red kites in their garden and nesting nearby.*

A few days after we moved in we saw a huge red bird swooping around. One day we were having a camp fire and he swooped along through the smoke so that's why he's called Smokey.

Once we saw another red kite and we thought it was Smokey and then he flew down too so we were amazed that there were two Smokeys! Sometimes we see him chasing other birds. I like to see him gliding through the air. I feel like he's mostly ours like our pet. He couldn't come in the house though because he might smash the lights! He likes to sit up high. Lately we know that Smokey has had babies and we can see the nest. I haven't managed to see the babies yet though. I hope that the babies start flying and one day that we might see the whole family flying together.

*By Fenn Harper Hill (aged 6)*

I am writing to tell you about the red kites in our garden. Around the start of April, we saw Smokey in one of our trees with a female who we later got to know as Penny. Then they made a nest in a tree opposite our decking and lately we've seen little furry grey heads peeking out! Smokey has been protecting the nest a lot. One time we went out into the garden and Smokey had picked up a cuddly toy hippo and dropped it in our compost heap! Another time he had picked up a piece of loo roll! Normally when we see Smokey he is chasing another bird. His favourite type of food is squirrels; we know because he leaves his leftovers on our grass!

I hope they stay and I get to see the babies fly through the sky.

*By Rory Harper Hill (aged 8).*

I came to stay with my daughter in Rowlands Gill at the end of March. After hearing about the Red Kites that visit their garden I was looking forward to seeing them myself. I wasn't disappointed as Smokey (as my Grandsons had named him) flew into the garden each day sometimes landing to rest. In fact, on one occasion, he sat for quite a while looking into my window about 6 feet away (social distancing). This enabled a detailed look at his beauty, colour and strength. One morning

Smokey seemed very excitable...swooping, dipping and diving. He was flying in and out of the adjoining property where his nest was. This behaviour continued for a day or two and it was then we discovered there were three chicks in the nest. I assume his behaviour was his way of celebrating becoming a Dad. There was a flurry of interest from neighbours with photos being taken to share. After a few days Smokey's partner appeared in the garden and, at that point, I felt I was part of their family. The whole episode certainly brightened up my time in COVID-19 lockdown.

*By Diane Harper (Rory and Fenn's Grandma)*



*Images by Alan Jordan*

### **Autumn Health Walks - Jackey Lockwood**

Health Walks remain on hold for the foreseeable future. However, with the autumn colours being so splendid as I write this, I hope FoRK Members and Health Walkers have been able to get along to the Derwent Valley to enjoy some fresh air and exercise. Even when the trees have shed their

leaves a winter walk can have many health benefits. I know Gateshead's Countryside Ranger has been working hard to ensure that footpaths are kept in a good state of repair and overhanging vegetation is cut back so that areas are accessible to all.

Two of our most popular Health Walks are circular and use the Derwenthaugh Park and Derwent Walk. The more northern of the two goes past Swalwell Visitors Centre (currently closed) and this walk can be accessed from any of the car parks or bus stops along the route. The more southern of the two is best accessed from the Heritage Centre at Winlaton Mill. Once at the Nine Arches Viaduct the return route can be varied by using the Derwent Walk and Butterfly Bridge. For the really energetic the Hollinside Trail can be added in for interest but there are a lot of steps! Refreshments are available at the pub or café.

Any Walkers who feel they are ready to go further than the usual 3 miles could try the Derwent Valley Explorer way-marked with green arrows. It is 6 miles and takes in both the above two walks and includes Thornley Woodlands Centre (TWC) for a refreshment stop if needed. Again, there are quite a few steps but lovely woodland to observe. Also, from TWC or the Heritage Centre, the Red Kite Trail can be completed as a linear walk using buses or in two circular walks if the one circle of 11 miles is a bit too much. The shorter loop, using the steps between the Derwent Walk and TWC is in the Derwent Valley so is mostly level and is approximately 3 miles.

The longer loop of the Red Kite Trail is approximately 8 miles and takes in the upland section so it is quite hilly. It can be walked in either direction. If you follow the way-markers from TWC to cross the main road (A694) you will pass fields, farms, some kennels then via Barlow in to Spen Woods, Victoria Garesfield and eventually Chopwell Woods. From there you descend to Lintzford where you can catch a bus back to TWC which shortens the walk by about 3 miles. Alternatively, stay on the Trail and make your way up to Lintzgreen station, along to Rowlands Gill and back to TWC via the steps from the Derwent Walk.

There is a detailed description of the Trail on our website and Red Kite Trail leaflets are available at both visitor centres. Watergate Park is another interesting place to walk with plenty of bird life around the lake and in Washingwell Woods where there is a new boardwalk which makes the path a bit safer. By now everyone will have found their own local favourite walk; there are certainly plenty to choose from in our area. Whatever you do enjoy the walking, the landscape and the wildlife.

### **Derwent Valley Kite by Jim Third**

*Silently soaring on fingered wings  
twisting and turning and using the breeze  
gliding above us he sees many things.  
Side slipping, diving and dipping with ease  
above the ridge he starts to hover  
making adjustments for the wind on wing.  
The Vale of Derwent is far down below  
splendidly glowing in the late evening sun.  
The red kite spins and puts on a show  
the path of his flight writes a song in the skies.  
Power and beauty clash as he flies  
drifting upon the dusky breeze as evening unfolds.*

## **Red Kite Information Panel at the Heritage Centre - Harold Dobson**

We're pleased to announce that an information panel entitled "The Red Kite returns to the Derwent Valley" has been produced and erected on one of the windows in the courtyard of the Land of Oak & Iron Heritage Centre in Winlaton Mill.

The panel provides information, including photos, about the reintroduction programme, how to identify the bird and takes you through a year in the life of a red kite. It also includes brief information about FoRK.

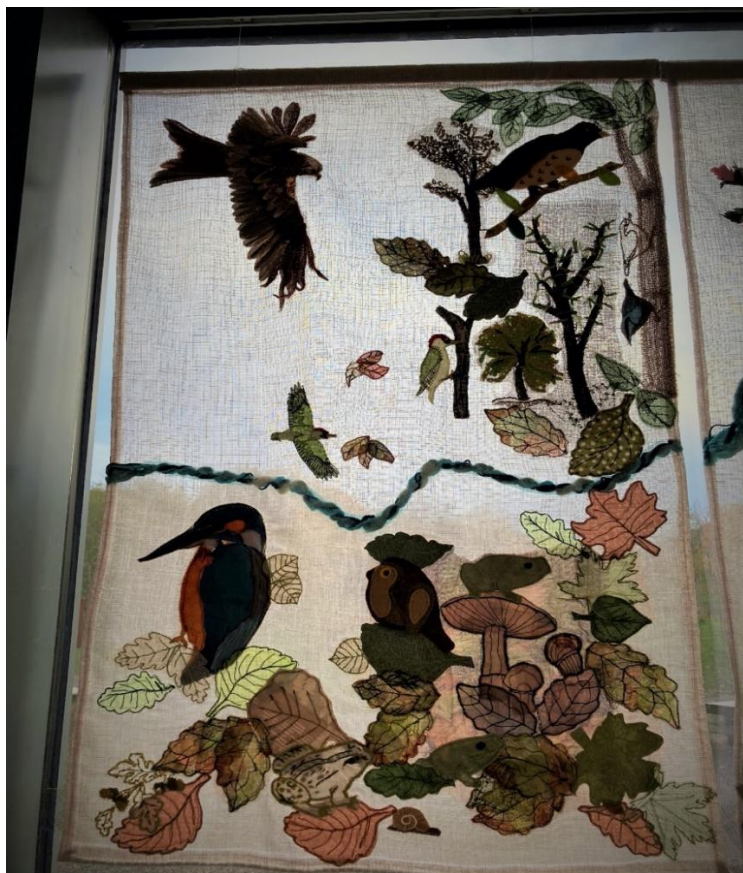
We hope you will have an opportunity to check out the panel when you're queueing up for a coffee at Café Shrub.

## **The Red Kite Sews Over the Derwent Valley** by Karen Mathieson

If you haven't yet seen the stunning art installation, 'Derwent Threads', created by the wonderfully talented Gibside Sewing Group during the first Covid-19 lockdown then you should head along to Café Shrub at Land of Oak & Iron Heritage Centre, Winlaton Mill for an admiring look!

The ten textile panels hanging in the end window depict the landscape, history, heritage and natural history along the 33km journey of the River Derwent from its moorland source above Blanchland to where it meets the River Tyne.

See the red kite, depicted in intricate detail, soaring above woodland and wildlife of the Derwent Valley. It marks the celebration of the Northern Kites reintroduction programme in the Lower Derwent Valley between 2004-2009 which saw 93 fledgling red kites brought up from the Chilterns and released. These fascinating raptors continue to thrive and remain at the heart of the local community, its culture and economy.



**Members' Photographs** – Harold Dobson

We hope you've been able to get out for regular walks during the many long months of the pandemic and, if you've taken any photos, be they of red kites or any wildlife, we'd be pleased to share a selection of them in future issues of this Newsletter. Please send your images, with your name, to: [hfdobson@btinternet.com](mailto:hfdobson@btinternet.com)



**Membership Renewal 2020 -2021** – Karen Mathieson

This is a friendly "last chance" reminder to those members who have not yet renewed their 2020-2021 FoRK membership which was due at the end of October. We still need you to help us in conserving the red kite population in Gateshead's Lower Derwent Valley and to continue to monitor their health & welfare.

Please do renew your membership (*£7.00 for an individual or £10.00 for a family or household*) as every single member counts. All you need to do is complete the form below and return it, with your subscription, to me (cheque or postal order made payable to "Friends of Red Kites").

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**To: Karen Mathieson, FoRK Membership Secretary, 17 The Meadows,  
Pickering Nook, Burnopfield, Newcastle-upon-Tyne NE16 6QW**

Name .....

Address .....

Post code ..... Email Address .....

IF YOU DO NOT HAVE A PRINTER PLEASE JUST WRITE YOUR NAME, ADDRESS & EMAIL ADDRESS ON A PIECE OF PAPER AND INCLUDE IT WITH YOUR PAYMENT.



As this is our final Newsletter of 2020, we would like to wish you, our members, and your family a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

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