



# Friends of Red Kites

in the North East of England

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



## Newsletter, Winter 2021



### Red Kites roosting – Ken Sanderson



It is very unusual for birds of prey to roost together in numbers. Red Kites are one of the raptor species that do, so why they do it?

There are several possible reasons:

- Red kites are sociable birds and enjoy the company of other kites outside of the breeding season. A lot of calling, wheeling and chasing can be observed at the pre roost.
- To find a partner – juveniles are “introduced” to the roost by their parents in early autumn and failed breeders, who might be looking for a new mate, have also been noted.
- To help find food – kites that leave the roost very early in the morning are often followed by other kites which might be thinking that they are returning to a food source visited the previous day.

A visit to the main roost sites around the middle of September didn't turn up anything significant: birds were gathering in small groups in the late afternoon but didn't appear to be going to a final roost and may have dispersed back onto territories. However, towards the end of the month approx. twelve birds were seen together near the Pontburn viaduct pre roost and appeared to drift up the valley to roost near Hamsterley Hall.

While there was evidence that a roost had formed higher up the Derwent Valley there was nothing to suggest there was an active roost in the Rowlands Gill area despite

reports of between ten and twenty birds gathering around Rowlands Gill and Lockhaugh in the late afternoon. Several visits in October produced nothing in the way of a roost there and it wasn't until the 4<sup>th</sup> November that a roost was confirmed when twelve kites were noted circling the Column to Liberty on the Gibside Estate before they dropped into trees in the Stables area. On the same evening fifteen kites were seen around the Walled Garden area of Hamsterley Hall.

There is no easy access to our normal roost viewpoint which overlooks the southern side of the Hamsterley Hall Estate. This is due to a landslide so the footpath through to Pontburn Wood and Southfield Farm has been closed. Southfield Farm is a chicken farm and access has been further restricted due to avian flu. Because of these issues the roost watch on the 11<sup>th</sup> October took place from a layby on the Medomsley Road when a distant twenty-one kites were seen dropping into trees near Southfield Farm. The Gibside roost was proving a bit fickle because, on the same evening, no birds were recorded going to roost at Gibside.

Roost numbers were starting to build in the Hamsterley Mill area: On 1<sup>st</sup> November circa thirty-four kites roosted near Southfield Farm, just west of Hamsterley Hall. Earlier in the afternoon nineteen kites were putting on a pre roost display over Hamsterley Mill and the Pontburn Viaduct.

The late afternoon and evening of the 22<sup>nd</sup> November proved the most rewarding session so far. From the Pontburn Viaduct, at Hamsterley Mill, the observers were treated to a fantastic aerial display with up to fifteen kites at one time, mainly juveniles, speed chasing and talon grappling in the late afternoon sunshine. One of our tagged kites, S2, was identified from a photograph. S2 fledged from a nest with a brood of three in Rowlands Gill in 2020. An hour before sunset the watchers switched location and moved over to the footpath which runs along the north-west side of Hamsterley Hall and affords good views up the Pontburn Valley. There were already circa 5 birds in the air near Southfield Farm and kites were also dropping into the Hamsterley Hall grounds. Numbers built up at Southfield Farm and twenty-eight were seen in the air together at one time with a constant flow of others moving up the valley from the Hall and Hamsterley Mill Housing Estate joining them. In total forty-nine kites were counted dropping into an area near Southfield Farm. The evening was crowned with a beautiful sunset.

In the search for additional roost sites, visits have been made to previous locations which have been used but, currently, Sherburn Towers and Victoria Garesfield show no evidence of any roosting kites.

As always, it would be appreciated if you could let us know of your red kite sightings. It would be great to get any leads as to potential roosts from our members.

Despite the slow start to the winter roosts, numbers are building and we look forward to participating in the National Red Kite Roost Count on Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> January 2022 when we expect to follow up our most successful breeding season with a record number of red kites counted at roost.

### **A Seasonal Poem - Jim Third**

When asked to contribute a poem for the Newsletter, I thought something seasonal would fit; observing a neighbour burning leaves reminded me of a poem by Laurence Binyon called "The Burning of the Leaves":

*Now is the time for the burning of the leaves.  
They go to the fire, the nostril pricks with smoke  
Wandering slowly into a weeping mist  
Brittle and blotched ragged and rotten sheaves  
A flame seizes the smouldering ruin and bites  
On stubborn stalks that crackle as they resist.*

*The last hollyhocks fallen tower is dust  
All the spices of June are a bitter reek  
All the extravagant riches spent and mean  
All burns the reddest rose is a ghost;  
Sparks whirl up, to expire with the mist  
The wild fingers of fire are making corruption clean.*

*Now is the time for stripping the spirit bare,  
Time for the burning of days ended and done.  
Idle solace of things that have gone before  
Rootless hopes and fruitless desires are there.  
Let them go to the fire which never look behind  
The world that was ours is a world that is ours no more.*

*They will come again the leaf and the flower  
To arise from squalor of rottenness into the old splendour  
And magical scents to a wondering memory bring  
The same glory, to shine upon different eyes.  
Earth cares for her own ruins naught for ours.  
Nothing is certain only the hope for Spring.*



**Membership Renewal 2021 -2022 – Karen Mathieson**

This is a friendly “last chance” reminder to those members who have not yet renewed their 2021- 2022 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.

**Thank you for your support – Harold Dobson**

Following on from Karen’s article, thank you, our members, for renewing your membership for another year and your on-going support and interest in our red kite population in Gateshead’s Lower Derwent Valley.

We do appreciate donations which are also made at the same time as the payment of the membership fee. Our main financial outlay, each year, is the cost of paying for a professional tree-climber each June who, over a two-day period, climbs up to each of the red kites’ nests where there are fledglings, and lowers them down, in a laundry bag, to the licensed staff below, who ring and wing-tag the youngsters, and then returns them to their nest.

## **RSPB Pin Badge Volunteers**



Each year, in the region, the team of RSPB volunteers raises almost £250k in donations from the sale of RSPB pin badge and collection boxes. Could you help us raise even more?

### **The skills you need ...**

A friendly and personable approach, a high level of motivation, basic computer skills and the ability to work on your own. In addition, knowledge of your local shops, businesses, pubs and tourist attractions as well as potential sites for new boxes in your area would be very helpful.

### **What's involved?**

Each box needs to be visited every four – eight weeks, at your convenience. Badges are replenished and donations counted on site. The money is then banked at your local Post Office or Payzone location using a personalized paying-in card supplied to you. You will then record the donations collected, by pin box, on your home computer, using a secure online database called "Robins" through which you can also order more boxes and pin badges as required.

You will be provided with all the information and equipment you need to fulfil the role and will be supported by your local RSPB Fundraising Officer (Sue Overfield).

### **Interested?**

If you are interested then please contact Sue ([sue.overfield@rspb.co.uk](mailto:sue.overfield@rspb.co.uk) or 07925 891 812) or, if you'd like an informal chat to find out more, then feel free to contact our very own pin-badge volunteer, Harold Dobson ([hfdobson@btinternet.com](mailto:hfdobson@btinternet.com) or 07801 907 832) who currently looks after four, local pin badge sites.



As this is our final Newsletter of 2021, we would like to wish you, our members, and your family a Merry Christmas and a happy & peaceful New Year.

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