



Newsletter, Winter 2024



Red Kite Roost monitoring – Ken Sanderson

In the years following the red kite releases at Rowlands Gill, in Gateshead's Lower Derwent Valley (2004 to 2006), the birds bred and roosted around the immediate areas, with a few exceptions, and this area we called the "core area".

Over the years, as the population increased, albeit slowly, the winter roosts got bigger. The kites began to breed higher up the valley causing a shift in the core area and, in 2015, a smaller second roost formed higher up the valley in the Hamsterley Mill area. This roost grew in number and from 2018 to 2020; the records show that the counts for each roost were similar during that period. From 2021, the roost around Hamsterley Mill has been significantly higher than the roost at Rowlands Gill. In January of this year 97 kites roosted around Hamsterley Mill and 25 kites roosted in the Rowlands Gill area.



Another interesting feature of the roosts is that they are now forming later in the year. In the early years the roost formed around mid-September but now they are not forming until much later. This year the first kites noted higher up the valley wasn't until 21st October and birds were not recorded at Rowlands Gill until 3rd November. This begs the question: "Are the kites staying on territory longer due to milder autumn weather, linked to global warming?"

Recent roost monitoring visits has recorded 21 kites at Rowlands Gill (Gibside Estate) and 55 in the Hamsterley Mill area. This makes a total of 76 which is an increase on figures recorded at this time last year. There may be other smaller roosts in the area, of which we are unaware, so if you see any signs of birds settling into trees around dusk do let us know.

On Sunday 12th January, the Friends of Red Kites monitoring teams will take part in a National Red Kite winter roost count.

Public Roost Watch (Sunday 8th December) – Ken Sanderson

Members of the general public and FoRK members are invited to join some of our Monitoring Team to see red kites at a pre-roost gathering on the Hamsterley Mill estate where good views of upto 30 kites can be seen perched and flying.

This event will take place on Sunday 8th December, meeting in the layby outside Lintzford Garden Centre at 2pm. More details can be found at:

<https://friendsofredkites.org.uk/events>

November Members' Night – Sylvia Jones

On Monday 25th November 20 members attended a meal at the Skiff Inn.

Pietro welcomed us into the conservatory. The pre-ordered meal was excellent and, as usual, the most popular choice was fish and chips followed by apple pie with plenty of custard.

Ken was host. He welcomed us and, after the meal, gave a roost update and presented two quizzes: "Name that Flower" and a "Winter Walk". They were both quite difficult. He also informed members that Alan Hart had passed away. Alan was assistant Kite Officer, with Ken, in the Northern Kites Project. Then he was a member of the Thursday monitoring team in FoRK. He will be sadly missed.

There were only six prizes in the raffle which raised £55. Geraldine Smith kindly supplied a good supply of home-made, red kite biscuits.

There was a happy and relaxed atmosphere at the meal and we all had a good time.



Photographs by Vic Lawson

Health Walks with Friends of Red Kites – Jackey Lockwood

In the last year we have once again enjoyed a varied and interesting programme of Health Walks. There are five favourite walks which we have used. We have met up each Monday afternoon at 1.30 pm for a 3-mile walk in the Derwent Valley or in nearby Watergate Park. The paths we have used have been surfaced and, at most, had a gentle gradient (except for the steps from the Meadow) There were three nominated Leaders on each walk so the pace could be varied if necessary but so all Walkers improved their fitness and stamina as well as socialising. There was a café at the end of most of the walks for those who wanted refreshments.

The most northerly of the walks we did was a circular route from Sands Road car park in Swalwell to the confluence of the River Derwent with the River Tyne and back to the start point in a figure of eight. This walk gave good views of waders, gulls and ducks.

The most southerly of the walks was a linear one from Stirling Lane, in Rowlands Gill, to the viaducts near Hamsterley and back again along the Co. Durham section of the Derwent Walk. This gave regular sightings of red kites from various viewpoints as well as woodland birds. These two viaducts are now temporarily closed (October 2024 to February 2025) for essential maintenance work and resurfacing.

Two other walks which were used several times in the years' programme started from Winlaton Mill. One of these routes took us through Derwenthaugh Park to Swalwell then up onto the Gateshead section of the Derwent Walk to cross the river at the Butterfly Bridge. The other route went through the Park, around Clockburn Lake to the Nine Arches Viaduct, an option to go down on to the Meadow at Lockhaugh and back in a loop. These walks gave good sightings of riverside birds such as dipper, grey wagtail, goosander, swan and heron and a variety of summer migrant birds such as chiffchaff, blackcap, swallow and sand martin as well as resident birds such as buzzard and bullfinch. Through the seasons there were many species of woodland and meadow flowers as well as deer.



The walk in Watergate Park & Washingwell Woods offered the option of a shorter walk around Watergate Lake. There was always plenty to see there from a pair of swans and three cygnets to little grebe, mallard, tufted duck, coot, moorhen and gulls. Swallows and house martins were regularly seen over the water and a variety of songbirds were heard. The slightly more challenging section through the woods was taken on by most Walkers each week.

The average number of walkers out with us has declined from a pre-Covid high of 45 to a regular 19 or 20 folk. We are very fortunate to have been able to enjoy some of the best outdoor spaces in Gateshead. The current programme of walks is on our website. The walks are free and new Walkers are always welcome; you just need to register when you arrive. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the volunteer Health Walk Leaders who have contributed so much to the success and enjoyment of these walks, and to the Walkers themselves for their continued interest, enthusiasm and support. We look forward to getting out in the fresh air for exercise in the year ahead.

The Friends of Red Kites Coffee Morning

You are warmly invited to join friends and enjoy home-made cakes, scones and biscuits with a cup of tea or coffee

AT: Fellside Church Hall, Ancaster Road, off Fellside Road,
Whickham NE16 5BJ

WHEN: Saturday 25th January 2025

FROM: 10 am until 12 noon

Donations of cakes, biscuits or scones are welcomed on the day. If you do plan to bring some goodies along then could you kindly let Jen Adams know in advance (email: red.kite2020@gmail.com, mobile: 07906 044934) and also bring along a list of ingredients used on the day.



The proceeds from the day will be used to pay for the cost of the tree climbers when ringing and wing-tagging the young red kites before fledging.



As this is our final Newsletter of 2024, we would like to wish you and your family a Merry Christmas and a happy & peaceful New Year.



www.friendsofredkites.org.uk