

## Autumn 2012 Newsletter

Dear Friends,

### MEMBERSHIP Judy Summerson

Currently we have just over 300 members. By now you will have received your annual membership renewal letter. Your support is very important to the conservation of the red kites in the North East of England. The more members we have, the louder the voice we will have to encourage interest and involvement in protecting and maintaining the kite population. Please encourage your friends to join and continue your own very much appreciated support.



### WE WELCOME OUR FIRST PATRON ~ TRAI ANFIELD

**Friends of Red Kites** are delighted to announce that Trai Anfield, well-known to everyone here in the north as a former BBC Weather Forecaster and Look North Presenter, has agreed to become our Patron. In accepting this important role, Trai says:

"I am honoured to become Patron of such an important and successful conservation initiative as **Friends of Red Kites**. I have admired the work of the group since it started out in 2004 as the Northern Kites Project. It has been terrific to see such an iconic species as the red kite return to this area and flourish beyond expectations. The birds themselves are magnificent, and they bring benefits to the whole community.

### N E RED KITE BREEDING REPORT FOR 2012 Ken Sanderson, Kite Officer and Ian Kerr, Monitoring Team

The wettest spring since records began appears to have had a major impact on the region's Red Kite population and its breeding success. It resulted in another difficult year for the re-introduced species and prevented any increase in breeding success for the 2011 season when kites were still suffering from the effects of the harshest and most prolonged winter for more than three decades.

2012 was the third year in which responsibility for monitoring was undertaken by Friends of Red Kites (FoRK), the organisation made up of former volunteers with the Northern Kites project which released 94 birds from the booming Chilterns population over a three-year period. Again, ringing, wing-tagging, the completion of BTO Nest Record Cards and liaison with the Rare Birds Breeding Panel was undertaken by FoRK.



Causey Gill chick



Paddock Hill chick

Images-Ken Sanderson

Monitoring during March and April revealed that 26 pairs of kites were holding territories. 19 of these pairs went on to build nests or to refurbish those used in previous years. One nest was completed but not used while the 18 other pairs went on to lay eggs. 13 of those pairs succeeded in fledging a total of 22 young, a very similar result to the 12 pairs and 24 young in 2011. Two pairs fledged three young each while the others succeeded in rearing one-two chicks.

Five pairs failed, four of them almost certainly due to natural causes. Of these, one failed during the incubation period, three early after hatching while the fifth failure involved a nest with a single chick which died when it

was about four weeks old. One nest almost certainly failed due to human disturbance when shrub and tree thinning was carried out nearby.

Four unhatched eggs were found in three nests. The very wet weather of spring and early summer probably played its part in making it difficult for adults to keep eggs and small young warm and to forage successfully for food.

At one site where a pair had three large young two were blown from the nest during strong winds. One died and other was found injured and taken into care. After rehabilitation it was released and was seen to join up with a family party of kites.

The figures given above are the absolute minimum as FoRK feels that some sites may well have been missed. For example, birds in wing moult, an indication of breeding, were seen in several areas but nests were not found or young seen.

While the Red Kites had a very difficult breeding season, they were certainly not alone. There were similar problems of poor success rates reported for other tree-nesting raptors including Goshawks, Buzzards and even Peregrines, normally the most robust of species, suffered losses from nest ledges being flooded.

All of the kite territories identified were in the core release area around the Derwent Valley or adjacent areas of Causey and Beamish in County Durham. For a second year there was no evidence of breeding in Northumberland although a pair was present throughout the season on the county boundary around Derwent Reservoir.

Fidelity of kite pairs to nesting territories was again well demonstrated. Nine of the pairs which produced eggs refurbished old nests while some others built new nests close to previous sites.

During June and July five chicks were ringed and wing-tagged by Keith Bowey, Ian Kerr and Ken Sanderson. Others were left un-ringed because they were too large to handle safely and could have 'jumped.' One brood was left because the nest was in a very flimsy dead Larch which might have collapsed with disastrous consequences for the birds – and the climber – if it had been attempted. Another brood was left because the nest tree was covered with ivy which would have been badly damaged by climbing.

The 2012 young have been given red tags with white lettering and numbers on their right wings and the normal Northen project tags of pink on the left. Anyone seeing a tagged kite can report it through the FoRK website, [www.friendsofredkites.org.uk](http://www.friendsofredkites.org.uk) or via their county recorders.

Plans are already being made to regularly monitor kites roosts this winter and a full co-ordinated spring survey of kites is planned for 2013. This will be done by recruiting volunteers from FoRK and local bird clubs. This should enable a much more accurate assessment to be made of the size of the local population and could help to pinpoint new territories for the next breeding season.

#### **2012 results at a glance (2011 figures in brackets)**

26 known active territories (19)

19 nests built or refurbished (19)

1 nest not used following refurbishment

18 known incubating pairs (18)

13 nests (12) successfully fledging 22 young (24)

5 nest failures, 1 during incubation, 4 with young



Images courtesy of Harold Dobson and June Atkinson

#### **MONITORING THE KITES Allan Withrington**

I hope to locate some kites in the area of Derwent Gorge / Muggleswick and would love some company. Would anyone like to come with me? It would need to be fine and breezy, so may take place at short notice. Any offers? Tel Allan on **07790085659**

## Dr. Tim Harrison of the British Trust for Ornithology asks ARE RED KITES GARDEN BIRDS?

There are many birds that people might expect to see in their garden but, for most, Red Kites are not one. A growing trend for people to provide food for Red Kites, however, is changing the garden bird scene in some parts of the country. Tim Harrison, of the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), finds out more.

The opportunity to see a magnificent bird of prey from the comfort of one's own living room is relatively rare. When the species involved is one that was almost extinct in the UK just a few decades ago, the draw is almost irresistible. Red Kites are now making a strong recovery in several regions and householders are tapping into their willingness to take scraps from gardens in order to get a good view of them.

Being proficient scavengers and not averse to visiting urban areas (William Shakespeare once referred to London as 'a city of Red Kites and Crows') Red Kites can find rich pickings in gardens. Concern has grown, however, about feeding this species, including what to feed them and when, and about how such provision might strain neighbourly relations. A collaborative group, including Natural England, Southern England Kite Group and the Zoological Society of London, have issued some sensible best practice guidelines.

**The right foods.** The best foods to provide are likely to be those based on whole small mammal (e.g. mouse, rat) carcasses. These can be bought from pet food suppliers. Cooked or processed meats should be avoided, and meats that do not contain skin or bone should only be provided sparingly. It is best to mimic natural foods eaten by Red Kites since these are most likely to contain a full complement of required nutrients. Corpses that are found in the wild are best avoided because they might be diseased or might contain poisons.

**Feeding schedule.** Feeding in the afternoon so that kites use their natural foraging habits during the earlier part of the day is recommended. There is no evidence that food supplementation causes wild birds to lose their natural foraging ability but it is likely to benefit individuals if they keep these skills well-honed. Uneaten food should be removed at the end of the day so that vermin and other scavengers are not attracted overnight.

**Talk with your neighbours.** Before trying to attract Red Kites into your garden, have a chat with your neighbours. The meat that you provide is unlikely to only attract Red Kites – other scavengers, such as crows and gulls, will also take the food. Consider too whether your neighbours might be intimidated by these large birds of prey.

Whatever birds you have in your garden – large or small – the BTO wants to know about them through their year-round [Garden BirdWatch](#) survey. For more information, including a free copy of their fantastic quarterly magazine [Bird Table](#), please email [gbw@bto.org](mailto:gbw@bto.org) or telephone the Garden Ecology Team on 01842-750050.



Helpful links to Google: [Stats about Red Kites from BTO BirdFacts](#) [How are Red Kite populations doing?](#)



Images courtesy of Stuart Gay BirdForum

## PRESENTATIONS AND EVENTS Sylvia Jones

Sylvia, Judy and Harold have been active in the community with help from many friends and volunteers. We continue to work with the usual groups but we have also been meeting different community groups, including Care Home residents. Although they are no longer active they get a great deal of pleasure from our presentations. Whickham Manor residents are lucky enough to see red kites daily from their windows. Sylvia has also visited a number of 'Live at Home' schemes in the Rowlands Gill area. Once again the residents get great pleasure from the red kites.



On Saturday August 11th a group of us attended the Chopwell Fire Station Community Day. What a fabulous family atmosphere. The 'chip pan' demonstration was amazing. There was a lot of contact between the firemen and the public.

We talked to about 100 people and many of them reported seeing kites daily and were able to confirm their locations. Many cakes were made to support St Oswald's Hospice, so of course we had to eat some.

As a follow-up to Harold's presentation, June manned a Red Kite stall at the Ponteland Manor Care Home Summer Fayre and has been invited back for their 15th anniversary in September. We are available to give presentations and would welcome more bookings for next year, so please contact us if you are interested. Thank you to everyone who has helped us.



Images courtesy of David Jones

## 'BEFRIEND A KITE' SCHEME **Marian Williams**

Having successfully launched our new 'Befriend a Kite' scheme last year, with six schools joining the scheme, we are currently processing a further seven schools. Once again the names the schools have chosen for their kites have been interesting:-

High Spen Primary School chose **Fireball**, Milecastle Primary School chose **Mile Star**, Prudhoe Castle First School chose **Red Sarah**, (after a member of staff who was leaving), Sele First School chose **Swift** and Whittonstall First School chose **Trunkle**, (a made-up name to represent the Scottish origins of their kite). The two other schools are still to complete the process.

High Spen Primary School have been heavily involved with a nine-month project on the red kites and below are some examples of the activities Class FWD got involved in an exciting project called '**Red Kite Sensations**'.



**Courtney Tyson and Amy Giles report:** The whole class wanted to learn more about these outstanding birds of prey because they live near High Spen.

As part of the project the class had lots of visitors. One of the Friends of Red Kites, Judy Summerson, came in to help us adopt a Red Kite. Miss Barron's brother, Bob, came in and showed us the equipment that he uses to climb trees and get birds that need to be tagged. An artist called James Searle came into help the class do art and craft activities.

The class took part in lots of art and DT activities. They drew pictures of birds of prey and made nests using chicken wire, twigs and material. The children also made proggy mats and knitted squares to make a big picture of a Red Kite. Finally the whole class made kites to fly.

As well as having visitors and doing lots of art and DT, the class also went to Beamish Wild where the children held some of the birds and watched birds flying around. Some children went along the Derwent Walk to the Red Kite Roost event. The whole class went on a scavenger hunt to Chopwell Woods. All of these experiences have meant

that FWD are now practically experts on Red Kites. It has been great fun for everybody.

Further information about our 'Befriend a Kite' scheme can be found here: <http://www.friendsofredkites.org.uk/page14.htm>

**Finally, good news.** A £7000 grant from the **Heritage Lottery Fund** will enable the **Friends of Red Kites** (FoRK) to make a giant red kite 'fly' around some of north-east England's most iconic locations as part of the **Flight of the Kite** project.

This will be done by creating a series of 'community heritage happenings' at which the 'world's largest red kite' mosaic will be constructed in iconic landscape locations from North Northumberland southwards to the Tees Valley. A dedicated **Flight of the Kite** page will be established on our website, giving further details about future plans.



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