



Friends of Red Kites

in the North East of England



www.friendsofredkites.org.uk

NEWSLETTER Issue 04 February 2010

Dear Friends,

Membership (Judy Summerson, Membership Secretary)

We now have 215 members with the promise of more to come. Phil Bolam, the Landscape Manager for the National Trust at Gibside became the 200th member. Phil and the National Trust are very supportive of the kites and we are very grateful to them and to all our members for their support.

Secretary's report (Allan Withrington)

A very good Extraordinary General Meeting took place at Gibside on 7th December 2009. Its purpose was to amend the constitution, allowing Corporate Membership. This was passed without demur and the remaining time was spent socialising. The Constitution has been duly amended and is available to members via e-mail on receipt of a request to me at allanwithrington@yahoo.co.uk Anyone wishing to have a hard copy should please call me on 07790085659.

Events and Presentations (Sylvia Jones, Vice-Chairman)

Three volunteers and a grandson spent a very cold night in Gibside with 150 youngsters and helpers from East Gateshead, tracking a Red Kite in the walled garden. The kite was in fact a spare transmitter hanging from a tree and the youngsters were in small teams participating in a series of activities as part of a "night" activity. We were all very impressed by how much the youngsters knew about the Kites. A good time was had by all, but it was cold!



We have had two very successful red kite Safaris from the Black Horse car park at Barlow. It was wonderful to see more than 12 red kites along these 6-7 mile walks. 17 members of Durham University Conservation Society joined FORK members and were greeted by kites flying overhead as they arrived. Interestingly, red kites and buzzards were flying together on this beautiful day.

Two weeks later Washington U3A members joined us for a similar walk on a very wet and windy day. However the red kites gave excellent close up flying displays especially in the afternoon when the weather had improved. Well done to the U3A members for their stamina and

perseverance; the kites' performance rewarded their efforts.

In November we had nine events, which were attended by a variety of community groups. We made new friends and welcomed return visits from previous members. Judy Summerson visited the **Day Centre of St. Oswald's Hospice** in Gosforth. Patient numbers were small, but interest in the presentation and the kites was keen.

We have 9 presentations booked for this spring. Unfortunately, adverse weather conditions led to the cancellation of the roost watch on **Saturday January 16th 2010** at Lockhaugh farm.



Another kite Safari will be held at 10.30 a.m. on **Saturday, 13th February** from the Black Horse pub at Barlow.

An evening kite event will be held on **Wednesday 10th March**. Details will be announced in due course.

Health Walks (Allan Withrington, Secretary) Tel: 07790 085 659

Meet at 1.30p.m. on February 1st 8th 15th 22nd at Winlaton Mill Car park.

And at 1.30p.m. on March 1st 8th 15th 22nd 29th at Stirling Lane Car park, Rowlands Gill.

Red Kite Up-date

Monitoring takes place twice a week and last Thursday's routine visit gave us over 20 kites around Lockhaugh Farm and Nine Arches area. During the previous week we saw WT15 on the pylon at the viaduct, patiently awaiting the breeding season! (Tim Watson)

The kites have had a hard time during the recent cold weather. Fortunately, staff at Gibside are feeding the birds and the residents of Fellside Park, Whickham have been leaving out chicken and turkey remains.

Birds have been pre-roosting in the woods below Lockhaugh farm and then crossing the river Derwent to roost in the conifer trees on the Gibside Estate. Mike Henry and Allan Withrington recorded 42 Kites at the pre-roost on Saturday 23rd January.

One of our members, Tracy Sacco, lives in Reading. Kites frequently fly over her garden. Tracy sent in this photograph recently. We make a specific request to ALL our members to assist us in compiling territorial data on the birds. All we need from you is specific information of where you have seen Red Kites, when, and what they were doing. Keep this info coming in and we will have a much better picture of how and what the kites are doing. We have promised to send the information to the national databank, so please help us with this important aspect of our work. Information can be sent to info@redkites.org.uk using the Sightings Sheet link on our FoRK website.



"My first Red Kite-the importance of the Derwent Valley birds" by Tim Watson

Most birdwatchers, most of the time, appreciate every bird they see, but very few birdwatchers don't also dream of seeing rare birds, or birds resident outside their home area. There were few "birdbooks" in the 1950s and 1960s, so as a youngster growing up on Tyneside and becoming interested in birds, the Collins Pocket guide (Fitter and Richardson) and then the Fieldguide (Peterson, Mountfort and Holom) were the only real references, not forgetting the Observers book. The 1952 Pocket Guide simply refers to "Kite" and stated that it was a "resident, breeding only in central Wales, where fewer than a dozen pairs survive". There was no explanation that persecution had caused its retreat into its tiny Welsh area, so it became to me just another "rare" bird that would not usually occur in the North east of England. For me, and no doubt many others, it was a bird you wanted to see, but wondered if you ever would, like Dartford Warbler, Crested Tit or Chough, all occurring many miles from home.



Then in the mid 1970's, living as a student in Bristol, I was near enough to Wales for walking trips and one June weekend camped at Rhandirmyn, near Llandovery. This wonderful area has much oak woodland, and Redstarts, Wood Warblers, Pied Flycatchers and Tree Pipits are obvious summer visitors, but above the woods there was an open sheepwalk and I knew I stood a chance of seeing my first Red Kite. I was in luck, and where the wood edge gave views of the upland, I watched in awe as a kite drifted along the side of the hill, against the blue, then quickly out of view. Fantastic!

Thirty years later, and more Welsh, French and Spanish kites later, I am a volunteer at a public watch point at a Red Kite's nest in Gateshead's Derwent Valley. The first young kite to fly in the north-east of England has just taken flight as a result of the re-introduction project. The tiny Welsh population has expanded to over 400 pairs, and further 600 pairs are breeding as a result of seven re-introduction projects in England and Scotland. Re-introduction to Northern Ireland is also taking place.

New field guides have appeared over the years, but no-one forgets the artistry and style of Richard Richardson and Roger Peterson.

These newer guides make reference to changes in the range of the Red Kite, back to areas populated prior to the persecution of it and other species of birds of prey. Persecution of birds of prey sadly is still taking place.

The most exciting part of this story is the welcome given to the birds from the public, especially children, the next generation's conservationists. A youngster new to bird-watching in this area will still look wistfully at illustrations of Crested Tit, Dartford Warbler and Chough wondering when she or he might see one. But not Red Kite, because they are back, living and breeding locally, loved by the community. Fantastic!



Isn't nature amazing!



Look carefully at the tongue of this young kite. The hole that you are seeing is the opening of the respiratory system. In birds that have the ability to open the mouth wide i.e. a wide gape where the opening of the respiratory system is very obvious. The opening that you see is the **oropharynx**, the oropharynx passes through a valve, the **glottis**. The glottis is the valve that prevents the swallowed food entering the respiratory system. The air enters into the **Larynx** just below the glottis (In most mammals the larynx contains the vocal cords but this is not the case in birds).

The next section of the respiratory tract is the **trachea**. In birds the trachea is extensively modified (dependent on the bird family); a section of the trachea is enlarged into a sounding chamber or **tracheal bulla** (or sounding chamber). The tracheal bulla modifies the sound produced by the **Syrinx**, which is usually situated at the base of the trachea. At the syrinx the trachea splits into a

pair of primary **bronchi**. The bronchi then pass into the lung as the **mesobronchus**. The air travelling through this system then enters the lung - air sac system. It is worth noting that birds do not have a diaphragm, unlike mammals and therefore have a far more complex breathing function than mammals.

The Adventures of a Young Kite (Judy Summerson)

Just before Christmas some visitors at Gibside found one of the 2009 chicks on the ground. A visit to the vet confirmed a cracked wing bone and the bird was put in a pen at Lockhaugh. Food was left for him and regular checks were made to ensure that all was well. The wing healed and the vet gave the bird a clean bill of health but the weather was against any release. The bird became cheeky and was clearly bored and itching to be free. Eventually and after a lot of soul searching about the fitness of the kite, and the weather, the bird was released at Gibside on 23rd January. Much to our relief the release was a great success and later in the day he was observed interacting well with other kites on the estate. The warden at Gibside is feeding the kites and watching out for the youngster. This morning 25th January the bird was seen feeding and interacting with another kite. So this little fella is being given every chance of survival and we hope to see a lot more of him as he grows to be a fit and healthy adult bird.



Time for your injection!

That's better!

Let me out!

Great, I'm free again!

Images : June Atkinson, Ian Curran, Paul Hillion, David Jones, Ian Kerr, Rike Kroner, Mick Render, Tracy Sacco and Lauren Withrington

Comments and questions are welcome. Contact the Editor: june.atkinson@virgin.net

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