



Friends of Red Kites

in the North East of England

www.friendsofredkites.org.uk



Newsletter February 2015

Membership Judy Summerson Membership Secretary

We now have 287 members. This is good, but over 300 members would sound so much better. Hopefully, with your help this will happen quite soon. Membership is very important to the Friends. It provides essential finance to run the Group and demonstrates an interest in the red kites as well as a real desire and passion to conserve this magnificent bird of prey in the north east of England. Please encourage your friends to join this very active Group. Membership forms can be found on our web site, at Thornley Woodlands Centre, Gateshead Central Library, Lintzford Garden Centre and St Mary's Heritage Centre, Gateshead.

Roosting Red Kites Ken Sanderson Chairman and Kite Officer

Red Kites form communal roosts in the autumn and continue to gather at dusk throughout the winter. In the darkest days of winter they can spend up to sixteen hours a night perched at roost.

The first red kite roost came together last autumn on the 22nd September when 11 kites were noted dropping into deep cover at Paddock Hill, near the Nine Arches Viaduct, in Gateshead's Derwent Valley. Numbers built up steadily until January when 53 were recorded in the areas surrounding the viaduct. The roost check on that evening was part of an International Roost count carried out at all locations in Europe holding red kites. On that same night at a second roost in the valley, in Chopwell Woods, near Victoria Garesfield, nine red kites were recorded dropping into conifers. This made the total number of communal roosting red kites recorded as being sixty-two, the highest ever number recorded for Gateshead. The Chopwell Woods roost consists mainly of juvenile birds, and has held up to twenty birds at times. It is the first time that a second roost has lasted throughout the winter. In previous years it had formed in the autumn but had broken up once the days shortened and the weather became colder.



It is not surprising that the second roost was sustained during the winter as it is unusual for red kites to have such high numbers at the main roost. The fledging of a record number of thirty-five chicks last summer would also have made a significant contribution to the kite population. Nineteen of these chicks were wing-tagged as nestlings; twelve of these have been identified at the pre-roost *gatherings*. The roost disperses during February as birds move back onto territory to start the breeding cycle all over again. At this time of year spectacular displays of red kites interacting in pairs can be seen, especially on warmer days, as they court their mates with speed chasing and talon grappling.

Health Walkers: Christmas Scarves and Gloves Competition Marian Williams



We held our annual festive competition again throughout December. The theme this year was Scarves and Gloves. We had a good selection of Christmas attire this year, with some innovative thought and effort being applied. But it was one of our long-standing regular walkers, Sylvia Fenwick, who was chosen as the winner with an unusual scarf, hat and gloves combination. Each week additional items were added, including bows, lights,

a snowman and robin. She was awarded her prize and trophy on a rather festive Monday in January, with snow and rain not putting off the hardy eleven people who still turned out for the walk. Many thanks to everyone who participated – it really brightened up our walks in December. We look forward to seeing all our regular walkers and any new ones out in 2015, which is Gateshead's "Year of Walking".



Health Walk Leader Refresher – Training **Jackey Lockwood Co-ordinator**

During 2014 two new volunteers have trained and joined our ranks of Health Walk Leaders. This year a seasoned Leader has also joined us bringing the total number of Leaders we have to eleven. Gateshead continues to oversee a programme of Health Walks across the Borough but Health Walks are now under the umbrella organisations of Ramblers and Macmillan.

This organisational change means that all existing Health Walk Leaders have to undergo a refresher training course. All nine of the existing Friends of Red Kites Health Walk Leaders attended at Saltwell Park training rooms on Wednesday 11th February. The course was delivered by Gateshead's co-ordinator, Andy Siddle, who made the day relevant and interesting for all of us. We passed the various challenges and are grateful for his time and effort.



The Health Walks continue to be popular and the number of walkers has increased consistently. The Walks take place every Monday afternoon in the Derwent Valley. The start point changes each month so there is plenty of variety. The details of the Walks are on our website. If you would like to join us for fresh air and exercise please do come along. There is always time to chat with fellow walkers and to enjoy the landscape and wildlife on our doorstep.

Our Befriend a Kite Scheme **Sylvia Jones**

Fiona Firefly is the latest chick to be named by a school in our 'Befriend a kite' scheme. The name was chosen by St. Patricks R.C. Primary School from Flint Hill, near Stanley.



Wing Tag F3, Fiona Firefly, was born in 2012 to very famous parents - Red Philip (WT15) and Swift (WT43). These red kites are often seen at the Kite Watches and both have colourful backgrounds. We hope that Fiona Firefly is seen in the Derwent valley this year. Befriend a kite is a very successful scheme. For further details check out our website. Go to Individual Kite Histories for their fascinating life stories: <http://www.friendsofredkites.org.uk/page13.htm>

Our Red Kite Mosaic is in the Highlands **June Atkinson**

Linda and David Livingstone, who live in Muir of Ord, north of Inverness, came last autumn to collect our Red Kite mosaic. They have followed the progress of our Flight of the Red Kite Exhibition and wish to use the mosaic kite in their schools and community, in order to raise the profile of these majestic birds. Although the Black Isle began its re-introduction of kites at the same time as was happening in the Chilterns, the Scottish Project has failed to a large degree and the area is now the most endangered for the Red Kites. By encouraging local people, the mosaic will carry a strong message and lead to greater awareness.



Presentations **Judy Summerson**

The "Red Kite Returns" presentation continues to be popular. Information is added regularly to reflect the behaviour of the kites, persecution, their influence on the local community and new activities to raise awareness. Since April 2014 the team have given 20 presentations which have all been well received. Bookings are being made for the remainder of 2015 and 2016. Please contact Judith.summerson@blueyonder.co.uk if you wish to book a talk.

Visit to Charlotte Straker Project, Corbridge **June Atkinson**



Kay Dibblin, one of our members, and I visited the Charlotte Straker Project in Corbridge, where we gave an afternoon programme of our On Red Kite Wings film, by Trai Anfield, featuring a music composition by Ian Fleming and selected poems, written by some of our members when Eric Nicholson organised a creative writing topic to celebrate our Double Anniversary Year in 2014. The residents were very receptive, enjoying this approach in film and word.

Watcher of the skies

Low shafts of rose-gold sunlight shine
across a hopeful morning moor,

The grasses and the heather tweed
enfold the huddled, hidden grouse.

The watcher of the skies takes heed
of the kite who sweeps into his ken.

He checks his bag, acknowledging
a passing walker with his dog.

He lays his bait and does not see
the wary fox who sniffs the breeze,
stills her boisterous cubs, peers out
from the safety of the trees.

The poisoned carrion is found

by furtive fox who goes to ground
to feed her hungry young;

by leaping dog who finds among
the tasselled grass, a tasty morsel;
by red kite who descends
with grace to seize his prize.

He retreats, the watcher of the skies;
rests easy in his cottage bed.

His moneyed masters will enjoy
their sport, the guns, that sense of power,
but when the evening comes, blood red,
the kite, the fox, the cubs, the dog,
are dead.

Alison Ringrose, Ponteland

This poem was inspired by an excerpt about Red Kites on Countryfile, the BBC programme.

Red Kite Word Search

G P Z Q C Q D U A B I Z P R F
I T H H U A E A N B M F E Z E
K U X D J W R E B Z E G K E A
N F O U D E S R G E N A D C T
K E J V A T Y I I E G I K M H
M A J E S T I C V O L A T A E
K W O T N B D A E G N H R C R
C B E Y P R C E Q R E U T O C
I Y P M A S W G Y R K P P K F
H Q E E B W I O M W O L L E Y
C R T A L O N A Y M G H D F W
M V B T E B L T B H S B I O E
R A O S F I O O B G T J X R B
H B X V Y H X G X J I I Y K N
A S H D Q A F B V L E T E P H

BEAK
FEATHER
GLIDE
NEST
TALON

CARRION
FORAGE
MAJESTIC
SCAVENGER
THERMAL

CHICK
FORK
MEW
SOAR
YELLOW



Kites do quarter the ground looking for carrion, their normal food, as well as searching for earthworms and beetles. All too often they fall prey to poisoned bait.



Here is the corpse of Wing Tag 10, Flash, adopted by a local school. Red Kites are a Schedule One Bird of Prey, protected by law, but need us to help and protect them. As the Spring Breeding Season approaches the kites need our support.

Flying Kites

Rowlands Gill Primary School moved into their brand new building in 2006. The Red Kite represents a symbol of Rowlands Gill Primary School. In 2004, our children participated in sponsoring two kites from the 'Northern Kites Project'. They were called Scarlet and Speedy! The children love hearing about how they are getting on as they are now both with the Yorkshire Red Kites. Scarlet has had at least sixteen chicks and Speedy is also doing well with his mate.



With the support of the PTA, we developed this marvellous wildlife garden. There is a huge structure of the flying Kite in the centre and a seat shaped like a Kite beside it. The children love sharing a story or doing activities in the wildlife garden. More recently, an artist, Clare Satow, funded by Gateshead Council, visited our Year 6 children to discuss designing a huge banner and giant mobiles of the flying Kite to decorate the balconies of SAGE Gateshead.

The children were eager to participate, sharing their designs and making the individual mobiles to show to the public. Each mobile varied in colour and texture. They produced a marvellous display at the SAGE ready for the choir concert, given by Amble First School. Members of the public were so impressed by the lovely kite mobiles they were wanting to buy one! The Kite Banner showed a wonderful flying Kite over the River Derwent. It is made out of acrylic paints and is three metres long! It is hanging, in prime position, at the entrance to our school.



All the children really enjoyed these activities and participating in the various events. They demonstrated their artistic skills and observational designs too. We are now waiting for our next Red Kite project!



22 November 2014 Year Six pupils receiving their new Banner from artist Clare Satow (left) and Miss Martin, Head.

Miss Hannah Martin Head Teacher

Friends of Red Kites wish to congratulate and thank Miss Martin, her Staff and the pupils of Rowlands Gill Primary School. They have indeed taken the Red Kites not only as a symbol for their school but to their hearts. We hope the children will join us in becoming Ambassadors for the majestic Red Kites which fly over their school each day.

We look forward to seeing Members at our next Evening on Monday, 16th March at The Red Kite at 7.00pm

Thanks to all those whose contributions and photographs have been included. June Atkinson February 2015

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