



# Friends of Red Kites

in the North East of England



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

## Winter Newsletter January 2013

Dear Friends,

### MEMBERSHIP Judy Summerson

Thank you for renewing your membership. Your interest and support for the red kites is much appreciated. We now have 277 members and it would be good to reach 300 again before the end of March. Just before Christmas we held an excellent recruitment session at Tesco in Rowlands Gill and enrolled 13 members. This will be repeated in the near future at Rowlands Gill and at Flight of the Kite events.

We need to keep raising awareness and encouraging people to join the Friends. Please tell your neighbours and ask them to join. There are membership forms on our website [www.friendsofredkites.org.uk](http://www.friendsofredkites.org.uk) and at Thornley Woodlands Centre.

### RED KITE REPORT WINTER ROOST Ken Sanderson, Kite Officer

I always get a thrill from seeing red kites coming into roost, whether it's a lone bird flying in late and diving straight into the deep cover of a conifer, or a "squadron" of up to forty of these majestic birds in the sky together, gliding effortlessly from the pre-roost to their final resting place for the night.



Image courtesy of Gerry Whitlow

This "show" takes place daily, just before dusk, in the Derwent Country Park and can be viewed from the Nine Arches Viaduct on the Derwent Walk and it never disappoints. Friends of Red Kite volunteers have attended several sessions over the last few months and those who have come have always gone away waxing lyrical about the kites.

It is very unusual for birds of prey to roost together in such high numbers, so why do red kites do it?

#### There are several possible reasons:

Red Kites are sociable birds and enjoy the company of other kites outside 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 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.

An increasing number of "foreign" kites are being attracted into the Gateshead roost. Juvenile kites from mid-Scotland, the Black Isle in northern Scotland, and the Cumbrian re-introduction programme have all been recorded recently. We already have a Scottish bird and a Yorkshire red kite in our breeding population. Red kite juveniles are still being wing tagged and this gives a visual identification which allows the birds' movements to be tracked. An example of this is the recording of wing tag F6 at the main roost following a period of rehabilitation after it had been found injured below the nest. Wing tagging has allowed Friends of Red Kites to track the movements of this juvenile following rehabilitation.



Image courtesy of Ken Sanderson

A record number of fifty-five kites roosted together on the evening of the 10th January 2013. Numbers had been gradually increasing from the twelve that first came together in mid-October. Approximately thirty kites have been identified at roost from wing tags during the winter period with a significant number of untagged adults and juveniles being noted. In February roost numbers will start to decline, especially in warmer weather, as mature kites move back onto their territories and young birds seek new territories.

## PRESENTATIONS AND EVENTS Sylvia Jones

The team have had a few bookings for our usual presentation, but we are now preparing a new presentation for the Flight of the Kite initiative. This will be available from March and many community groups may enjoy a second visit with this new presentation. Please contact Sylvia Jones if you are interested.



Image courtesy of David Jones

We are visiting three 'Living at Home' venues in Rowlands Gill during March. We really enjoy talking to these enthusiastic local residents who see the red kites daily.

Our members' evening was a huge success. Fifty-two of us enjoyed a very nice two-course meal at the recently re-named Red Kite pub at Winlaton Mill. It was a pleasant evening, socialising with old and new friends. Thank you to those who attended and the staff for looking after us so well.



Image courtesy of Austin Dunphy

We have a number of new events planned so please check the website and e-mails.

**Happy New Year** wishes from the Presentations Team: Sylvia Jones, Judy Summerson and Harold Dobson.

## PRESS AND PUBLICITY June Atkinson

Again, we thank all those who offer us support in the media, on-line and via our website. Much more information will be put into the public domain as our plans for the Flight of the Kite Heritage Exhibition take final shape. We are contributing to Festival North East in June, when our exhibition will be at South Shields Museum and Art Gallery. All the details will be available on our website [www.friendsofredkites.org.uk](http://www.friendsofredkites.org.uk) in due course.

## THE RED KITE HAS TAKEN FLIGHT!

Harold Dobson

As mentioned in the Autumn newsletter, the Heritage Lottery-funded "Flight of the Kite Project" has taken off with the 150 tile giant red kite mosaic touring fourteen heritage sites in the region, assembled by FoRK volunteers and having its photograph taken by a professional photographer, Kaleel Zibe.



Image courtesy of David Jones

The suite of images will be displayed in a Heritage Exhibition which is touring the region this year. The exhibition is to have its official launch at Gateshead Civic Centre on Monday 11<sup>th</sup> March. The exhibition will remain at the Civic Centre for the rest of the month and then half will be moved to Blackhall Mill Community Centre and half to Whickham Library during April. The exhibition will be on the move throughout the remainder of the year and details of its location will be given in the Flight of the Kite section of our website.

A "Flight of the Kite" presentation is being created to be shown at the exhibitions and also as a supplement to the "The Return of the Kite" presentation which is used in our talks to community groups.

## HEALTH WALKS IN THE DERWENT VALLEY Jackey Lockwood Health Walks Co-ordinator

During 2012 we enjoyed another varied and interesting programme of Health Walks in the Derwent Valley. The average number of walkers has risen slightly from last year from 25 to 27 people out each week enjoying the fresh air, exercise, countryside and the company of others.



Images courtesy of Harold Dobson

Each month the venue of the walk changes, but there are four particularly popular locations. The most southerly of these is a linear walk which starts and ends at Stirling Lane car park in Rowlands Gill and goes along the Co. Durham section of the Derwent Walk. Two other walks start from Winlaton Mill car park.



One of these routes goes through Derwenthaugh Park to the Nine Arches Viaduct and returns by Clockburn Lake. The other route goes through the Park to Swalwell and returns along Gateshead's section of the Derwent Walk. The most northerly of the walks is another circular route from Sands Road car park in Swalwell to the confluence of the River Derwent with the River Tyne and back.

We are fortunate to have such accessible and varied countryside nearby. During the course of the year we have observed a wide range of wildlife. The tidal sections of the rivers in winter held a variety of waders, ducks and gulls feeding and resting. In most months along the River Derwent we have had sightings of cormorants, herons, goosander, dipper and grey wagtail.

The grassland meadows had a colourful variety of flowers from spring onwards. In the woodland areas we heard the singing of summer migrant birds such as chiffchaff, willow warbler and blackcap as well as our own resident birds. Autumn brought stunning displays of changing leaf colour. Even in more recent wet, icy conditions some hardy walkers have been out and enjoyed sightings of deer and wintering birds. Virtually every week, whatever the season, we have had sightings of red kites as they fly or perch in clear view in their home range. Kestrel and buzzard are also regularly seen.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the volunteer Health Walk Leaders who contribute so much to the running and enjoyment of the walks, and to the walkers themselves for their continued interest and enthusiasm. A group of twenty-two walkers recently enjoyed a meal together at the Red Kite Pub, where the Manager made the evening enjoyable with a good selection of food on the menu.



The Health Walks start at 1.30 pm every Monday. Each walk is about 3 miles in length and finishes at approximately 3 pm. There is an option of a refreshment stop nearby. New walkers are always welcome. All the details are on the Health Walks page on our website [www.friendsofredkites.org.uk](http://www.friendsofredkites.org.uk). If you would like to join us, the starting point for February is Sands Road car park in Swalwell, and for March and April the start point is Winlaton Mill car park. Hopefully we will see you out and about in 2013.

### **NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY OF NORTHUMBRIA VISITS NINE ARCHES VIADUCT TO SEE KITES AT ROOST**

Snow and icy conditions failed to chill the enthusiasm for seeing our kites of 17 hardy members of the Natural History Society of Northumbria. They attended a visit on January 20<sup>th</sup> led by members of FoRK's Thursday monitoring team of Tim, Ian, Anna and Alan. The kites, as usual, put on an impressive pre-roosting flying display.



Despite several inches of snow underfoot and threatening grey skies above threatening still more, it turned out to be a very successful event. It started well with two kites obligingly circling very low over the Winlaton Mill car park as our visitors gathered. Then at the main watch-point, Nine Arches Viaduct, they were treated to around 20 kites spiralling overhead. As they dropped lower and came closer they were able to pick out their rich colouring against the dark backdrop of the trees. Team members then set up telescopes to give them close-up views of perching birds and answered many questions about their life-styles.

Variety was added by a Buzzard joining the spiral which gave the party the chance to compare the two species side by side. Other species during the visit included a Goosander flying downstream, a distant party of Greylags and Cormorants.

The event was arranged by Tim Watson after an approach from the society. Our visitors were escorted back to Winlaton Mill at dusk, all clutching FoRK membership forms so we may be seeing much more of them in the future!

Account : courtesy of Ian Kerr Image: courtesy of Anna Newsom

### **THE RED KITE GOES RACING!! Harold Dobson**

Friends of Red Kites have again agreed to sponsor the Red Kite Racing Team (Seniors) from Emmanuel College, Gateshead. The Team is participating in the "Formula 1 (F1) in Schools" international competition in which groups of children (aged 11-18) have to design and manufacture a miniature "car" out of balsa wood using CAD/CAM design tools. The cars are powered by a CO<sup>2</sup> cartridge and attached to a track by a thin wire. They are timed, by computer, from launch to passing a finishing line 24 metres away. In addition to the time trials, the teams are judged on the engineering and design of their car, a portfolio and a verbal presentation.

Emily Miller, Team Marketing and Sponsorship Co-ordinator, says: "This year we are going for an ambitious design in producing the front and rear of the car out of plastic and keeping the central body as balsa wood. The FoRK sponsorship will go towards the production of the 3D plastic". The regional F1 in Schools competition will be held at the Business School, Newcastle University on Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> February. We can follow the Team's endeavours on their website: <http://redkiteracing.webs.com>

**COMING HOME TO ROOST - LIVING WITH KITES.**

In 2002 I worked with colleagues to plan the re-introduction of red kites to the North East. I wanted this re-introduction to be different, not simply a biodiversity project. What better place to re-introduce kites than the Derwent Valley, rich in habitat with strong communities where people and kites could interact. As a resident of Rowlands Gill, wouldn't it be great to have kites at my own back door? But what unfolded went beyond my wildest dreams.

Between 2004 and 2006 94 kites were released. We had tantalising glimpses of what the future offered. We would open the curtains in the morning and see kites circling, lie in the bath and hear them whistling! Occasional birds would visit, stealing food from the bird table meant for smaller relatives.

The formal project concluded, kites continued. In 2009, Broady Whipper (77) and Welbeck Whistler (60) were garden regulars, nesting nearby. Alas they did not return in 2010. In 2011, Broady Whipper, alone, took up residence. He would wake us up, whistling from a large oak tree in the garden. We would come home from work and he would greet us with more whistling. Sadly he seemed to be on his own. He has been ever present since then, seemingly oblivious to our gardening! He interacts incessantly with other kites as they fly over; occasionally others will join him, most recently an untagged bird, but he doesn't seem to have a permanent friend.



Hey, 'kitey boy', flying past my window as I type, so familiar now but forever special. Hope you find a friend this year.

Account and photograph of Wing Tag 77, Broady Whipper: courtesy of John Barrett, Rowlands Gill

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