



# Friends of Red Kites

in the North East of England

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



Newsletter Issue 05 May 2010

Dear Friends,

## Membership (Judy Summerson)

Our current membership is 246. Word of mouth is without a doubt the best way to encourage folks to join, so please chat to your friends and persuade them to support these magnificent birds of prey in the north-east UK .

## Current News of our Red Kites (Ken Sanderson)

Despite the cold weather in February red kites, like most birds of prey, began displaying and defending their territories. Non breeding kites and maturing juveniles will have paired up in the winter roost and "moved out" to forge territories of their own. In March, which was only marginally warmer, male kites were busy refurbishing or building new nests ready for the female to lay her eggs and start incubating in April.

Our FoRK monitoring teams have spent a significant amount of time locating these territories and nests. In all, over thirty territories have been identified and well over half of them are "active" nests . What is interesting is that four of these nests are in residential gardens, the kites not seeming to mind routine human activity. What a fantastic experience for those people lucky enough to have these magnificent birds of prey setting up home next to theirs.

The monitoring team would like to thank all those people who have reported sightings of kites engaged in breeding activity; from these observations we were able to confirm many territories and actually locate three nests.

During incubation, kite activity is fairly low and nest finding becomes more difficult, but fieldworkers will not have much time to rest on their laurels. Red kite chicks will be hatching soon, giving more opportunities to locate nests when first one parent brings food to the nest and then, when the chicks don't need brooding as much, both parents will forage. If May and June are reasonably warm and dry we can expect a very good number of red kite fledglings. Our thanks to Alan Mould, who drew this very apt and amusing cartoon especially for us !

## **FREE** Health Walks (Allan Withrington)

Every Monday 1.30pm start.

May 3rd, 10th, 17th, 24th and 31st

**Stirling Lane car park, Rowlands Gill**

June 7<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup>

**Winlaton Mill Car Park, Derwenthaugh Park**

July 5<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, and 26<sup>th</sup>

**B&Q Car Park, Swalwell**

August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup>, 23<sup>rd</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup>

**Vale of Derwent Car Park**

All enquiries and further information phone 07790 085659



## It's a mucky job, but somebody has to do it, by Ken Sanderson

Think of red kite conservation work and it conjures up images of these majestic birds being monitored in the beautiful Derwent Valley, or of the delivery of community presentations, at which the public are made aware of the need to treasure our heritage. Not so for a team of eight volunteers who found out it's not all glamour and glitz when they donned overalls, gloves, masks and goggles, and set about cleaning and disinfecting the pens used to rehabilitate injured or displaced red kites.

The task took place in March at the Northumberland Water Treatment Works in Lochhaugh, Rowlands Gill.



The pens were built in 2004 and were used to house juvenile kites from the Chilterns before their release into the wild. Allan Withrington and Ken Sanderson of the Friends of Red Kites were joined by volunteers from the Gibside landscape team, led by Helen McDonald, Gibside Assistant Landscape Manager. Two of the four pens had been occupied by injured kites over the autumn and winter and these proved harder to clean because they contained the rotting remains of carrion which had been fed to the kites to aid their recovery. After much scrubbing and spraying the pens were deemed fit for use and the group then set about repairing the chicken wire around the base of the pens outside to prevent entry by burrowing predators.

Many thanks to the Gibside volunteers for helping us out on what wasn't the most pleasant of jobs but they assured us that they had carried out far worse tasks than this.

### Presentations and Events (Sylvia Jones and Judy Summerson)

March was a busy month with seven events, two walks and an evening event. We have achieved 2000 people attending events in our first year. We are meeting a wide variety of community groups and enjoying some memorable occasions. Guisborough and Saltburn U3A had some difficulty finding The Black horse at Barlow but then enjoyed coffee with scones, an excellent walk with abundant wildlife and finished their day with afternoon tea at Gibside.



The Red kite evening event at Chaplins was a huge success. 63 members attended and enjoyed a short update about our financial status, membership and events. Ken gave current bird information and organised a quiz while every one savoured the delights of a Chaplin's buffet.

In April we visited the Ladies of Ponteland group, gave the Red Kites Return Presentation and donated our fee to the RNLI. We received a delightful thank-you letter and best wishes for our future work with the Red Kites.



The CAMEO club (come and meet each other) is a Christian group in Houghton-le-Spring, where elderly people are welcomed every Tuesday. They enjoy coffee, classes, lunch and a speaker. 97 local residents enjoyed our presentation and their warmth and appreciation was exceptional.

We have four Presentations in May. Our sincere thanks to everyone who has made our Events so successful. Here, Sylvia Jones is about to begin a Presentation. Photo courtesy of David Jones.



## Malcolm Beard introduced his ROBOKITE on 'The One Show'



I live in Newbury and normally work in Didcot. So over the last few years I have seen a rapid increase in the Red Kite population, with birds spreading out along the Berkshire Downs as a consequence of the Chilton's breeding program.

The idea of building a radio-controlled Red Kite came about after getting 'visits' from curious birds whilst flying various other radio-controlled models and helicopters. They would normally take up station above the model, check it out for a few moments and then head on their way. As I often use models to carry cameras for aerial photography, this got to be quite frustrating, as the birds were never in the right place for long enough to get some good air-to-air shots. I decided that if I could build a model that looked sufficiently like a Red Kite, their curiosity might give me a better chance.



Robokite takes to the skies



A curious red kite takes a closer look



A red kite confidently tailing Robokite

I found enough information to base a model on. As I wanted it to be able to carry the weight of some camera gear, I chose to build something around the maximum size that they can grow to. In retrospect the fact that the female birds tend to be larger turned out to be a useful bonus in attracting the attention of the male birds!

I based the model on the shape of a thermalling Red Kite i.e. wings outstretched, but chose not to add any additional vertical flying surfaces ('fins') that you normally find on aircraft to give yaw stability. Instead I thought I would copy the characteristic twisting tail that is such a feature of Red Kites' flight. I wanted to be able to fly the model from flat fields as well as from hill sides, so a small electric motor was built into the bird's head. When flown as a pure glider, the propeller can be removed and a beak fitted in its place. Provision was made for mounting a small camera on top of the body, looking backwards and slightly up, as that is from where I expected the Kites to approach.

With the model looking and flying right, I took it to Didcot to see how the local Kite population would react. There is a large concentration of them in this area, as there is a rubbish tip behind the power station that provides a ready source of food. I flew the model from an adjacent field and could not believe the response. Within a minute of getting the model in the air, it was surrounded by Red Kites. On that first flight there were at least a dozen birds that headed straight over to it. The best bit was that they didn't just take a look and head off again, but followed wherever I flew. It seemed like they were genuinely intrigued by this new Kite in town and were flying up to almost touching distance to check it out. They seemed to be vying with each other to see who could get the closest!

I have been flying this model for about a year and a half now. It has been flown in lots of locations in Berkshire, Oxfordshire and Wiltshire. If there are Red Kites nearby, they will almost always come and have a look and fly in formation for a while. They are never aggressive, but it is not unknown for the smaller (male birds, I think) to be pretty persistent and to show off their flying skills with some radical manoeuvres to impress the newcomer. Of course they could just be playing up to the camera; it has got them on the BBC's 'One Show' after all!

### **Malcolm Beard**

Here's a link to a video clip :- [www.highvizphotography.co.uk/media/kitesair2air2.wmv](http://www.highvizphotography.co.uk/media/kitesair2air2.wmv)

- and a slideshow made from a series of stills:- [www.highvizphotography.co.uk/media/kiteslides.exe](http://www.highvizphotography.co.uk/media/kiteslides.exe)

**We are very grateful to Malcolm Beard for giving us an exclusive report on his Robokite.**

## Forthcoming Events

### Red Kite Watching in the Derwent Valley

This will run every Sunday throughout June and July from 11a.m. until 3p.m. at Kite Hill, shown in the map below.

Thank you to everyone for responding so quickly and positively to our requests for help. If you have offered to help with **Kitewatch** the training session is on **23<sup>rd</sup> May** from 10.00 -12.00 at **Thornley Woodlands Centre**

The '**Creation of the Red Kite**' is still being considered and you will receive information once we have the 'go ahead'.

It's not too late to offer your services. Just e-mail [Judith.summerson@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:Judith.summerson@blueyonder.co.uk) or leave a message on 07811927330.



Compilation: June Atkinson

## Annual General Meeting

This will be held on Wednesday, 30th June at Chaplin's, Winlaton Mill 6.30pm reception, followed by the Business Meeting at 7 o'clock then a Buffet and a Red Kite Beetle Drive! More details and the Agenda will be sent in due course.

### Contact details for Committee

Chairman  
Membership Secretary  
Secretary  
Treasurer  
Events and Presentations  
Health Walks  
Design & Graphics  
Press & Publicity; Editor

Mr. Ken Sanderson  
Mrs. Judy Summerson  
Mr. Allan Withrington  
Mr. David Jones  
Mrs. Sylvia Jones  
Mrs. J. Lockwood  
Mrs. Karen Malone  
Mrs. June Atkinson

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Keep up-to-date by visiting our Website: [www.friendsofredkites.org.uk](http://www.friendsofredkites.org.uk)

We are extremely grateful to everyone who has kindly reported sightings or given information. If you have any photographs which you would like to share with us, please send them via our website or to [june.atkinson@virgin.net](mailto:june.atkinson@virgin.net)