



## Newsletter, Spring 2019

### Late winter roosting kites – Ken Sanderson

In the last issue of this Newsletter it was reported that, after what appeared to be a normal start to the winter roost season, things did not go so well after that with regard to roosting kite numbers: kites did not settle in any particular roosting location, moving about from one site to another and total numbers were down on previous years as the winter progressed. Several areas which could, potentially, hold roosting kites were surveyed without success; ruling out the possibility that they were using roost sites that we did not know about. So, were birds staying on territory? Or is it that there are not the number of birds about as there used to be?

It was hoped that a comprehensive roost count on 6<sup>th</sup> January, which contributed to the National Roost Count, would provide some explanation as to what was happening. On that evening seventeen members of the FoRK monitoring team covered all known locations which were known to hold roosting kites during the season.

Disappointingly, only forty-four kites were counted on the night, despite excellent coverage. This compared with fifty-seven last year and sixty-six in 2017. Thanks must go to Paul Danielson, Assistant Kite Monitoring Officer, for organising this event.

On the 20<sup>th</sup> January members of our Thursday team, headed by Tim Watson, hosted a Natural History Society of Northumbria roost-watch from the Nine Arches Viaduct. The watch was severely affected by a noisy helicopter searching close by and the 25 members who turned out, not surprisingly, only saw seven red kites, but they did get reasonably good views. Other counts over Gibside during the month were circa twenty to twenty-five, which was fairly typical for this location.

The fine weather over the last few weeks has brought about a lot of kite activity and pairs are now back on territory with twenty-three territories having already been confirmed in what are early days.

.... but the questions remain unanswered !!



## **Health Walks – Jackey Lockwood**

The Health Walks were well attended throughout 2018. The average attendance was 37 walkers. We met each Monday afternoon for a 3-mile walk in the Derwent Valley or at nearby Watergate Park. As usual, the walking route was changed each month which gave a variety of landscapes and habitats.



Some of the most popular routes are in Gateshead's section of the Derwent Valley. On these walks we had close views of the River Derwent from the multi-user path in Derwenthaugh Park and of Clockburn Lake. Wildlife sightings included dipper, wagtails, goosander, kingfisher, swans and deer as well as red kites and buzzard. The sections along the Derwent Walk and on the water meadow gave us views of very different flora and fauna which were enjoyed by the walkers.

During December the walk was along the Lower Derwent and included a section of the River Tyne. On our last walk of the year the walkers enjoyed singing Carols at the FACT (Fighting Against Cancer Together) building. Many thanks to them and to Kevin, one of our walkers, who did the organising and provided the musical accompaniment. Thanks also go to one of our Leaders, Glenn, who organised the two regular, additional walks at the coast (High Newton to Craster/Cullernose Point and Whitburn to Tynemouth) and to Sue who organised a meal and social evening for the Red Kite Health Walkers.

Once again, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of our trained Health Walk Leaders without whom these walks would not happen, and the walkers themselves whose enthusiasm keeps us all going! There are always 3 nominated Leaders so the pace can be varied if necessary. January 2019 has got off to a good start with plenty of new walkers, as well as the regular ones, getting out to enjoy the fresh air and exercise.

## **A Date for your Diary – Harold Dobson**

As part of our 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations we are planning to offer an "enhanced" Red Kite Family Fun Day at Gibside on Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> July (10.00 – 4.00). In addition to our tombola stall, there will be the Red Kite bus, kindly provided by Go North East, and their entertainments team who will undertake face-painting and bubbleology. Plus, we plan to lay out our 150-tile red kite mosaic on the Avenue [The mosaic toured various landmarks as part of the "Flight of the Kite" initiative when we were five].

Finally, the National Trust has kindly agreed **free** entry to any Friends of Red Kite member upon the production of a FoRK membership card. [Don't worry if you've lost/mislaid your membership card as we'll provide Visitor Reception with a list of all our members]

## **Presentations to Raise Awareness – Judy Summerson**

Raising awareness of our magnificent birds is arguably the most important task for members of the Friends of Red Kites.

Currently we do this by organising health walks where walkers can observe and learn about the birds, kite roostwatch events in the winter, when the kites are forming a pre-roost, fun days, members evenings, special events such as our tenth anniversary this year, talking to relations and friends and anyone we meet, and giving presentations.

Harold and I share the presentations between us. The 40-minute powerpoint-assisted talk called "*The Red Kite Returns*" chronicles the fascinating story of the re-introduction of the red kite in the north-east after an absence of 170 years. It includes the history & annual natural history of this magnificent bird of prey and outlines the work done by FoRK to conserve the red kites.



We ask for a donation of £25.00 and travelling expenses. If the audience is in excess of 25 then the cost will increase on a £1.00 a head basis, capped at £50. Cheques should be made payable to "Friends of Red Kites".

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