



Northumberland & Tyneside  
Bird Club

Registered Charity No 517641

This is a short report by Ian Kerr and Ken Sanderson (FoRK)

# North East Red Kite Breeding Report 2015

## **NORTH EAST RED KITES FACE ANOTHER DIFFICULT YEAR.**

By Ian Kerr

A brood of four young, the region's first since breeding recommenced in 2006 after a gap of around 170 years, was the highlight of an otherwise poor season for our local Red Kite population.

The four fledged from a regular breeding site in the Derwent Valley, a very welcome bright spots in another very difficult year which saw alarmingly high failure rates and three more birds killed by illegal poisoning.

During the season there were 13 successful nests which fledged around 26 chicks, a very much poorer outcome than 2014 when 20 pairs produced around 35 young to the flying stage, raising hopes that at last the local population was beginning a healthy expansion. Disappointingly, once again in 2015 there were no known breeding attempts in Northumberland.

Monitoring by Friends of Red Kites (FoRK) showed that during the 2015 season birds were widespread in early spring before settling down to breed. Pairs or single birds were reported in around 45 potential breeding areas.

A total of 26 nests were known to have been built or re-furbished and 22 pairs went on to produce eggs. Lone males appeared to be present at two of these nests and both failed to attract females.

From the 22 pairs which laid eggs, only 13 were eventually successful in fledging chicks, a very high failure rate. Nationally, the normal failure rate for Red Kite nests is around 20%. The North East figures proved very much worse at almost 50%.

Cold conditions in April when birds were incubating or hatching young may have played some part in these failures. Two of the failed nests were thought to have suffered human disturbance and others were predated. Another nest only a few yards southwards of the Northumberland county boundary failed when two chicks were blown to their deaths during high winds.

The poisonings, which received widespread publicity and condemnation, may also have affected the final results. One of the dead birds was a female from a site which has produced young during the previous four seasons. Her regular mate remained at the site but failed to attract a replacement female.

The poisonings brought the total of Red Kites confirmed to have been deliberately killed to ten. One young bird was killed on a north Durham grouse moor by Carbofuran. This chemical has been illegal in Britain since 2002 but still appears to be the poison of choice for people targeting raptors and other species.

Even more alarming, the two other victims were found at High Spen in the core breeding area. This suggested that birds are not just at risk in the usual raptor poisoning blackspots around game-shooting estates. They were killed by a legal pesticide which has been discovered being unlawfully used in poison baits elsewhere in Britain.

Despite these problems, there was evidence of birds moving out of the core Derwent Valley and colonising new areas of County Durham. The discovery of newly-fledged young (two at one site and a single at another) gives some hope for the future. In another area of Durham a new nest was discovered but appeared to be occupied by an unmated male.

FoRK is planning two co-ordinated roost counts this winter, covering all likely areas where kites could be spending the nights, as part of its on-going monitoring programme. This could help to provide further data on the total size of the kite population in the region.

2015 Results at a Glance (2014 figs in brackets)

- 45c possible territories (31)
- 26 nests built or refurbished (25)
- 22 incubating pairs (25)
- 13 successful nests (20) fledging 26 young (35c)
- 9 nest failures (5)





