

Red Kites in East Powys

Welsh Kite Trust 2016

Area Monitored

The area bounded by the A488 road from Knighton to Penybont, the A44 to Crossgates, the A483 to Newtown (plus the hillsides to the west in the Ithon catchment), the A489 through Kerry to the Shropshire border, and the Wales / England border back to Knighton, was monitored for 11 years, 2003-13 inclusive.

Following a change in monitoring policy by the Welsh Kite Trust, from 2014 the monitoring area was restricted to south of the Kerry Ridgeway and the top of the Ithon catchment, as no Kites had been found in the northern part of the area in previous years. The area now monitored is around 360 square kilometres.

Methodology

The initial search effort has been broadly constant over all these years, consisting of 4 days initial searching for new pairs in late March and early April, followed by 4 more days of looking for new and established pairs in mid-April. After that, occupied sites and every site occupied in the previous 3 years was checked, to confirm whether or not birds were sitting.

Up until 2013, each nest found was checked for young in early June. The time commitment for this second stage has increased, as the number of nests has grown. Some nests with young were then revisited for tagging, and between 2008 and 2011 also for taking chicks for the Irish reintroduction programme. The commitment for revisiting declined from 2013, as tagging Welsh Kites largely ceased, and then finished altogether in 2015. The last visit to each nest has been delayed until late mid-June, when the chicks are almost fully grown and there is a better chance of assessing the number of young in the nest.

Results in 2016

In 2016, a total of 25 nests was found, the highest number since monitoring began, and four more than 2015, the previous highest. Seven further pairs were seen, but no nest was located (total 32 pairs, again the highest number found in the area, and two more than in 2015, again the previous highest).

A further 33 sites where Kites have nested in previous years were visited or observed from a distance, without result.

Eleven of the nests failed. The 14 successful nests produced at least 18 fledged young.

Comparison with previous years

The population growth found in 2014 and 2015, which followed two particularly poor breeding seasons in 2012 and 2013, has continued, and 2016 was the most successful season to date in terms of pairs and nests found.

However, 11 of the 25 nests failed, and the number of young / nest found (0.7) and young / successful nest (1.3) were both the equal second lowest productivity ratios since monitoring started, and were, not surprisingly, well below the average since 2003. Wales was wet and windy at the start of May, and had the wettest June on record, so the high failure rate and low productivity were probably weather-related.

The 14 successful nests produced at least 18 young, but the number of young in some nests might have been underestimated, as they could not be seen from higher up the slope, and were therefore viewed from the ground using a telescope, sometimes with an incomplete view. The count at many nests has been more accurate in previous years, when the tree was climbed for tagging the chicks. The same assumption has been made as in previous years – i.e. birds big enough to tag went on to fledge

Cumulative totals of the number of pairs and nests found since monitoring in this area started in 2003, and their outcomes and productivity, are shown in the Tables.

Table 1. Pairs, nests and outcomes 2003-16

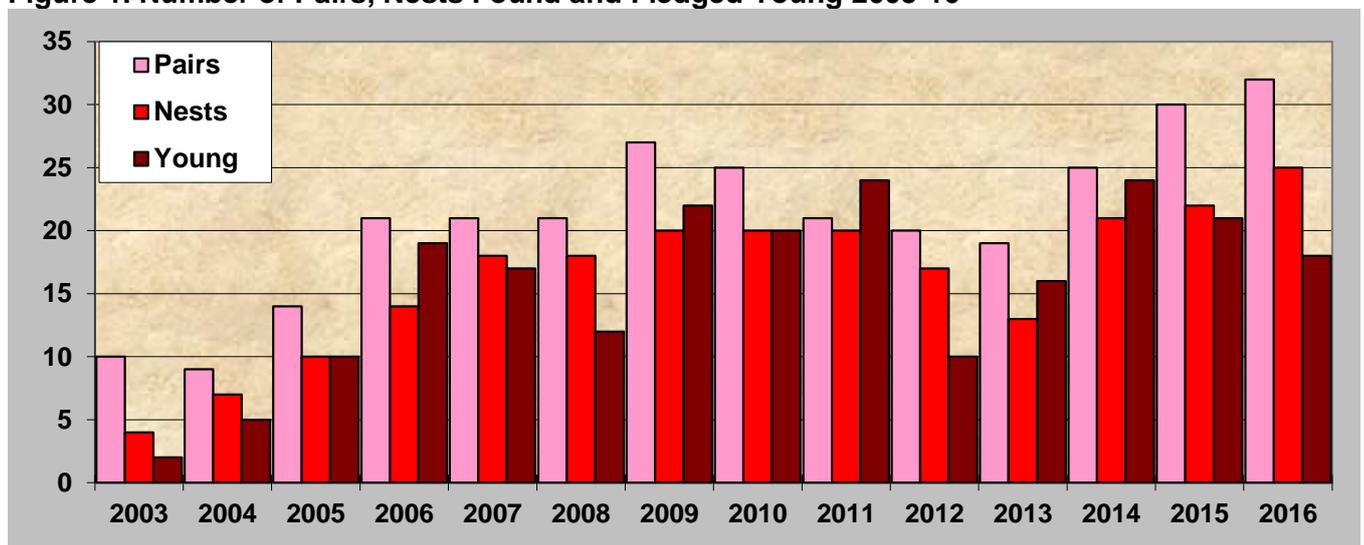
Nests & Outcome	Year														Total
	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	
Pairs Found	10	9	14	21	21	21	26	25	21	20	19	25	30	32	294
Nests Found	3	5	8	14	18	18	20	20	20	18	15	21	22	25	227
Successful Nests	1	4	5	12	13	11	15	14	16	8	12	17	15	14	157
Nestlings Tagged	1	4	3	13	13	10	12	9	12	10	13	2	0	0	102
Nestlings to Ireland							1	6	1	6	Re-introduction programme complete				14
Fledged Young	2	5	10	19	19	12	16	19	6	10	16	24	21	18	197
Total Young	2	5	10	19	19	13	22	20	24	10	16	24	21	18	223

Table 2. Productivity 2003-16

Productivity (East Powys)	Year														Total
	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	
Young / nest	0.7	1.0	1.3	1.4	1.1	0.7	1.1	1.0	1.2	0.6	1.1	1.1	1.0	0.7	0.98
Young / successful nest	2.0	1.3	2.0	1.6	1.5	1.2	1.5	1.4	1.5	1.3	1.3	1.4	1.4	1.3	1.42

Some of the same data is presented graphically in Figure 1

Figure 1. Number of Pairs, Nests Found and Fledged Young 2003-16



Seven of the found nests were at new sites, five other pairs used the same nest as last year, and four others were at the same site as last year, but changed nest trees. Apart from the seven sites occupied in 2015 for the first time, four others have been occupied from 2010 or later. Although 11 sites were first occupied before 2010, only three have been continuously occupied since they were first found.

Wing tagging

No young were tagged in the area. None were tagged in 2015 either, for the first time since 2003, and the total still stands at 102.

All breeding Kites were inspected for tags, but only three were found.

- i. Blue H3, the male at Upper Pentre, has been there since 2012 and came from near Dolau, 3.1 km distant.
- ii. Blue 15 was found for the first time at a nest near Monaughty. She fledged from a Shropshire nest near Knighton in 2010, six kilometres to the north. It is likely that a six-year-old has been breeding in the area for several years. A pair was seen displaying nearby in April 2013, which may have been the first year she bred, but no nest was found that year.
- iii. A male with a red/yellow tag was seen at a nest near Cantal, but the tag was not read. The nest failed.

A Kite with an unread yellow tag was also seen near Llanbister Road, but not at a nest site. In 2015, three yellow (2013) tagged birds were seen: one (unread) on a male, part of a pair that nested nearby that laid very late and failed early, and two near Heartsease, about 4 kilometres from Llanbister Road, Yellow 29 and Yellow 30, both of which were within 2km of their natal site.

In total 20 different tags have been read on nesting Kites since 2004, 11 males and 9 females. The males have moved an average of 17 kms, and the females an average of 11 kms. The most interesting have been:

- i. Female white J, tagged near Strata Florida in 2002, was found breeding at four different sites in the area all about 36 kms from her natal site. She was first found in 2005 and then, after a gap, every year from 2008 to 2013, when she was last seen aged 11.
- ii. Male Orange [therefore sign], from near Bwlch - y Sarnau in 2005, was seen at a nest near the source of the Ithon, 3.5 km distant, in 2011 and 2013, when he was aged eight.
- iii. Two others, Blue H3 and Blue 15, have reached six years old, another reached five years old, but none of the others reached that age.
- iv. Siblings Purple 73 and 74, from Bryn Golfa in 2007, were found breeding together for three years running (2009-11) at two separate sites, 4 and 5 kms from their natal site.

Conclusion

In terms of pairs found and nests found, 2016 was the most productive year since monitoring started in 2003.

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