



Boda Wennol

Cylchlythyr Ymddiriedolaeth Barcudiaid Cymru
The Newsletter of the Welsh Kite Trust

The Welsh Kite Trust back in Action!** Kite monitoring in 2016 ** What's happening to our Kestrels? ** New WKT Website ** WKT Plans for 2017

WKT BACK IN ACTION!

Welcome to the 29th issue of **Boda Wennol**. This issue resumes after a two year gap during which time the Trust has been busy working behind the scenes to face a number of challenges that are common to many small charities today. Ever increasing admin costs have meant that we have had to move towards a stronger online presence and a new website has been built. The fact that our main species is no longer seen as being rare and vulnerable by many, has also led to a reduced income. This last factor can be seen in a very positive light in that the current status of the kite is testament to the success of the trust which has overseen a kite population increase from 100 pairs to an estimated minimum of 2000 pairs, not to mention two reintroduction programmes using Welsh-born red kites in Ireland. This tremendous success was only made possible by the combined conservation efforts of

many dedicated wildlife enthusiasts, farmers and scientists all working together. Solid and reliable scientific research has informed the conservation process and throughout it has been dependent on voluntary time and financial donations from the friends and supporters of the Welsh Kite Trust. Please accept our grateful thanks to all who have supported the trust in any way. It has turned into one of the most successful conservation stories in recent times.

A VICTIM OF OUR SUCCESS

It could perhaps be reasoned that the primary reason for the Welsh Kite Trust's existence has now disappeared; after all, many of us who live in Wales now encounter kites more often than any other species of bird of prey, and red kite has recently been elevated from amber to green in the list of Birds of Conservation Concern, Wales (2016). Whilst this is good news, the red kite still has a very restricted range in world terms and is confined to selected parts

of western Europe. Within this region the situation is not universally rosy and in some areas, populations are known to be declining; Spain and southern France have seen worrying population declines in recent years. This means that the steadily increasing Welsh population is becoming more and more significant at an international level. On top of this, WKT has been systematically monitoring nests over a considerable period, and the resulting long-term data set becomes increasingly valuable as time goes on. No one knows the potential threats that kites may have to face in the future. For instance, we know they are very vulnerable to poisoning, and there is constant pressure to develop new rodenticides that are ever more lethal as rodents become resistant to existing poisons. It is only when populations are well-monitored that early detection of any changes is possible, alerting us to take action promptly.

KEEP UP THE GOOD WORK

After much discussion the WKT trustees agreed that the reasons to continue are still as valid as ever, but to do so, administration costs would have to be cut to an absolute minimum with as much correspondence as possible carried out online, to save postage and printing costs. A new website would have to be built and managed using voluntary time with a new domain name, and any day to day admin would need to be achieved using volunteer effort. The money saved could then be used to continue to fund the high quality research projects and long-term monitoring programmes that have been the cornerstone of our conservation success in the past.



A very familiar sight nowadays
Photo: Tony Cross

Kite Monitoring in 2016

TABLE 1: Red Kite Nest Monitoring in 2016	Nests monitored	Successful nests	Chicks Fledged	Productivity per Nest	Productivity per Successful Pair
Brecon/Carms	119	72 (61%)	89	0.7	1.2
East Powys	25	14 (56%)	18	0.7	1.3
Pembrokeshire	8	4 (50%)	6	0.8	1.5
Shropshire	23	18 (78%)	31	1.3	1.7
Total	175	108 (62%)	144	0.8	1.3

The monitoring results are currently available for 175 kite nests, a total which includes 23 nests from sites in Shropshire, an area into which the indigenous Welsh kite population has expanded since 2005. In all, 108 of the 175 nests (62%) were successful and 144 young birds fledged giving an average productivity figure of 0.8 chicks per breeding attempt. Most of the individual areas within Wales show a very similar figure for productivity (0.7 to 0.8), but it is noticeably higher in Shropshire (1.3). This is a typical pattern that

is seen in many years and the differences are most likely explained by the slightly drier climate reducing weather-related nest failures. Productivity per successful nest, at 1.7, is also higher than in any of the Welsh areas. This may indicate that there is a greater food resource available per pair due to a lower density of pairs near the edge of the range. In which case further colonisation can be expected. It will be interesting to see if productivity per successful pair decreases over time as the density of pairs in-

creases.

It is worth pointing out that the lower productivity of Welsh pairs is not an issue of concern. Even 0.8 chicks per nesting attempt is sufficient to double the population every six years! As the density of kites increases, productivity will inevitably fall due to greater competition for food resources. Eventually, once the kite population has fully recovered, it should stabilise at around 0.4 to 0.5 fledged chicks per nest.



The result of successful conservation: The number of kites in this photo is more than twice the entire UK population the 1980s. Photo: Tony Cross

What's happening to our Kestrels?

A DISAPPEARING ACT

There was a time when seeing a kestrel was such a common sight that the event was often ignored by many birdwatchers, and no doubt, the appreciation of this species was further taken for granted because they were frequently encountered in industrial landscapes and along roadside verges, a far cry from seeing a red kite on a remote Welsh hillside. Today, however, you are much more likely to see a kite than a kestrel in most parts of Wales. The kestrel population has been declining in numbers since at least the 1980's and the reasons for the decline are not yet understood. The latest BTO atlas published in 2013 shows that large swathes of south west Wales currently have no breeding kestrels at all, and that even where kestrel still occurs it is at a lower density than in most parts of England.

WHAT DO WE KNOW SO FAR?

A detailed study in 2016 that was part-funded by WKT found that in Pembrokeshire, the decline was continuing even in areas with suitable habitat, so habitat loss alone cannot explain the recent decline. It was also found that the number of young that fledged per breeding attempt appears to be sufficient to sustain a population, poor productivity cannot be implicated. The conclusion is that something must be affecting the survival of full grown birds after they leave the nest, but more dedicated research is urgently needed to better understand the situation, and so that effective conservation measures can be applied.

Possible reasons for reduced survival of full-grown kestrels that need further investigation include: reduced habitat quality in winter, predation by other raptors, (don't worry, the chief suspect is goshawk, not kite!), climate change

effects, and rodenticide poisoning. In addition, if there is a net emigration to breed in other areas then this will appear as if survival is reduced.

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

The problem is that very little detailed study of the species has taken place in Wales and even basic information such as juvenile dispersal patterns are not well understood. With this in mind, a colour-ringing scheme for kestrel nestlings was initiated in 2011 (again funded by WKT) to increase the reporting rate of dispersing kestrels. This has already turned up some surprises; A kestrel that fledged from a nest on Anglesey ringed in June 2015 was found alive in northern Spain in October 2016! This is in contrast to a female that fledged from a nest at Stackpole in 2011 that has bred ever since only 16km away at Tenby, Pembs. At least seven other individuals have been resighted, mostly within Wales but also in southern England, so clearly, juvenile dispersal appears to vary considerably between individuals. It is hoped to expand this scheme more widely within Wales to increase the number of marked nestlings and also to monitor adult survival. Many of the resightings have been supplied from photographers, so if anyone has a chance to photograph a kestrel, then please check the legs for a yellow ring with a letter and two numbers printed in black and let us know.

A study to measure the background levels of rodenticides in kestrels is also urgently needed.



This male kestrel, 'Po7' from a nest at St David's, Pembrokeshire could be identified from the photograph at Ynyslas. Photo: Janet Baxter

NEW WEBSITE

The new website is now the focal point for reporting our activities and publicity.

The web address is: www.welshkitetrust.wales.

(Please take care to use the “.wales” extension because the old extension of “.org” is now owned by someone that is nothing to do with the Trust).

On the website you will find details of the latest work of the Trust, information about kites and other raptors, online sales of cards, dvd's etc to help fund the conservation work of the Trust, links to related sites, a blog and much more. New posts will be added throughout the season and the site will improve and expand over time.

We will still produce a short newsletter twice a year that will summarise the recent work of the Trust. This will be free to download, or can be sent by email if preferred.

We very much encourage any contact with the trust to take place online.

This can be done in two ways:

By using the contact form found on the 'CONTACT US' page on the website or

By email to: admin@welshkitetrust.wales, (again please note the .wales extension).

If you do not have online facilities then we can be contacted by post at:

John Roberts, Hirfryn, Maindy Croft, TonPentre, Pentre, Rhondda Cynon Taff, CF41 7ET.

We no longer have the facility to routinely answer questions by telephone.

IN BRIEF

Welsh Kite Trust Projects 2016

- 175 nests monitored
- Detailed kestrel survey in Pembrokeshire
- Expansion of Kestrel nest monitoring more widely in Wales
- New website

In 2017 Welsh Kite Trust will be:

- Continuing with the primary objective of monitoring kite nests. The aim is to have a minimum sample of 100, and more if possible, including nests within the core breeding area and near the edge of the range so that the figures can be treated as representative.
- Expanding the kestrel colour-ringing programme, trialling a method of catching and marking adults so that adult survival can be measured. It is likely that adults are site-faithful between years, and if this is the case, then it will be possible to monitor their survival.
- Appealing for kestrel nest sites to add to the colour-ringing programme. Until juvenile dispersal patterns are better understood, it will be very difficult to decide appropriate conservation measures.
- Working with a German film maker, Hans Peter Kuttler, making a documentary about Welsh wildlife, and promoting the success of the kite.
- Begin the process of digitising all our early nest records so that the data can be entered into the BTO nest record scheme.

Please accept our grateful thanks for all your support.

