



Red Kites in East Powys 2017

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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 Kite nests 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. Since then 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 2017

In 2017, a total of 27 nests was found, the highest number since monitoring began, and two more than 2016, the previous highest. Four further pairs were seen, but no nest was located (total 31 pairs, the second highest number found in the area, one less than last year, but one more than in 2015, the previous highest).

A further 9 sites where Kites have nested in the previous two years, including six occupied last year, were visited, and many more occupied in previous years were observed from a distance, without result.

Eleven of the nests failed. The 16 successful nests produced at least 20 fledged young.

A site 3km south of Churchstoke and 1km north of the Kerry Ridgeway, the Welsh border, was monitored as part of the Shropshire population from when the nest was first found in 2010, with the results included in the report from this monitoring area. It was occupied every year up until 2016, but it was not monitored in 2017.

Comparison with previous years

The population growth, which resumed in 2014 following two particularly poor breeding seasons in 2012 and 2013, has continued, and 2017 was the most successful season to date in terms of nests found, and second best in terms of pairs found.

However, 11 of the 27 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. Rainfall in the area was only 33-50% of the April average for 1981-2010, and below average in May. Parts of June were wet and windy, and temperatures were above average over the whole nesting period, and very high in mid-June, so the high failure rate and low productivity were probably weather-related.

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 was often more accurate before 2015, as the tree was climbed to tag 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 2003-17

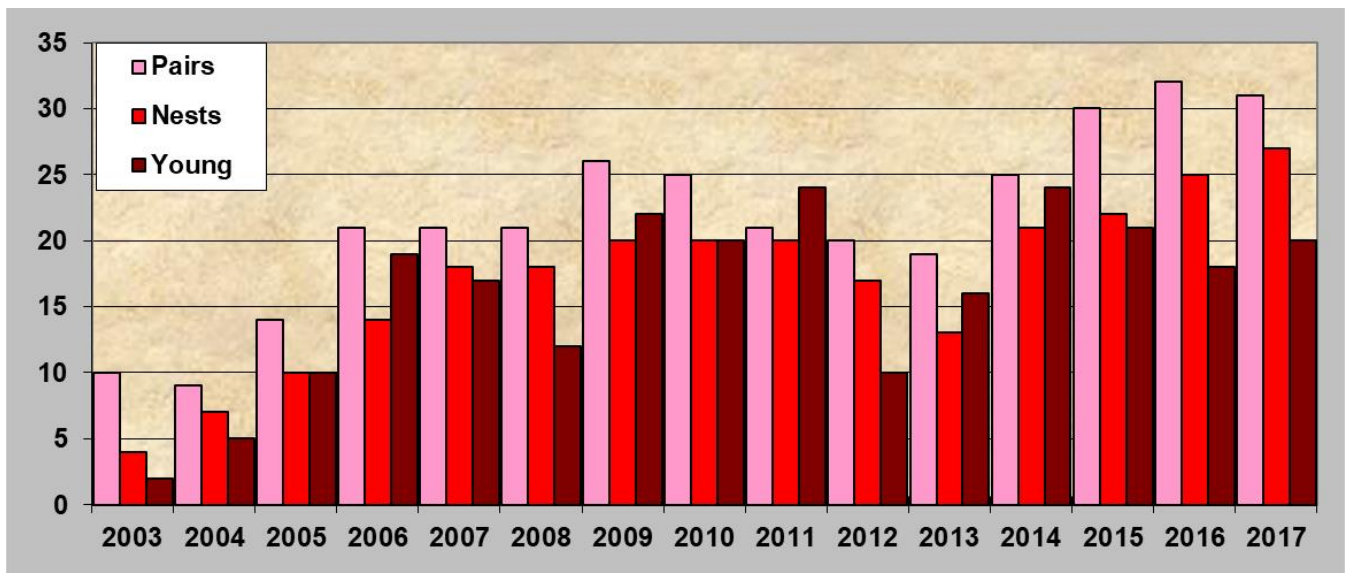
Nests & Outcome	Year																Total
	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017		
Pairs Found	10	9	14	21	21	21	26	25	21	20	19	25	30	32	31	325	
Nests Found	3	5	8	14	18	18	20	20	20	18	15	21	22	25	27	254	
Successful Nests	1	4	5	12	13	11	15	14	16	8	12	17	15	14	16	173	
Nestlings Tagged	1	4	3	13	13	10	12	9	12	10	13	2	0	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	20	217	
Total Young	2	5	10	19	19	13	22	20	24	10	16	24	21	18	20	243	

Table 2. Productivity 2003-17

Productivity (East Powys)	Year																Total
	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017		
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	0.7	0.96	
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	1.3	1.40	

Some of the same data is presented graphically in Figure 1

Figure 1. Number of Pairs, Nests Found and Fledged Young 2003-17



As usual, productivity in Shropshire nests was considerably higher than in this monitoring area in East Powys, where the comparable figures were an average of 1.3 fledged young per nest found and 1.9 per successful nest since 2006, and 1.1 and 1.7 respectively in 2017. Better productivity in Shropshire is attributed to better weather (generally warmer and drier, and better food supply).

Turnover of nest sites

Six of the found nests were at new sites, 14 other pairs used the same nest as last year, five others were at the same site as last year, but changed nest trees, and two reoccupied nests used in previous years, one in 2015 and one in 2012. Apart from the six sites occupied in 2017 for the first time, eight others have been occupied from 2010 or later. Although 12 sites were first occupied before 2010, only three of them have been continuously occupied since they were first found.

Altogether, 75 different nest sites have been found since 2003, many used for one year only.

Wing tagging

No young have been tagged in the area since 2014. The total since 2003 still stands at 102.

All breeding Kites were inspected for tags. Only three were found, but others may possibly have been overlooked

- i. Blue H3, the male at a site near Llanbister Road, 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 in 2016, and was on the same nest in 2017. She fledged from a Shropshire nest near Knighton in 2010, six kilometres to the north. It is likely that, as seven-year-old, she 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. Yellow 30 was found sitting on a nest near Heartsease, 4km to the north-west from her natal site

In 2016, a male with a red/yellow tag was seen at a nest near Cantal, but the tag was not read. The nest site was not occupied in 2017. A Kite with an unread yellow tag was also seen near Llanbister Road, but not at a nest site, in 2016.

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 4km from Llanbister Road, Yellow 29 and Yellow 30, both of which were within 2km of their natal site.



Blue 15 tagged as one of a brood of three at her natal site on 17 June 2010
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In total, 21 different tags have been read on nesting Kites since 2004, 11 males and 10 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. Female Green star, one of the first two fledged young from a Shropshire nest site near Knighton in 2006, was found at two different Shropshire sites in 2008 and 2009, then at a third site 1km north of the Kerry Rigeway and 3km south of Churchstoke, in 2010, 15km from her natal site. She was seen at the same Welsh site in 2011 and 2012.
- iii. 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.
- iv. Two others, Blue H3 and Blue 15, have reached seven years old, and are still alive; another reached five years old, but none of the others reached that age.
- v. 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 nests found, 2017 was the most productive year since monitoring started in 2003.

Further Information

A similar monitoring report for the adjacent area of Shropshire, and other information, can be found on the Welsh Kite Trust's new website www.welshkitetrust.wales

Leo Smith
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Thanks to Gareth Thomas for permission to use the photo