

Red Kites Llandeilo to Brecon 2017

Objectives

The objective of monitoring the Red Kites in this area is to ascertain the size of the population on an annual basis and the level of breeding success. The population size is compared to that the previous year to ascertain an expansion or contraction which involves identifying new and missing pairs. The outcome of each breeding attempt in terms of the number of young produced is included in an assembly of data in respect of each year so that an ongoing assessment of the total population can be made year on year and trends identified.

History

Monitoring of the area south of the A40 between Llandeilo and Brecon by the writer commenced in 1984, when only three nesting pairs could be found. The annual results were included in a national survey of all breeding kites in Wales as part of the work of an amalgamation of wildlife bodies known as the Kite Committee, which included the then Nature Conservancy for Wales and the RSPB Wales Office. When in 1995 more than one hundred nesting pairs were located the RSPB was forced to give priority to more deserving species and the Kite Committee was disbanded. Some of the fieldworkers involved at the time were anxious to continue the population study on an annual basis and formed the Welsh Kite Trust for that purpose in 1996. By the date of publication of the BTO's Bird Atlas in 2011 there were thought to be more than one thousand breeding pairs of Red Kite in Wales and the Trust in turn is in the process of concentrating on other more vulnerable species. However it is felt that the Trust is in the unique position with regard to the Red Kite population of having a long and detailed history of its growth and believes that it should continue to be monitored on a sample basis for stability and productivity along with other raptors.

Area covered

The original area of Wales which was monitored lies between Brecon, Powys in the east and Llandeilo, Carmarthenshire in the West. It was bounded on the North by the A40 Trunk Road between Brecon and Llandeilo and on the South by the mountain and moorland of the Brecon Beacons. The boundary in the East was originally the A470 and in the West the A483. In recent years the adjoining area to the North comprising the Eppynt Valleys has also been covered. This lies immediately to the north of the A40 and extends to the military ranges of the Eppynt Uplands.

As explained previously it seems more rational to define the study area by reference to 10-km squares and the boundaries have been amended to reflect that. The main study area now includes six 10km squares comprising 600 square kilometres namely SN72(" Llangadog"), SN82("Trecastle"), SN92("Sennybridge"), SN73("Llandoverly"), SN83("Halfway") and SN93("Llanfihangel Nant Bran"). 95% of the total effort put into finding new nests is in these six squares. The existing known nests in some of the adjoining 10km squares continue to be monitored namely SN62 (three known nests in 2017), SO02(none), SN91(3), SO03(2) and SO04(1) all of which are legacy nests from the earlier method of defining the study area.

Of the six 10km squares included in the area, SN72, SN82 and SN92 are distinguished by the goal of finding every kite nest by checking every possible site, whether historic, traditional, recent or wherever there is potential kite habitat. In the 10km squares in the Eppynt Valleys namely SN73,

SN83 and SN93 an attempt is made to check all nests from the previous year and recent years, potential areas of woodland and to follow up any leads or information. SN72 has included a Red Kite Feeding Station since 2003 and it is reflected in the number of breeding pairs in that Square compared to all the others. SN72 is therefore exceptional in this respect.

Method

Starting as early as possible in the Season, usually in February, priority is given to checking all the Nest Sites from the preceding Season by watching at a distance from a high vantage, firstly in the Llangadog, Trecastle and Sennybridge 10km squares then in the three Eppynt squares. When a firm conclusion can be reached on these Sites then the nest sites from all earlier years are checked and finally historic breeding sites, some going back to the 1800's. The found nests are checked again either by a nest visit or preferably if possible from a vantage at a distance during May for survival in June for Young and in July for fledged young. None of the young are either ringed or tagged as part of this study, mainly because of the disproportionate level of resources involved and the impossibility of covering all the nests in what is after all a core area in the limited period when they are old enough to ring and too small to fly.

Results

Information on each Occupied Site is included in a data assembly following the information required by the Nest Record Cards Scheme of the British Trust for Ornithology. The number of young reared is then used to calculate the average young per Occupied Site and also the young per successful nest. These figures can then be used for comparison between years, between different areas in Wales and in England and Scotland, between 10km squares and between pre- and post- Feeding Stations. The figures are subject to the usual cautions that it may not always be possible to see all the young in a nest and that one or more young may have already fledged.

2017 Results

In the 2017 Season 104 Occupied Sites were found in the six main study squares and all the pairs laid eggs. The total number of fledged young was 79. The average productivity figures resulting from this are 0.75 per nesting pair and 1.18 per successful nest.

When broken down into 10km squares the figures are as follows:

Area	Nesting Pairs	Successful NN	Young	Young per Nest	Y per successful N
SN72	38	25	32	0.84	1.28
SN82	17	8	8	0.47	1.00
SN92	12	9	13	1.08	1.44
SN73	14	11	11	0.79	1.00
SN83	10	6	7	.70	1.17
SN93	13	8	8	0.62	1.00
Overall	104	67	79	0.76	1.18
Misc	10	5	6	0.6	1.2
Totals	114	72	85	0.75	1.18

Comparisons

Earlier results have been converted to show them by reference to the six 10-km squares as follows:

2013	SN72	30	22	29	.97	1.32
	SN82	12	8	10	.83	1.25
	SN92	10	8	12	1.2	1.5
	SN73	9	5	6	.67	1.2
	SN83	7	4	6	.86	1.5
	SN93	0	0	0	0	0
2014	SN72	27	19	24	.89	1.26
	SN82	11	5	5	.45	1
	SN92	10	7	9	.9	1.28
	SN73	9	7	11	1.22	1.57
	SN83	9	5	7	.78	1.4
	SN93	4	2	2	.5	1
2015	SN72	42	29	34	.81	1.17
	SN82	16	9	12	.75	1.33
	SN92	15	9	13	.87	1.44
	SN73	11	8	10	.91	1.25
	SN83	11	7	7	.64	1
	SN93	12	5	5	.42	1
2016	SN72	43	26	32	.74	1.23
	SN82	17	7	8	.47	1.14
	SN92	12	8	11	.92	1.375
	SN73	14	8	9	.64	1.125
	SN83	12	8	9	.75	1.125
	SN93	12	9	10	.83	1.1

Turnover of Nest Sites

72 of the 110 nest sites in the six 10km squares in 2016 were re-used in 2017. Of the remaining 38, 22 were lost altogether and 18 pairs changed to a new nest. However, 16 new nests were found. The figures broken down for the six 10km squares are as follows:

	SN72	SN82	SN92	SN73	SN83	SN93	TOTALS
Re-used	26	11	9	12	6	8	72
Lost	9	3	2	2	4	2	22
Changed	9	3	1	1	2	2	18
New	4	3	2	2	2	3	16

Conclusion

The Red Kite Breeding Population following the 2017 Field Season in the six 10km squares of the study area comprised the 208 adults and the 79 fledged young they produced, total 287. After the 2016 Season the same figure was 299, indicating a marginal contraction. It is intended to carry out the same survey in 2018.

John Roberts. February 2018.