Red Kites in East Powys 2018

Female Red Kite tagged Yellow/black 30 in 2013, at a new nest site near Llanbister in 2018

Area Monitored

The area bounded by the A488 road from Knighton to Penybont, then 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 the Welsh Kite Trust (WKT) for 11 years, 2003-13 inclusive.

By 2013 the whole population in Wales had grown to the extent that it could not be monitored effectively, nor could a representative sample of nestlings be wing-tagged, so the Trust decided to monitor sample areas, to check that the population was healthy and continued to grow, and the tagging ceased.

Following the change in policy, this area became one of the sample areas, but 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 monitored since 2014 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 has been checked, to confirm whether or not birds were sitting, but the time devoted to this has increased year on year as the population has grown.

Up until 2013, each nest found was checked for young in early June. The time commitment for this second stage has also 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 the second half of 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 2018

Thirty-two nests were found during fieldwork, and another was reported to the website at the end of the season, the highest number yet. Four further pairs were seen, but the nest could not be found. The 33 nests compares with 27 found last year, the previous highest number since monitoring began, and two more than 2016, the previous highest.

A further 10 sites where Kites have nested in the previous three years, including two occupied last year, were visited, and 17 more occupied in previous years were observed from a distance, without result.

It was a poor breeding season: 14 (42% of the nests found) failed, and 12 of them failed early. The abnormally cold spring, with continuous and strong east winds, was almost certainly responsible: it was introduced by the “beast from the east” in late February, and the adverse conditions followed until late April.

The 19 successful nests produced at least 21 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 for this monitoring area. It was occupied every year up until 2016, but it was not monitored in 2017 or 2018.

Comparison with previous years

The population growth, which resumed in 2014 following two particularly poor breeding seasons in 2012 and 2013, has continued, and 2018 was the most successful season to date in terms of nests found, and pairs found.

However, 14 of the 33 nests failed, and the number of young / nest found (0.6) and young / successful nest (1.1) were the equal lowest, and lowest, productivity ratios respectively since monitoring started, and were, not surprisingly, well below the average since 2003. Although the number of nests was the highest yet, there were more fledged young in three previous years, 2009, 2011, and 2014, with the latter two producing the record of 24. As outlined above, the high failure rate and low productivity were almost certainly 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. There may have been additional young in 10 of the nests, but given that only two of the nine nests with a complete view had two young, any under-estimate is likely to be small. The count at many nests was often more accurate before 2014, 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 2003-18

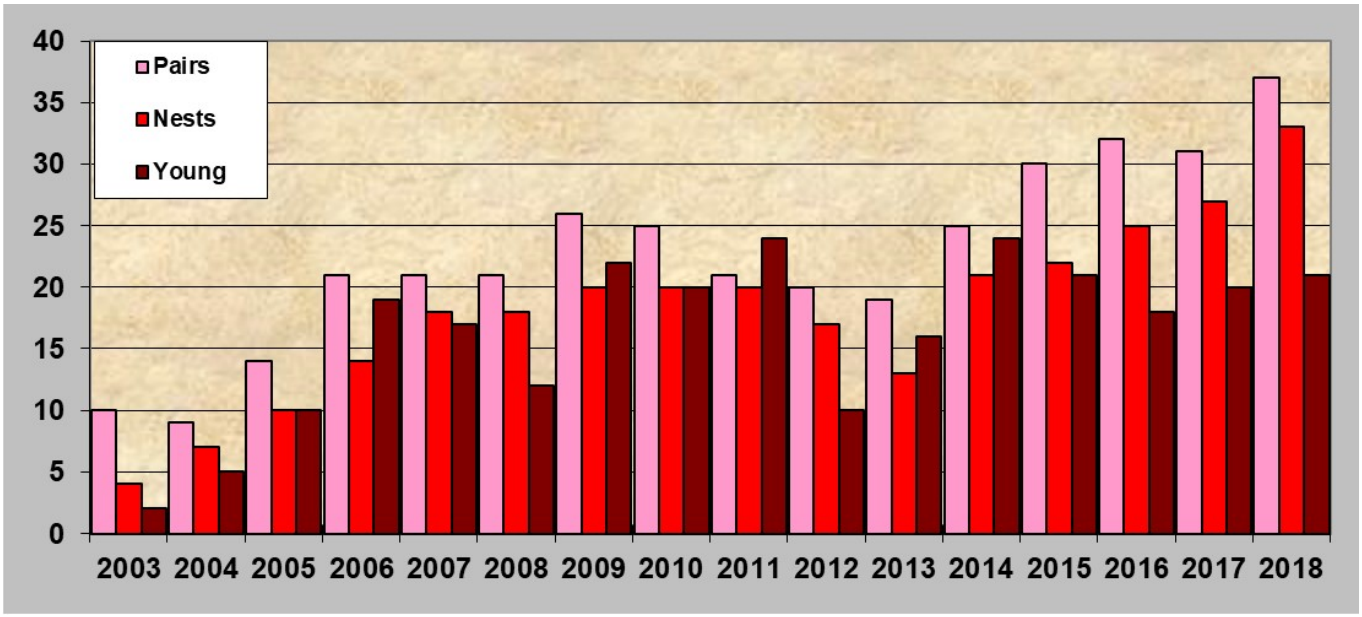
Nests & Outcome	Year																Total
	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	
Pairs Found	10	9	14	21	21	21	26	25	21	20	19	25	30	32	31	37	362
Nests Found	3	5	8	14	18	18	20	20	20	18	15	21	22	25	27	33	287
Successful Nests	1	4	5	12	13	11	15	14	16	8	12	17	15	14	16	19	192
Nestlings Tagged	1	4	3	13	13	10	12	9	12	10	13	2	0	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	21	238
Total Young	2	5	10	19	19	13	22	20	24	10	16	24	21	18	20	21	264

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	2018	
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	0.6	0.92
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	1.1	1.38

Some of the same data is presented graphically in Figure 1

Figure 1. Number of Pairs, Nests Found and Fledged Young 2003-18



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 1.8 per successful nest since 2006, and 1.2 and 1.5 respectively in 2018. Better productivity in Shropshire is attributed to better weather (generally warmer and drier), and better food supply.

Turnover of nest sites

Seven of the 33 nests were at new sites, 18 other pairs used the same nest as last year, four others were at the same site as last year, but changed nest trees (moved 100m or less), and one reoccupied a nest used two years ago. Apart from the seven sites occupied in 2018 for the first time, 14 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, about 90 different nest sites have been found since 2003, many used for one year only.

However, the increasing number of pairs using the same nest as last year, and the proximity of three new nests to well established sites with a kilometre, suggest that parts of the area may be approaching maximum density.

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 six were found, but others may possibly have been overlooked. Four were read:-

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 (female) was found for the first time at a nest near Monaughty in 2016, and was on the same nest in 2017 and 2018. She fledged from a Shropshire nest near Knighton in 2010, six kilometres to the north. It is likely that, as a six-year-old when found, she had 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 29 (female) was found sitting on a nest near Heartsease, 4km to the north-west from her 2013 natal site. This was the natal site of Yellow 30, which occupied this nest last year.
iv. Yellow 30 (2013 female) moved less than 2km north to a new site near Llanbister. The report of the nest, and the photo on page 1, was sent to the WKT website.

The two unread tags were yellow (2013), at a nest near Llanbister Road, and green, on the other side of Llanbister Road (probably 2015, but not tagged in this area).

Three yellow (2013) tagged birds were seen in 2015: a male (tag unread), part of a pair that nested near Llanbister Road that laid very late and failed early, which may perhaps have been Yellow 29 or the same bird that nested near Llanbister Road at a different site in 2018, and the two that were found at nests in 2018, Yellow 29 and Yellow 30, which were both seen near Heartsease, about 4km from Llanbister Road; both 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

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 Ridgeway 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 eight 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.
vi. Yellow 30, which was replaced in her 2017 nest by Yellow 29 returning to her natal site. Yellow 30 moved to a new site less than 2km distant.

Conclusion

In terms of nests found, 2018 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

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October 2019

Thanks to Cilla Maylott for permission to use the photo of Yellow 30