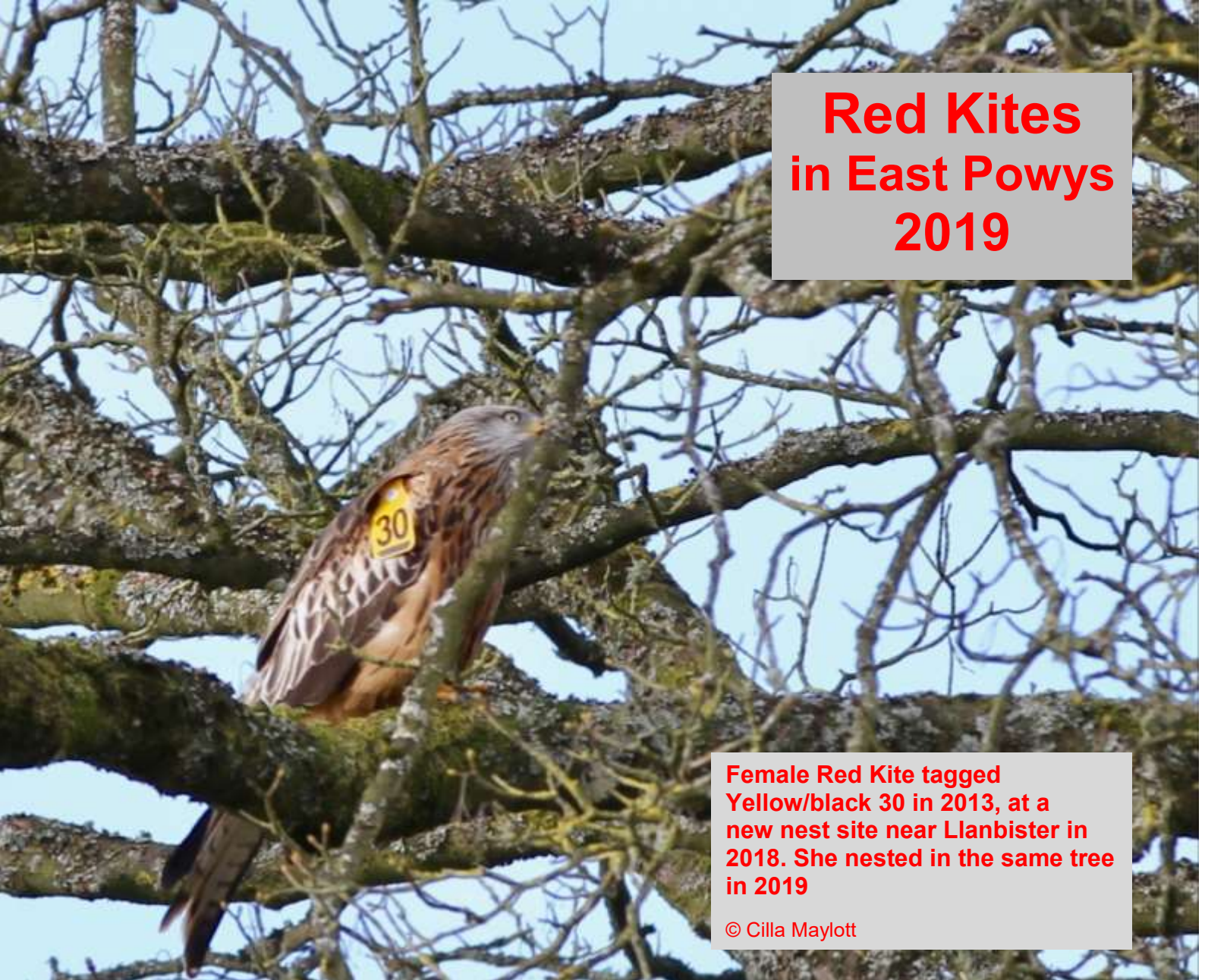




Red Kites in East Powys 2019

**Female Red Kite tagged
Yellow/black 30 in 2013, at a
new nest site near Llanbister in
2018. She nested in the same tree
in 2019**

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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.

As a further example of the continued welcome increase in the Red Kite's range, a nest was reported from near Kerry, in the part of the area omitted from 2014 onwards.

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 2019

Thirty-five nests were found during fieldwork, the highest number yet. Four further pairs were seen, but the nest could not be found. The number of nests found has increased steadily since monitoring began (see figure 1).

A further 15 sites where Kites have nested in the previous three years, including five occupied last year, and two which are presumed to be alternate sites to ones occupied in 2019, were visited, and several more occupied in previous years were observed from a distance, without result.

It was another poor breeding season, with 14 failed nests, the same as 2018, but the percentage failure rate was slightly lower (40% of the nests found, compared with 42% in 2018). Spring was very wet, followed by a drought from late May onwards, and the weather was almost certainly responsible.

Productivity was also very poor: only one nest definitely had more than one chick, although another five, where the contents of the nest could not be seen, may have done. The 20 successful nests produced at least 21 fledged young.

The outcome of one nest is unknown. It was not visited until after the young would have fledged. No Kites were seen, but the nest could not be found.

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 has not been monitored since.

Comparison with previous years

The population growth, which resumed in 2014 following two particularly poor breeding seasons in 2012 and 2013, has continued, and 2019 was the most successful season to date in terms of nests found, and pairs found.

However, 14 of the 35 nests failed, and the outcome of one is unknown. The number of young / nest found (0.6) and young / successful nest (1.1) were both the equal lowest productivity ratios 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 five of the nests, but given that only one of the 15 nests with a complete view had two young, any under-estimate

is likely to be very 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 2003-19

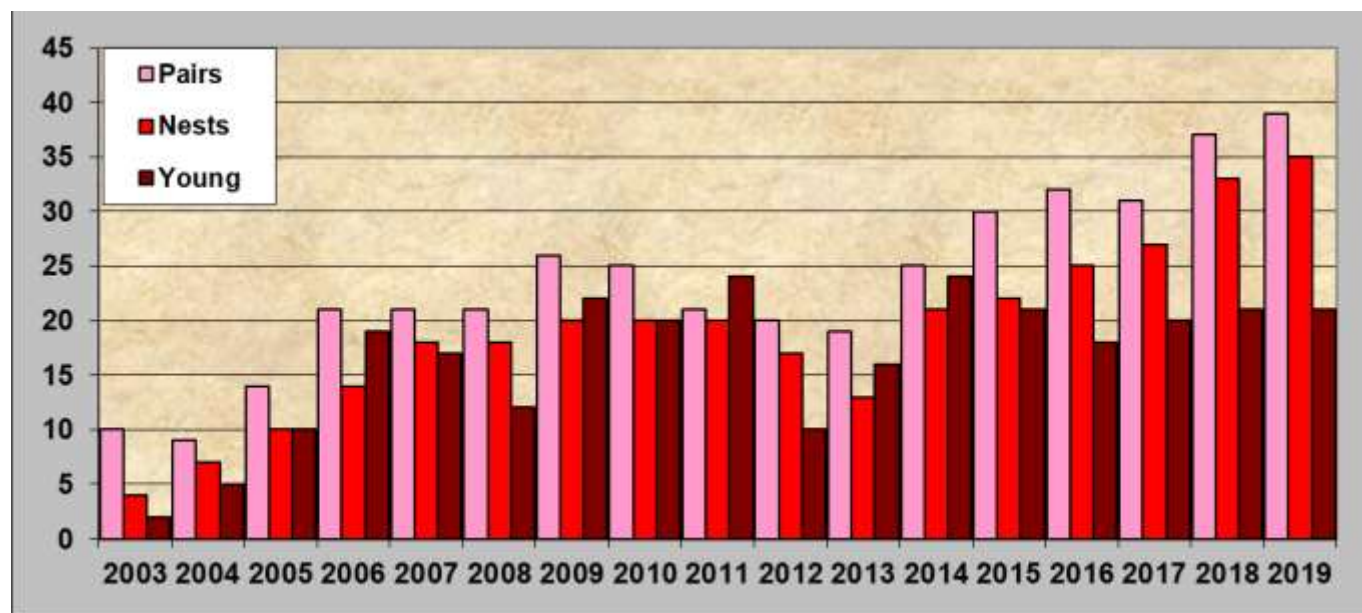
Nests & Outcome	Year																	Total
	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	
Pairs Found	10	9	14	21	21	21	26	25	21	20	19	25	30	32	31	37	39	401
Nests Found	3	5	8	14	18	18	20	20	20	18	15	21	22	25	27	33	35	322
Successful Nests	1	4	5	12	13	11	15	14	16	8	12	17	15	14	16	19	20	212
Nestlings Tagged	1	4	3	13	13	10	12	9	12	10	13	2	0	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	21	259
Total Young	2	5	10	19	19	13	22	20	24	10	16	24	21	18	20	21	21	285

Table 2. Productivity 2003-19

Productivity (East Powys)	Year																	Total
	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	
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	0.6	0.89
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	1.1	1.34

Some of the same data is presented graphically in Figure 1

Figure 1. Number of Pairs, Nests Found and Fledged Young 2003-19



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

Six of the 35 nests were at new sites, 20 other pairs used the same nest as last year, one moved higher in the same tree, six others were at the same site as last year, but changed nest trees (moved 100m or less), one reoccupied a nest used two years ago and one reoccupied a site used once previously, in 2011. Apart from the six sites occupied in 2019 for the first time, 22 others have been occupied from 2010 or later. Although 14 sites were first occupied before 2010, only five of them have been continuously occupied since they were first found.

Altogether, about 100 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, suggests that parts of the area may be approaching maximum density, although only one of the new sites was within a kilometre of an occupied well-established nest site.

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 four were found, but others may possibly have been overlooked. Three 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, 2018 and 2019. 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 30 (2013 female) fledged from a nest near Heartsease. She occupied the same site in 2017, then moved less than 2km north in 2018 to a new site near Llanbister. The report of the nest, and the photo on page 1, was sent to the WKT website. She occupied a new nest higher in the same tree in 2019.

The fourth (yellow-) tagged bird was at the same site near Heartsease. She was almost certainly Yellow 29 (female), found at this site in 2018. It was 4km to the north-west of her 2013 natal site.

There was no sign of the two unread tags in 2018, 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.

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.



Yellow/black 30 returned to nest in the same tree in 2019

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 nine years old, and are still alive.
- 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, who was replaced in her 2017 nest by Yellow 29 returning to her natal site in 2018. Yellow 30 moved to a new site less than 2km distant, and was there again in 2019. Yellow 29 was almost certainly at the same site in 2019 as in 2018, but the yellow tag could not be read. Both yellow-tagged kites were six years old in 2019.
- vii. Another reached five years old, but none of the others reached that age.

Conclusion

In terms of the number of pairs found, and nests found, 2019 was the most productive year since monitoring started in 2003. Although productivity was poor, for the second year in a row, the number of fledged young was exceeded in only three previous years.

Further Information

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

Leo Smith
March 2020

Thanks to Cilla Maylott for permission to use the photos of Yellow/black 30