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Red kites

In Dumfries and Galloway

David Hunt

A reintroduction project

Bulletin No. 16
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Forestry Commission Scotland Scottish Natural Heritage All of nature for all of Scotland D&GRSG



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Table 10 (continued)

G/P T	M	Galloway	Present core area, bred
G/P U	M	Galloway	Present core area
G/P W	F	Galloway	Present core area
G/P Z	M	Galloway	Present core area

2008 cohort, Galloway bred 53.

Status Summer 2009

Following the non-tagging of this cohort we can only speculate at their survival based on sightings of untagged individuals at the feeding station, survival of previous cohorts and more scientifically, extrapolation of the numbers of surviving kites of this cohort fitted with radio tags. Hence we would expect there to be somewhere between 25 and 35 kites of the 2008 cohort surviving to breeding age, next spring



Ian Saunders



Red Kites

in Dumfries and Galloway

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Table 10. 2007 cohort, Galloway bred 33

Kite	Sex	Origin	Status Summer 2009
G/P 3	F	Galloway	Last seen 29/08/2008
G/P 6	F	Galloway	Present core area, bred
G/P 7	F	Galloway	Present core area, bred
G/P 8	M	Galloway	Present core area, bred
G/P 9	F	Galloway	Present core area, bred
G/P 10	M	Galloway	Newcastle area
G/P A	M	Galloway	Present core area
G/P B	M	Galloway	Present core area
G/P C	F	Galloway	Present core area, bred
G/P D	M	Galloway	Last seen 18/08/2008
G/P E	M	Galloway	Present core area
G/P F	M	Galloway	Present core area, bred
G/P H	M	Galloway	Last seen 17/02/2009
G/P J	F	Galloway	Present core area
G/P K	M	Galloway	Present core area
G/P L	M	Galloway	Last seen 07/07/2008
G/P M	M	Galloway	Present core area, bred
G/P N	M	Galloway	Last seen 06/01/2009
G/P O	M	Galloway	Present core area
G/P P	M	Galloway	Present core area, bred
G/P Q	F	Galloway	Present core area
G/P S	F	Galloway	Present core area, bred



Table 9. 2006 cohort, Galloway bred 27, incomer 2

Kite	Sex	Origin	Status Summer 2009
G/G 1	F	Galloway	Present core area, bred
G/G 2	M	Galloway	Present core area
G/G 3	M	Galloway	Present core area
G/G 4	M	Galloway	Newcastle area
G/G 5	F	Galloway	Present core area, bred
G/G B	M	Galloway	Present core area, bred
G/G C	M	Galloway	Present core area
G/G D	F	Galloway	Present core area
G/G E	F	Galloway	Present core area
G/G H	F	Galloway	Present core area, bred
G/G J	F	Galloway	Present core area, bred
G/G K	F	Galloway	Present core area, bred
G/G M	M	Galloway	Present core area, bred
G/G P	F	Galloway	Present core area, bred
G/G R	F	Galloway	Present core area, bred
G/G S	M	Galloway	Present core area
G/G U	F	Galloway	Present core area, bred
G/G V	F	Galloway	Present core area, bred
G/G W	F	Galloway	Last seen 06/01/2009
G/G X	M	Galloway	Present core area, bred
G/G Y	M	Galloway	Present core area, bred
R/G 2J	F	C. Scotland	Present core area, bred
B/G X	F	Wales	Last seen 27/02/2009

Welcome to our 2009 issue of the Dumfries & Galloway Red Kite Reintroduction Bulletin.



With the reintroduction phase of the project ending in 2005, our bulletin is now an annual account of the breeding, movement, survival and mortality of red kites in Dumfries & Galloway. The bulletin also reports on the progress of other kite reintroduction projects throughout the UK and Ireland. An update on the Galloway Kite Trail and related website is also featured, highlighting the positive links between the kite project, local communities and the economy. We hope that the bulletin provides a comprehensive report on the red kite reintroduction project to inform and be enjoyed by all its readers.

Release update

A total of 104 young kites were released in Dumfries & Galloway between 2001 and 2005; of these, there are 39 known alive, 38 in Galloway and one in Central Scotland. Of the 39 released kites known alive, only one, a 2003 male (GR Y), has not been recorded breeding following release.



Table 1: Status of 104 released kites in Dumfries & Galloway from 2001 to 2005.

Year	Release	Known alive 2009	% known alive 2009
2001	33	5	15%
2002	24	6	25%
2003	33	20	61%
2004	10	7	70%
2005	4	1	25%
Total	104	39	37%



Scrutiny of sightings recorded of the 2007 cohort following this cold winter, in relation to the previous two years' mild winters, showed that survival to breeding age remained similar at approximately 60%. So rises in breeding figures were similar to the 2007 – 2008 season. Territorial pairs were up nine, laying pairs up ten, successful nests up six, although only six more young were fledged than in 2008. As can be seen in Table 2 productivity of young is down this year. The cold winter may have prevented females from attaining prime breeding condition and/or mortality of broods may have been affected by the period of prolonged cold easterly winds we had in April and May. Nest failures rose to nine this year, but obviously this figure will continue to rise with the increasing number of breeding pairs.

The slow geographical expansion of the breeding population continued with kites now breeding in eight 10 kilometre squares, at last exceeding the five 10 kilometre squares occupied for the last four years. The three new 10 kilometre squares each had one new breeding pair, of which two were successful, with the third failing at the egg stage. This year, two Galloway kites were recorded at various times commuting east to the Auldgirth/Routin Bridge area, so next year may see even more dramatic range expansion.

As mentioned above, our slowly expanding and infilling core area this year held 40 active nests, 24km being the greatest distance between any two nests and 0.5km being the shortest distance. Ten species of tree were chosen for nest sites; oak having eleven nests; Scots pine eight; Sitka spruce and larch four; birch, Douglas fir, Norway spruce, beech, sycamore and ash each having two nests. This is the first time that kites have been recorded using ash trees in Dumfries & Galloway. With kites re-using both the lowest and the highest 2008 nests, the range of heights above ground are as last year, heights ranging from six metres in a birch tree to 33 metres high in a Douglas fir. Along with the usually extensive wool cup, typical nest adornments were plastic bags, paper and coloured string. Of the 40 nests found, nine ended in failure, seven at the egg stage and the other two at the chick stage, with the remaining 31 being successful, fledging 58 young. Fifty-seven young kites were fitted with wing tags, whilst one other had fledged before the planned ringing date. Wing tags are coloured green/pink this year, numbered 1 - 10 or lettered A – Z. Continuing with our study on the dispersal, movement and survival of red kites, a percentage of young had radio transmitters fitted, allowing them to be tracked and providing important and interesting information.



Table 7. 2004 cohort, released 10, Galloway bred 3, incomer 1.

Kite	Sex	Origin	Status Summer 2009
G/Y K	M	Chilterns	Present core area, bred
G/Y R	F	Chilterns	Present core area, bred
G/Y P	F	Chilterns	Present core area, bred
G/Y Q	M	Chilterns	Present core area, bred
G/Y S	F	Chilterns	Present core area, bred
G/Y W	F	Chilterns	Present core area, bred
G/Y U	M	Chilterns	Last seen 28/04/2009
G/Y O	M	Galloway	Present core area, bred
G/Y T	F	Galloway	Present core area, bred
G/Y Z	M	Galloway	Present core area, bred
B/Y 53	F	N. Scotland	Present core area, bred

Table 8. 2005 cohort, released 4, Galloway bred 18

Kite	Sex	Origin	Status Summer 2009
G/O 101	M	Galloway	Present core area, bred
G/O 102	M	Galloway	Present core area, bred
G/O 105	F	Galloway	Present core area, bred
G/O 110	M	Galloway	Present core area, bred
G/O 111	M	Galloway	Present core area
G/O 112	F	Galloway	Present core area, bred
G/O 114	F	Galloway	Present core area, bred
G/O 117	F	Galloway	Central Scotland, bred
G/O 118	M	Galloway	Present core area
G/O 120	M	N. Scotland	Present core area, bred



Table 6. 2003 cohort, released 33, Galloway bred 1.

Kite	Sex	Origin	Status summer 2009
G/R 1	M	Chilterns	Present core area, bred
G/R 2	M	Chilterns	Present core area, bred
G/R 3	M	Chilterns	Present core area, bred
G/R 4	M	Chilterns	Present core area, bred
G/R 5	F	Chilterns	Present core area, bred
G/R 7	F	Chilterns	Present core area, bred
G//R D	M	N. Scotland	Present core area, bred
G/R E	M	N. Scotland	Present core area, bred
G/R F	F	N. Scotland	Present core area, bred
G/R H	F	N. Scotland	Present core area, bred
G/R J	M	N. Scotland	Present core area, bred
G/R L	M	N. Scotland	Present core area, bred
G/R Q	M	N. Scotland	Present core area, bred
G/R S	M	N. Scotland	Present core area, bred
G/R U	F	N. Scotland	Present core area, bred
G/R V	M	N. Scotland	Present core area, bred
G/R W	M	N. Scotland	Present core area, bred
G/R X	M	Chilterns	Present core area, bred
G/R Y	M	Chilterns	Present core area
G/R Spot	M	Chilterns	Present core area, bred
G/R Z	F	Galloway	Present core area, bred



Following last year's legal hitch when no wing tags were fitted, this year volunteers' sightings of tagged young at the Bellymack Hill Farm feeding station have been possible, with 39 seen to date.



Pairs of nesting first generation Galloway kites continue to flourish with twelve pairs breeding successfully fledging 21 young. I cannot overstate the importance of the fact that red kites born in Galloway are now breeding and producing offspring of their own. The ultimate aim of a re-introduction project is to return a once locally extinct species to its historic, natural and rightful place in the countryside. Owing to last year's non-tagging of young, next year we should see the first nest occupied by untagged Galloway kites, and in a year or two with continuing progress, we may be able to reduce or even cease wing-tagging.

Galloway Forest Park, managed by Forestry Commission Scotland, once again had six successful nests, fledging ten young.

The Galloway breeding population retained the welcome female recruit (red/green2J) from Central Scotland, but sadly her nesting attempt failed at the chick stage. This pairing became the only recorded pair to ever re-use their own previously failed nest, possibly a bad omen giving the outcome this year. Last year's Welsh female (black/green X) was not seen after 27/02/2009 and may have returned to Wales. However, Blue/Yellow 53 from Inverness bred again this year.

Sites



Site 1. Male: Green/Red S. Female: Green/Blue J.

Green/blue J, a 2001 female in her seventh breeding season, last year broke her run of producing only one young and had two. However, this year she reverted to type and produced only one, tagged green/pink 7. Sadly, this youngster was to be our first juvenile casualty of the year, as it had to be put down following a road traffic accident.

Site 2. Male: Green/Green ?. Female: Green/Green K.

Following the resident pair moving 2.5km to **SITE 35** last year and remaining there this year, a young pair has moved in to this vacant site. Utilising a nest high up in a 100-year-old Sitka spruce, a clutch was laid but the breeding attempt went on to fail at the egg stage.

Site 3. Male: Green/Red V. Female: Green/Orange 105.

The site was occupied but no active nest was found. Construction of a pheasant release pen in the nest wood may have unsettled the pair. That said, by agreement, the pen was erected in February to try and preclude this happening.

Site 4. Male: Green/Red W. Female: Blue/Yellow 53.

The active nest was found back at the 2007 site, from which they were ousted last year by ravens. As per last year this female seems to attract extra partners as green/red Q from **site 12** was present and exhibited agitated behaviour at this site on three occasions! One young fledged and was wing tagged green/pink 12.

Site 5. Male: Green/Red L. Female: Green/Yellow R.

Re-used last year's nest and fledged two young, tagged green/pink 1 & 2.

Site 6. Male: Green/Red Spot. Female: Green/White C.

The re-use of their nest for the last four years ended, the nest blowing out during strong winds in late March. This prompted a move of nearly a kilometre, to where they nested in a larch within the ample grounds of a large house. This pair and others used this same area as a communal roost wood during the previous winter. Two young were fledged, tagged green/pink 16 & 17.

Appendix



Surviving Red kites: released/bred/incomers in Dumfries & Galloway 2001 - 2009.

Table 4. 2001 cohort, released 33.

Kite	Sex	Origin	Status summer 2009
G/B 4	F	Chilterns	Present core area, bred
G/B A	F	N. Scotland	Present core area, bred
G/B J	F	N. Scotland	Present core area, bred
G/B U	M	Chilterns	Present core area, bred
G/B W	F	Chilterns	Present core area, bred

Table 5. 2002 cohort, released 24.

Kite	Sex	Origin	Status summer 2009
G/W 3	F	N. Scotland	Present core area, bred
G/W 5	F	N. Scotland	Central Scotland, bred
G/W 7	F	N. Scotland	Present core area, bred
G/W 9	M	N. Scotland	Present core area, bred
G/W C	F	N. Scotland	Present core area, bred
G/W X	M	Chilterns	Present core area, bred

Acknowledgements.

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Throughout the year Ray Hawley, Chris Rollie, Ian Saunders, Angus Hogg, David Hunt, Ray Wilby, Calum Murray and his many volunteers, including Michael Cole, Jeff Sutcliffe, Clare Rollie and Jean Southall, provided valuable wing-tag readings. Thanks to long distance tag readers Kevin Duffy and Duncan Cameron (Central Scotland), Ken Sanderson (Gateshead), Doug Simpson (Yorkshire) and Tony Cross (Wales). Thanks for the many sightings from RSPB Local Group members. Thanks to Bard Veterinary Practice and the Barony Wildlife Hospital. Thanks to Angus McKay of gpxweb.com for his continued support of the Galloway Kite Trail website, which at this moment he is upgrading.

Many thanks are due to Brian Etheridge for his tagging guidance, instruction etc, Colin Watret (ringing/wing-tags/monitoring) and Ciril Ostroznik (tree climbing and nest observations). Thanks are due to our colleagues at the RSPB Glasgow office, SHQ and the Lodge whose continued support of the project and the Galloway Kite Trail is much appreciated. Thanks to our project partners, SNH, FCS, D&GRSG, for their continued support, and to Sulwath Connections, Dumfries & Galloway Council, SNH and Heritage Lottery Fund in relation to GKT.

Many thanks to Anne Johnstone and Pam at Bellymack Hill Farm Feeding Station for their hard work in providing the wonderful spectacle, in hosting Calum, and in supporting the project in so many other ways. Thanks to the staff at FCS Clatteringshaws visitor centre and to all businesses on the Galloway Kite Trail for their positive feedback and assistance with pin badges, leaflets etc. Visit Scotland Dumfries & Galloway assists RSPB with leaflet distribution and promotion of the Trail.

Special acknowledgement must as ever be made of the assistance, access and patience granted to the project from the ever-growing group of landowners, farmers, gamekeepers and members of the public within Dumfries & Galloway. Many thanks to everyone in these groups, particularly those with breeding kites, hosting our release cages on their land and monitoring kites in any way.

Sites

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Site 7. Male: Green/White 9. Female: Green/White 7.

Re-used last year's nest and fledged two, tagged green/pink 14 & 15.

Site 8. Male: Green/Red X. Female: Green/Red H.

Re-used last year's nest and fledged two, tagged green/pink P & Q.

Site 9. Male: Green/Red D. Female: Green/Red U.

They continue to use the same precarious nest, fledged one young, tagged green/pink W.

Site 10. Male: Green/White X. Female: Green/White 3.

Moved 0.5km to a different wood, but still on the same estate, nesting high in a prominent Scots pine. They fledged a large brood of three, tagged green/pink 3, 4 and S.

Site 11. Male: Green/Red 3. Female: Green/Red 5.

Following last year's nest collapse, it was not a surprise to find this pair had moved 0.5 km, built up a nest in a Scots pine and fledged a brood of three, tagged green/pink A, B and C.

Site 12. Male: Green/Red Q.

Female: Green/Red 7.

They re-used last year's nest and fledged two young, one was tagged green/pink 9; the other young had branched and so remained untagged. Following this male's dalliance last year with the Welsh female black/green X, this year he turned his attention to another interloper female (from north Scotland), blue/yellow 53 at **site 4**.



Site 13. Male: Green/Red 1. Female: Green/Red Z.

For the third year in a row this pair re-used the previous year's nest; two young were fledged and tagged green/pink J and K. Both young were over one kilogram in weight on 7 June, which points to the clutch of eggs being laid in the last week in March.



Site 14. Male: Green/Red 4. Female: Green/Blue A.

“The only pair to nest in a different tree every year for the last four years, even although they have been successful each year”. I wrote the above sentence last year and as sod’s law would have it they re-used last year’s nest! They fledged two young, tagged green/pink L and M.

Site 15. Male: Green/Blue U. Female: Green/Blue W.

The oldest pairing in our population, re-used last year’s nest and fledged two young, tagged green/pink G and H. With 14 young fledged in the last five breeding seasons, they also remain the most prolific breeders in the population.

Site 16. Male: Green/Red E. Female: Green/Yellow T.

It is thought that a change of nest tree was the likely reason for the nest to fail at the egg stage. They moved from an almost impenetrable Norway spruce to an open oak, which did not deliver as much protection to the nest. The nest wood is small, on the eastern flank of a hill at an elevation of 135 metres, so nest choice could be critical.

Site 17. Male: Green/Red J. Female: Green/Yellow S.

Re-used last year’s nest and fledged a fine brood of three, tagged green/pink D, E and F. With the largest young being over a kilogram and only 100 grams between smallest and largest on the 7th of June, this most likely would be another clutch that was completed in the last week of March.

Site 18. Male: Green/Yellow Z. Female: Green/Yellow P.

Once again re-used the previous year’s nest and once again fledged two young, tagged green/pink N and O.

Site 19. Male: Green/Green M. Female: Untagged.

Last year this male had an incestuous failed breeding attempt with his sister, however this year he found himself an untagged female. They built a nest in a small oak on the eastern edge of the Forest Park. The nest went on to fail at the chick stage. Cause of failure at this stage is always hard to determine, in this case accidentally falling out of the nest being the most likely reason.



Table 3. Wing-tag colours, origin/year code.

Year	Left tag (origin)	Right tag (year code)
2001	green—Galloway	blue
2002	green	white
2003	green	red
2004	green	yellow
2005	green	orange
2006	green	green
2007	green	purple
2008	(No tags fitted in Galloway this year)	black
2009	green	pink

Since 2001, kites wing tagged in UK and Eire have used a standardised colour code, each release area having their own left wing tag colour and the right wing tag coloured as **table 3**. Most years we have had kites dispersing from the North Scotland, Central Scotland and more recently the Aberdeen project; they have blue, red and purple left wing tags respectively, and, as mentioned above, right wing tags are coloured according to the standardised year code in **table 3**. We have yet to record any kites from either Northern Ireland or the Republic of Ireland but feel it is overdue, their left wing tags are brown and pale blue respectively.

If you have any enquiries about kites, the Galloway Kite Trail, or wish to report any sightings or would like to offer help to the project in any way, you can call RSPB Scotland on 01556 670464.

**George Christie,
RSPB Red Kite Officer, Dumfries & Galloway.**



Last year, summering ospreys to the region were easily seen around the kite trail, usually hunting along Loch Ken or Woodhall loch. This year, the long awaited expansion to our region's single breeding pair was realised when four pairs of ospreys nested, successfully producing six young between them. One of the nests, less than 2km from the GKT contained the male Welsh osprey photographed by Keith Kirk last year, identifiable by a special numbered leg ring.



The Galloway Kite Trail featured in many publications throughout the year, from regional local papers like the Galloway News, Standard and Gazette to Visit Scotland publications and the FCS Galloway Ranger.

Our excellent, newly revised website, kindly constructed and maintained by Angus McKay of www.gpxweb.com, continues to attract on average over 2,000 visits per month. The website now offers a downloadable copy of the most recent annual bulletin.

Find us at: www.gallowaykitetrail.com

How can you help?

The red kite reintroduction project continues to be most grateful for sightings of kites, particularly away from the Loch Ken area. Any sightings where wing tags are read are most important and helpful to the project. Almost all kites have coloured wing tags, which either have a number, letter or a symbol as their individual identification. Some kites are untagged and are considered equally important sightings.

Sites



Site 20. Male: Green/Yellow Q. Female: Green/Orange 114.

Reused last year's nest and went one better than last year, fledging two young, tagged green/pink 5 and 6.

Site 21. Male: Green/Yellow J. Female: Green/Yellow W.

As expected, this pair moved to a new nest tree, albeit only about 100 metres away from last year's nest tree. Last year a single dead chick was found close to the nest tree and lo and behold, this year there was a chick lying below the new nest tree, happily unlike last year this one was still alive. When climbing the tree it was found that most of the nest had fallen out as there was another young kite sitting on a branch. The nest was rebuilt while the young were being tagged green/pink 20 and 21. Both young have since been identified at the feeding station.

Site 22. Male: Green/Orange 110. Female: Green/Orange 112.

Once again, this pair chose a new nest site, laid a clutch and incubation began, but sadly, for the third year in a row the breeding attempt failed at the egg stage. There may well be some thing biologically wrong with one or other of these unfortunate kites. They now hold the unwanted record for the most continuous failed breeding attempts; a record I hope never to see broken in the future.

Site 23. Male: Green/Yellow O. Female: Green/Green U.

Another pair that moved nest site, even though they were successful last year, in this case one kilometre, but not surprisingly to an area where the male had been recorded carrying nest materials in 2007. He was obviously thinking ahead in 2007! They fledged one young, tagged green/pink 13.

Site 24. Male: Green/Orange 101. Female: Green/Blue 4.

Moved 0.8 km to a shelterbelt consisting mainly of Scots pine, repeated last year's success in fledging two young, tagged green/pink T and U.





Site 25. Male: Green/Orange 102. Female: Green/Green 5.

During last year's ringing program, the nest was found to have partially collapsed at some time, however Ciril rebuilt the nest so well that the pair re-used it this year. A similar outcome prevailed with two young fledged; they were tagged green/pink Z and 11.

Site 26. Male: Green/Green X. Female: Green/Green V.

Re-used last year's nest and improved on last year, fledging two young, tagged green/pink X and 10.

Site 27. Male: Green/Green Y. Female: Green/Green H.

Another to move 0.8 km to another nest site, it is interesting that they dropped from 135 metres to 50 metres in ground elevation which may well be significant. One young was fledged and tagged, green/pink Y.

Site 28. Male: Green/Orange 120. Female: Red/Green 2J.

Following last year's failed breeding attempt, it came as a big surprise to find the female incubating in the same nest. This is the first time a Galloway pair has been recorded re-using their previous year's failed nest. At least two eggs were laid and two young were observed alive at two weeks old, however on the day of ringing only one dead chick was found in the nest. The chick weighing 576grams had died at 3-4 weeks. The results of an examination of the dead chick carried out by Scottish Agricultural Science Agency (SASA) showed that the chick had been exposed to a second generation anticoagulant rodenticide containing the chemical Brodifacoum, although Brodifacoum poisoning was not thought to be the cause of death, the cause of death was not established.

Site 29. (Male: Green/Red Q. Female: Black/Green X in 2008)

The male, green/red Q was identified at his nest territory at **site 12** and on many occasions at **site 4**, while the female was not recorded in the area after 27/02/2009. This site is therefore considered vacant.

Site 30. Male: Green/Green B. Female: Green/Green J.

Moved 350 metres to a new nest tree, this time an ash, the first time this species of tree has been selected by kites in our area. Following last year's brood of three, only one young fledged this year, tagged green/pink 22.



Newcastle's (Northern Kites) project continues to progress towards joining the ranks of the other successful English kite regions of Yorkshire, East Midlands and Chilterns and along with Wales in having a self-sustaining breeding population. Hence, the UK will now and increasingly in the future have an important role in the conservation of the red kite in a European context, and next year both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland should add to this. There are approximately 1,800 breeding pairs in the UK and this equates to 7% of the global population. With problems like land use changes, secondary poisoning and persecution having an impact in the main European populations of Germany, France and Spain; it is all the more important that the UK is having this positive and timely input.

Galloway Kite Trail

New interpretation/information structures have now been installed around the Galloway Kite Trail (GKT), sited at Glenlaggan, Parton, Crossmichael and New Galloway. Most dedicated interpretation boards for these structures are affixed, while the remainder are in the advanced stage of production. These structures complement the existing infrastructure of the GKT and are a ready source of information for visitors to our region. As well as driving through these improvements to the GKT, Calum, our community liaison officer is often found at the feeding station at Bellmack Hill Farm, interpreting kites and promoting the local area and GKT to the many visitors. He continues to receive and honour many requests to visit local schools or meet their classes on the Trail, giving talks to local and some not so local communities, clubs and institutions and finding time to arrange and lead guided walks on sections of the Trail.

Given that the summer weather was so terrible, visitor numbers to the Trail are not only on a par with previous years, but slightly up and visitor feedback continues to be very positive. Clare Rollie joined Calum's usual volunteers Jeff, Michael and Ian during the summer months. Clare spent much of her summer break from university at the feeding station engaging with visitors and when not at the feeding station, collating the information gathered from our returned visitor questionnaires, producing the usual summary of interesting facts relating to visitors to the GKT. The interesting facts and the positive visitor feedback highlight the extremely worthwhile contribution that the GKT makes to local communities that host it. Not only in a financial way, although this is a measurable and important amount, but in showcasing not only the spectacle of the kites but all the natural biodiversity and social history of our region.



The 2009 breeding summary figures for Scotland show that in total there were approximately 160 territorial pairs, 149 breeding pairs of which, 113 bred successfully, fledging 234 young. In addition to our D&G figures, North Scotland had 53 pairs, of which 42 nested successfully and reared 95 young, Central Scotland had 61 pairs of which 37 nested successfully and reared 74 young. Aberdeen's first breeding year got this phase of their project off to an encouraging start with five territorial pairs all laying clutches, two pairs failing, leaving three pairs to successfully produce seven young. In the final year of the release phase, Aberdeen saw another 36 young released, which brought the total released up to 101 over three years.



News now from across the Irish Sea where another project to move into the breeding phase was the Co Wicklow based Republic of Ireland project, where five territorial pairs were located. Two active nests were found, sadly both failing at the egg stage, though it should be remembered that the mightily successful Chilterns project began in the same fashion. Co Wicklow also saw the release of 25 young kites, bringing the number of released kites to 81 in three years of their five-year release program. In the second year of a planned three-year release program the County Down-based Northern Ireland project released 27 young kites. They also recorded a couple of precocious young territorial pairs in the area, which augers well for next year. In the 1980's the virtual non-expansion of the then small Welsh kite population was a principal reason for reintroduction in the UK. Now The Welsh Kite Trust is supplying the young from a more plentiful Welsh population to both Irish projects. That said, given that we are only 20 miles or so from the Irish coast we have yet to record one of these young in Dumfries and Galloway.



Site 31. Male: Green/Green ? Female: Green/Purple 9.

This pair delivered an exciting piece of range expansion, as they were our first pair to be confirmed breeding in the Fleet valley. Sadly the attempt failed at the egg stage, however the female was still roosting in the area in late August and foraging there in late October, which augurs well for next year.

Site 32. Male: Green/Purple 8. Female: Green/Purple S.

A new pair, and another pair to utilise an ash tree for their nest, in fact very similar to site 30 in that both nest trees are dominant trees in old boundary lines, possibly remnants of ancient hedges. Two young were fledged, tagged green/pink 23 and 24.

Site 33. Male: Green/Purple T. Female: Green/Purple C.

This was a particularly satisfying nest to find as the female involved was fledged from the 2007 nest at **site 17**. The 2007 nest at **site 17** was the scene of our only recorded re-laid clutch following predation of the original clutch. Happily, this new pair went on to fledge two young, tagged green/pink 8 and V. As well as the above female, a male (green/purple F) from the same late brood, bred at **site 38 (see below)**.

Site 34. Male: Green/Purple P. Female: Green/Green 1.

I thought I had this pair's nest site located, only for them to desert the area owing to the burning of rubbish nearby. I re-located them one kilometre away and they went on to fledge two young, tagged green/pink 29 and 30.

Site 35. Male: Green/Red 2. Female: Green/Red F.

I had to give this breeding pair a new site code as they had shifted 2.5 kilometres to a new nest tree last year. This year was complicated with a young pair moving in to within 200 metres of the old nest site at **site 2**, indicating a shift in territory for the above pair. They re-used last year's nest and fledged one young, tagged green/pink R.

Site 36. Male: Green/Purple M. Female: Green/Green P.

A new pairing consisting of the female from last year's failed incestuous relationship at **site 19** and a young 2007 male. They built a very sparse nest in a larch, which subsequently blew out in strong winds, the eggs were found broken at the foot of the tree.

**Site 37. Male: Green/Green ?. Female: Green/Purple 7.**

This was an infuriating site, as the nest was never found, the attempt deemed to have failed by virtue of the female's behaviour. Leaving the finding of a nest until the adults are feeding young is a sound piece of fieldwork, its only Achilles heel is when the breeding attempt does not reach that stage!

Site 38. Male: Green/Purple F. Female: Green/Purple 6.

A new pair who built a sparse nest in a Scots pine, which owing to its sparseness and placement on a lateral branch, I predicted failure. However they went on to fledge two young, tagged green/pink 31 and 32. This was our latest laid clutch, probably in the last few days of April, with young just beginning to fly around the site in late August.

Site 39. Male: Green/Green ?. Female: Green/Green R.

One of three sites not to be identified until the last week of our ringing programme, but just in time to tag the young. This pair was on site last year so it was no surprise to locate them. Sometimes locating nesting pairs can be down to a single fortunate sighting rather than dogged fieldwork. They fledged two young, tagged green/pink 25 and 26.

Site 40. Male: Green/Green ?. Female: Green/Green ?.

A culmination of sightings by volunteer Michael and a few days' intense fieldwork by project manager Chris allowed us to locate this nest. The nest was built on top of an old crow nest about 28 metres high in the crown of a large sycamore and knowing the crispness with which small sycamore branches snap, scaling it was not for the faint hearted. Two young were tagged green/pink 27 and 28.

Site 41. Male: Green/Green ?. Female: Green/Green ?.

I was very thankful for the suggestion from Brian the gardener at **site 40** which led me to be guided to this nest by the estate gamekeeper Colin and his son Danny. Locating nesting kites can be a time consuming occupation and I was very grateful for the assistance given, especially when the time to tag young was running out. Within a couple of days, we had tagged two big young green/pink 18 and 19. The last three sites are all the more important as they underline and underpin the expansion of the red kite population. All three nests are on the periphery of the kite breeding core area and the resulting young will be in the vanguard to deliver the next wave of expansion.

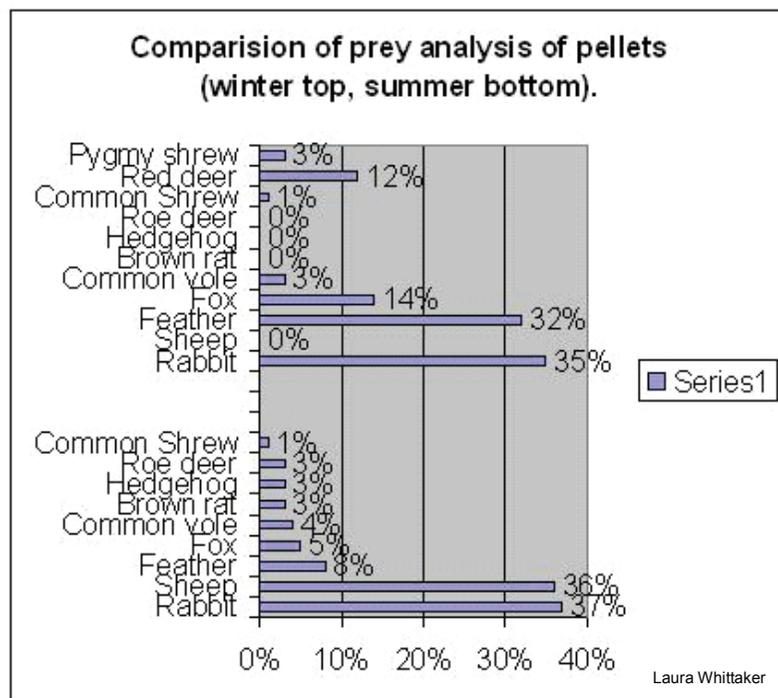


Areas with regular sightings this year have been predominantly to the northeast and east: Durisdeer, Holestane, Dalswinton Auldgirth and Shawhead. It will not surprise me in the least to find a nesting pair in these areas next year as they are highly suitable for red kites, containing an abundance of the nesting and foraging habitat required by breeding red kites. We remain keen to hear reports of any kites away from the Loch Ken, core area, or indeed of any kites suspected breeding.

**Movements of Dumfries & Galloway kites**

Green/white 5 and green/orange 117 remain in Central Scotland and both bred successfully. Dispersal of Dumfries and Galloway kites to other areas has just been as low key as the recording of incoming kites mentioned above. Prior to January 2009 only one of our 2008 radio tagged kites had left D&G, however another three had left by the end of June. One of them was recorded at a communal roost in Aberuchill in Perthshire but only to return to D&G within two weeks. Again, I must mention the fact that we did not wing tag the 2008 cohort and so much evidence of dispersal is not available. We can, however, relate the records of movements of radio tagged kites within the untagged 2008 cohort to give us an indication of the wellbeing of the whole cohort. The only other recorded movements were of green/purple K and an untagged 2008 female, both of which were recorded on many occasions approximately twenty miles to the northeast of the core area throughout the breeding season. As mentioned earlier this may be a breeding pair for the future, although, whilst their movements were to similar locations they appeared independent of each other.





Other kites in Galloway

This last year has been one of the quietest years for numbers of incoming kites, with only two having been recorded, both from the Aberdeen reintroduction project. One of them, purple/purple 26 first showed up in Dumfries and Galloway in October 2007, returned north as far as Central Scotland in April 2008 and then returned to Dumfries and Galloway four months later in July 2008, only to leave us again in March this year. The other, purple/black 57 appeared at the feeding station at Bellymack Hill Farm in early June 2009, remaining in the area only for a few days before moving on. Of the previous year's incomers: leucistic black/purple V8 from Wales was found dead in Derbyshire in April 2009, black/green X, also from Wales was last recorded in Dumfries and Galloway in February 2009. It will be interesting to see what numbers of incomers are recorded this winter following the strangely low numbers of the last.

Sites



Site 42. Male: Green/Green ?. Female: Untagged.

Whilst watching a known site I espied this male dropping into this hitherto unrecorded site. Later in the season, I visited the site, only to find a used nest with at least two broken eggs below the nest. The nest was probably left unguarded by inexperienced kites, which left it open to predation by carrion crows or ravens, both present in the immediate area.

Table 2: Summary of breeding, Galloway 2003-2009

Year	Pairs located	Pairs laying eggs	Pairs hatching eggs	Pairs fledging young	% pairs laying that fledged young	Total young fledged	Productivity young/laying pair
2003	4	4	1	1	25	1	0.25
2004	7	3	2	2	66	3	1
2005	14	12	10	10	83	18	1.5
2006	19	17	14	14	82	27	1.59
2007	22	21	19	19	90	38	1.81
2008	32	30	26	25	83	53	1.77
2009	41	40	33	31	77.5	58	1.45
total	139	127	105	102	80%	198	1.56

Mortality

As usual, my thanks to the landowners; gamekeepers, employees of estates and members of the public who have alerted us on finding trapped or debilitated kites. Some kites, particularly young inexperienced ones, have no fear over entering crow traps, pheasant pens etc in their quest for carrion and hence will be inadvertently trapped. I am very grateful for receiving these calls and for the opportunity to identify, treat and release these kites.

Monitoring nesting attempts gives us the opportunity to check on adult survival, any changes in personnel are usually picked up at this time. This



.year's territory. As he was considered a bit of an interloper at **site 4** last year, he may have moved on. All the other previous year's pairings appeared to be intact and present on their territories, so adult survival continues to be very good indeed.



Of two kites found dead this year, one was an adult, 2007 male, green/purple 1. The victim of a bizarre death when he was found to have a rubber-docking ring lodged round his tongue, preventing swallowing of food; hence, cause of death was starvation and dehydration. The other, a recently fledged 2009 juvenile was put down following a road traffic accident.

As highlighted in the sites section there were various nests where young kites were found dead or their remains were found close to the nest tree. Reasons for or causes of these deaths can only be guessed at; rain, cold wind, avian predation and falling from the nest while defecating being some of the possible answers.

Usually I finish the mortality section with a positive look to the next year owing to the fact that we know how many of the previous year's kites are still present in the core area through wing tag readings. However, in 2008 we did not fit any wing tags and obviously one untagged kite just looks like any other, so quantifying how many untagged potential breeders are remaining in our area is almost impossible. It will be both challenging and rewarding in the next year to find these nests involving 2008 untagged kites. My personal aspiration is for a thriving population of untagged red kites in Scotland and next year may be the beginning of that realisation in Galloway as these untagged kites breed for the first time..

Additional points of interest



This report summarises the findings from last year when we had a student, Laura Whittaker-Bush, from Cumbria University, Penrith, carrying out research on the diet preferences of red kites, both in summer and winter based on the analysis of regurgitated pellets. These regurgitated pellets contain the remains of indigestible matter, ie hair, feather and bones of food taken by kites. This research was the basis of her dissertation which along with her other university studies allowed her to receive a Degree in Animal Conservation Science. The list of prey in the table underlines the known fact that red kites have a varied diet, usually in the form of carrion, although small mammals and young of corvids, pigeons and waders will also feature.

Pellets are dried, and then broken up to reveal their ingredients (skulls, jaw bones, hair and feathers) some of them by use of a microscope. Skulls and jawbones of small mammals can be identified by eye; a microscope is used to identify the species that the hairs are from, as most mammalian hairs are diagnostically different from one and other under a microscope. Unfortunately, Laura and Cumbria University did not have the money or time to break down the feather component into species, this would have been interesting given the difference in percentages for winter and summer. However, the answer will probably be that there are more birds about following a breeding season; resulting in more to die in winter, and that also in our area many partridges and pheasants are reared and released for game shooting in the autumn/winter. Many of these are killed on roads and become available to kites. So, in summing up, animal husbandry (lambing and calving) predominately in the spring and game rearing in autumn/winter allied to sufficient numbers of rabbits and voles ensures there is an adequate food supply for kites to utilise throughout the year. Important food sources that do not show up in pellets are insects, worms, toads, frogs and an increasing incidence of fish remains at nest sites.