



giving
nature
a home

Red Kites in Dumfries and Galloway

A reintroduction project

Issue: Autumn 2013



Helping to give nature a home

RSPB Scotland's
work in the Dumfries
and Galloway Area
is supported by:



Scottish Natural Heritage
Dualchas Nàdair na h-Alba

All of nature for all of Scotland
Nàdar air fad airson Alba air fad

Red kite image
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Green/yellow R, 2004 female on her nest at site 5



The breeding season

MARCH

Over the years we have ascertained by monthly nest visits that some kites lay their eggs on the last few days of March. So, as you can imagine the heavy snow event of 22 March was not ideal.

APRIL

Still cold with periods of easterly winds but the snow eventually melted. Sadly, the bodies of two kites were discovered - victims of the same weather conditions that devastated the surrounding farmers' early lambing season. The breeding season then got underway in earnest. That final ingredient "sheep's wool" used to line the nests (holding 1 - 4 eggs) became readily available now that the snow was gone and sheep were back in the fields.

MAY

Now a constant routine of checking active nests while looking for new ones. A month on and the behaviour of some incubating females changed, they were sitting higher in the nest indicating that the first of the year's chicks had hatched. Less welcome was the growing number of failed nests, the result of the cold, late spring.

Summary of Breeding red kites in Dumfries and Galloway: 2003 - 2013

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
2010	52	51	49	47	92	98	1.92
2011	65	58	53	53	91	100	1.72
2012	73	69	56	52	75	97	1.4
2013	86	77	65	63	82	91	1.18
total	415	382	328	317	83	584	1.53

The breeding season continued

JUNE

By now we just about know the final breeding figures, which are in the summary chart opposite, a rise of 11% in the population from last year. Thirteen pairs failed, not as bad as last year, but still reflects the poor weather at egg laying/incubation. Almost all 13 failed at incubation, with at least one pair failing at the small chick stage.

From the middle of June onwards we begin nest visits to assess the number of large young, which in any normal year then go on to fledge successfully. This year, the total number of fledged young was estimated to be a minimum of 91.

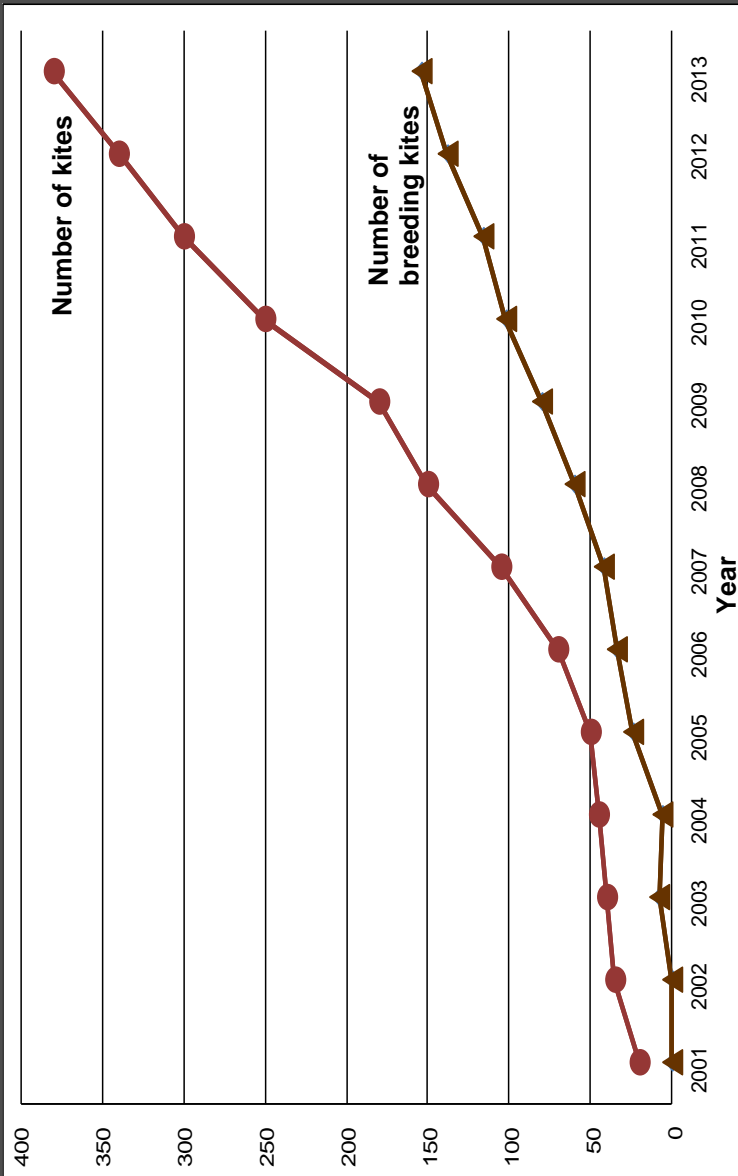
JULY

A handful of nests were visited to confirm large young to complete the season, mostly new first-time breeders, which are always a wee bit later than the more experienced pairs. On 19 July, the final two nests were confirmed as having single large young individuals at both site 2 and site 75.

A call from a member of public as to a young kite on the road led us to finding the nest site of pair 77. The single young had abandoned the nest, probably under onslaught from crows (judging by damage to the back of its head, where it had been pecked, leaving it with the proverbial 'Mohican').

We use the first appearance of fledged young at the feeding station at Bellymack Hill Farm as a benchmark. So, the first juvenile was seen at the feeding station on 31 July, which is approximately a week later than usual. Incidentally, the previous late show at the feeding station by juveniles followed the equally poor winter of 2010.

Population chart



Population and Expansion

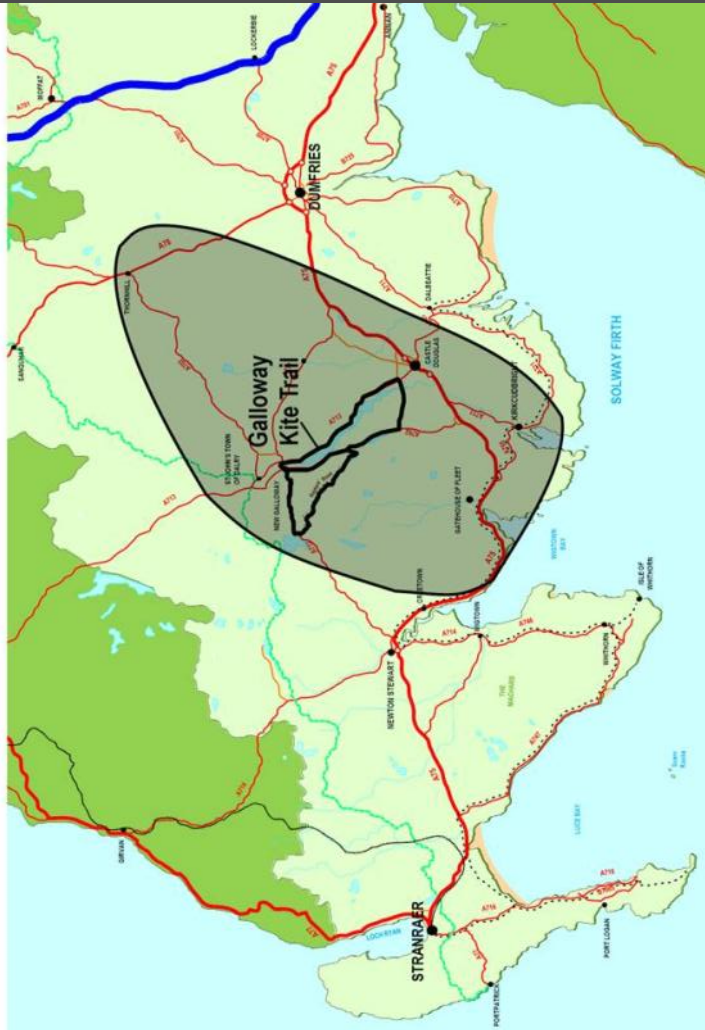
Population

The population of red kites in Dumfries and Galloway is approximately 300 - 400 individuals. Like all species, the early years of red kites are their most dangerous. A third of fledged young will be lucky to survive their first winter, although if they do, their future survival is more certain. Owing to some young kites' propensities for dispersing, some after fledging and some the following spring, survival and population numbers can only ever be an approximation. The number of breeding kites, 154 individuals (77 pairs), is a much more reliable indicator of our minimum population in the region.

Expansion

Within Dumfries and Galloway red kites are now breeding in sixteen 10 kilometre squares, from Creetown in the west to Thornhill in the east. Anyone familiar with the area will notice that the expansion of the D&G population is affected by conifer forests and our high hill ranges like the Rhins of Kells, Merrick and Fleet ranges, which kites tend to avoid. Kites can disperse great distances from their natal nest sites, so anyone with knowledge of the presence of kites outwith the shaded area on the map overleaf can assist the project by contacting us at the RSPB Crossmichael office, on 01556 670464.

RED KITE BREEDING RANGE, SOUTH SCOTLAND



As ever, I acknowledge the assistance and patience granted to the project from the ever growing group of landowners, farmers, gamekeepers, volunteers and members of the public within Dumfries and Galloway, many thanks to all.

George Christie, RSPB Scotland Red Kite Officer