Red Kite in Shropshire 2005 - 25





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Photos

Cover
Top: the first two young in a Shropshire nest, north-west of Knighton, in 2006
© Leo Smith and Tony Cross
Bottom: the first tagged Kite at a Shropshire nest from another tagging scheme, near Church Stretton in 2022, originally tagged in north Dorset
© Terry Moore
Opposite
Right Pink 30, the oldest tagged Shropshire Kite, near Clunbury in 2025
© Simon Marlow



Introduction

2025 marks the 20th anniversary of the first confirmed breeding of Red Kite in Shropshire for almost 130 years.

The Shropshire Breeding Bird Atlas 1992, covering the period 1985-90, reported that Red Kite was "recorded in five of the Atlas years, with a total of 11 breeding season records, mainly in early April or July". In 1993, the Shropshire Bird Report, published by Shropshire Ornithological Society (SOS), listed 11 records from 10 sites, and the numbers grew steadily to 54 records from 32 sites in 2003.

A forerunner of things to come, a tagged Kite was found dead near Lydbury North on 23 August 2003. It was waterlogged, found in the deep very soft mud in an almost dry farm pond, and believed drowned. It had been ringed near Pumsaint, near Lampeter, Carmarthenshire, on 7 July 2003, only 77 days before finding, 52 miles away.

The Welsh Kite Trust, with the help of the Shropshire Raptor Study Group since 2010, have been searching for Kite nests since the 2003 breeding season.

Reports have been published each year since 2005, the most recent covering 2021 and 2022. This report therefore recaps on the records since 2005, and provides detail of the monitoring in 2023-25.

Results since 2005

Two nests were found in 2005, both near Knighton in south-west Shropshire. The eggs were incubated for the full term in the nest nearest to Knighton, about 4km away, but the nest was abandoned around the time the eggs were due to hatch. The second nest, about 6km from Knighton, failed very early, at the start of incubation.

A pair returned to the nest nearest Knighton in 2006, and two young fledged, the first successful breeding since 1876.

The annual number of breeding pairs increased rapidly, and the range spread. The results are summarised in the table below, and described in more detail in the remainder of this report.

Table 1. Breeding pairs, successful nests and fledged Young 2005-25

Year	Nests Found	Success-ful nests	Fledged Young (Found Nests)	Cumu-lative	Additional pairs (Confirmed Breeding	Total pairs (Confirmed Breeding)
Up to 2022	406	291	502			406
2023	57	42	80	582	5	62
2024	47	34	55	637	6	53
2025	51	39	66	703	2	53
Total 2005-25	**561**	**406**	**703**		**13**	**574**

Some of these nests are very close together, and several pairs have neighbours within three kilometres.

The population is still concentrated in the south-west hills, Fifty or more breeding pairs were found for the first time in 2021, and 62 breeding pairs (including 57 nests) were found in 2023. The slightly smaller totals in 2024 and 2025 were due to reduced availability of Raptor Group members to undertake the fieldwork, rather than a reduction in the number of Kite nests.

In 2023, the year with the highest number of nests found, 38 (66.7%) out of the total of 57 were concentrated in the south-west quadrant, in Ordnance Survey National Grid 10km squares SO27, 28, 37, 38, 39, 47, 48 and 49,. Fifteen (26.3%) were in the northern half (SJ

squares), and 4 (7.0%) were in the south-east quadrant (10km square SO57 – SO79). A similar pattern has been found in each of the last four years, However, fieldwork by the Raptor Group was concentrated in the south-west, and more reports of Kites from elsewhere in the County would be gratefully received.

Records of Kites submitted to Shropshire Ornithological Society (SOS) have increased massively, year on year, in each of the previous seven years (apart from in 2023), reflecting the Kite's continued population growth and expansion of range. Over 1950 records were received in 2025, substantially more than just over 1250 in 2023 and 2022. Just over a third were again from the south-west (10km squares SO27-SO49), where the population is still concentrated (the low proportion reflects the distribution of active birders, not the Kites) However , many records were from the very edges of the County, including 11 different sites to the west of Oswestry, and several more along the northern county border across to Wood Lane and Whixall, all in the north-west; and several more around Newport and Market Drayton in the north-east, Shifnal and Albrighton in the east, Bridgnorth and several locations around Titterstone Clee in the south-east, and Ludlow in the south. This species has been encountered throughout Shropshire for some years now, and there were again several records from suburban Shrewsbury and Telford.

Fifty or more young have fledged in each of the six years 2020-25, all of which were considerably higher than the previous highest annual total (36 in 2011).

A total of 207 chicks had wing-tags fitted in the nest up until 2021. The oldest known tagged Shropshire Kite has been found every year since 2020, nesting near Clunbury, and was 16 years old when photographed in 2025..The results of monitoring tagged Kites are described in a later section of this Report.

Monitoring 2023-25
The results are set out in Table 1 above, and described in more detail in the remainder of this Report.

About 170 different sites have been used since 2005. Efforts are made every year to check all the sites occupied in the previous three years, and as many of the others as possible, but many sites, with no nest for some years, are not revisited.

Two unsuccessful nests were found in 2005, and between then and 2014, 59% of the total nest sites used in that 10-year period were used for one year only. Thirteen sites used between 2015 and 2017 were also used for one year only. Several sites occupied for the first time since 2018 have also been used only once, but as the population has increased, some of the sites occupied in earlier years have been reoccupied after a gap of several years.

Figures for 2017-25 include a nest literally on the County border, near Bromfield. The border is a stream, and in some years the wood and tree trunk was on the Herefordshire side, but the nest over-hanged the Shropshire side of the stream. In other years the nest and nest tree is wholly in Herefordshire. However, in every year the nest is in tetrad SO47N, which is a tetrad included in the Shropshire Bird Atlas, because more than half of it is in Shropshire.

Expansion of Range
Prior to 2012, the known breeding sites were restricted to the south-west quadrant of the County (10km squares SO10-39). However, the first nest east of the A49 road was found south-south-east of Church Stretton in 2012, and the first nest site north of Shrewsbury (in SJ41T) was found in 2017, although that site has not been reoccupied since. Another nest site was found in the northern half of the County (the SJ ordnance survey grid squares), in 2017, 10km south-west of Shrewsbury, and it has been occupied each year since. Another pair

nested only 600m distant in 2021, and annually since 2023, and raised another two young, but only one pair was present in 2022.

Another site north of Shrewsbury, in SJ41Z near Bomere Heath, was reported in 2019; the nest was found, and one young fledged. This site was apparently occupied in 2017, unknown to the Raptor Group, and three young fledged, but the pair there in 2018 apparently failed and left early. This site was occupied successfully again in 2020 and each year since.

The pair reported as nesting near Llanyblodwel (SJ22G) in 2018 was reported again in 2019, and Kites were seen at that location again in each year since, but permission to access the wood was not obtainable. Nesting was eventually confirmed in 2022, but the nest failed, and two recently fledged young were seen in 2024. The landowners reported that Kites had been present in the wood for 2-3 years prior to 2018.

A nest was found near Buildwas, in the Severn Valley, between the two major towns of Shrewsbury and Telford, in 2022, and in each year since..

Nests were found for the first time in the north (SJ OS Grid Squares) near Marton (SJ20, one site in 2023, and another in 2025), Meadowtown (SJ30B, in 2023), Bromlow Callow (SJ30F, in 2023), Loton Park (SJ31M), and West Felton (SJ32M), both in 2023, Eyton (SJ50W in 2024) and near Shifnal (SJ70T) in 2025.

The successful nest found in 2019 east of Church Stretton, near Longville (SO59I), successfully fledged two young in 2020, one in 2021 and at least two in the four years 2022-25. Two other nests were found in adjacent tetrads in 2021, but neither was occupied in 2022.

The expansion into the south-east has continued as well, with a nest reported in 2019 from near Bridgnorth in SO78Z. A pair was reported at a different site near Bridgnorth in SO79H from 2020 onwards, and a nest was found there in 2025. A nest was found on the lower western slopes of Brown Clee in 2020, and two young fledged, but the site was not occupied in 2021 or 2022, although there was probably a nest nearby. Nests were found at three other sites in the south-east, all to the west of Brown Clee, in 2022, and in each subsequent year.

A nest was found in the far south-east corner in Wyre Forest (SO77E), also in 2025.

In addition to the above nests found by the Raptor Group, surveys by the Community Wildlife Groups (CWGs) have shown that the number of Kites in the north-west has increased considerably in recent years. The Tanat to Perry Community Wildlife Group surveys 43 tetrads south and south-west of Oswestry. In 2022, at least nine Kites were seen in eight tetrads, slightly fewer than 12 in seven tetrads in 2021, and in 2020. In 2019, nine were seen in eight tetrads, and in 2018 11 were seen in 10 tetrads. Prior to 2018, Kites were much more scarce, and several members who saw Kites in 2018 said it was the first time they have seen them in the area, so these numbers reflect the spread of this species. In

Red Kite is also a target species for bird surveys carried out by other Community Wildlife Groups, covering the Severn –Vyrnwy Confluence, the Three Parishes (Weston Rhyn, St. Martin's and Gobowen - Oswestry north), Abdon District (west of Brown Clee), and (Titterstone) Clee Hill. The number of Kites seen, and the number of tetrads where Kites were recorded, has increased steadily, and, for example, Kites were seen in more tetrads outside the main range by members of these groups in 2019 than in the whole of the six years of Atlas fieldwork 2008-13.

In 2025, in the Tanat to Perry (Oswestry South) area, at least 9 Kites were recorded in 7 tetrads, while in the Three Parishes (Oswestry North) area, at least 6 Kites were recorded in 5 tetrads. In Titterstone Clee area, in the south-east quadrant, at least 9 individual Kites were

recorded in 5 tetrads in 2024, and in the adjacent Abdon district, around 26 Kites were recorded in 10 tetrads in 2025. These observations do not qualify for inclusion in Figure 1, but they do show an increase in the breeding season range since 2008-13.
As the population increases and spreads, nests become harder to find, so the breeding population is now undoubtedly well over the 68 breeding pairs located in 2022, and almost certainly exceeds 100 pairs

Distribution 2005-25

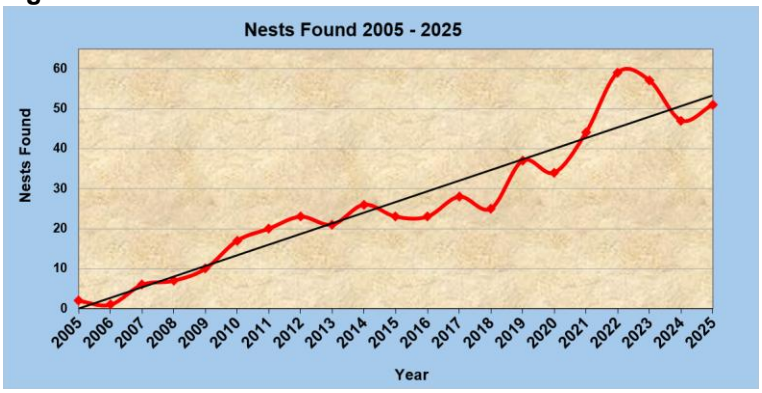
The Birds of Shropshire, published by Liverpool University Press in December 2019, included a Red Kite distribution map based on fieldwork carried out between 2008 and 2013. Each symbol represents one of the 870 tetrads (2x2 kilometre squares on the Ordnance Survey national grid) in the County. Tetrads with Confirmed and Probable breeding are represented by round red dots (larger size = confirmed breeding), pink squares are tetrads where kite was seen in the breeding season, and pale blue squares are where it was seen in winter but not the breeding season.

The tetrads containing the nests found since 2013 listed above (which excludes additional nests found in the main range, the south-west quadrant) have been added to the map, marked with red squares, as shown in Figure 1 overleaf. Fifteen of these red squares were added to the map for the three-year period 2023-25.

Population Growth 2005-25

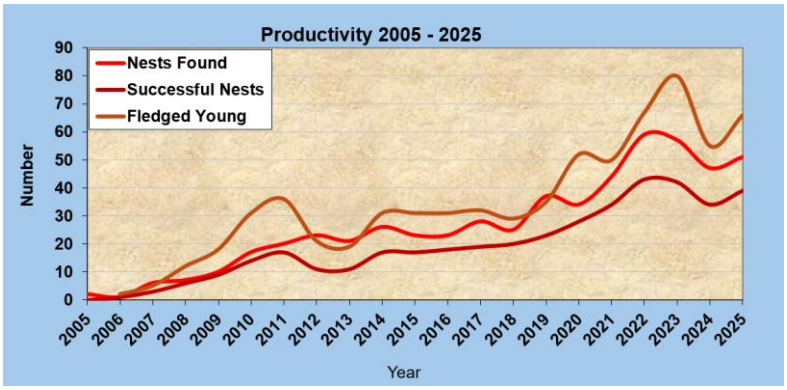
Kites returned to breed here in 2005, after an absence of almost 130 years, and the first known successful breeding occurred the following year. The number of nests found has grown rapidly, as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Nests Found 2005-2025



More than 50 were found for the first time in 2022. The dip in 2020 reflects the reduction in fieldwork effort, due to coronavirus restrictions, and the dips in 2024 and 2025 reflect a slightly reduced fieldwork effort by Raptor Group members, for personal reasons, rather than a reduction in the Kite population itself. Indeed, there has been a big increase in records of Red Kite submitted to SOS, many via BTO BirdTrack and eBird, in the last three years (a 57% increase since 2022), and this provides further evidence that there are over 100 breeding pairs now.

Figure 3. Productivity: Nests Found, Successful Nests and Fledged Young 2005-25



Since the first successful breeding in 2006, over 700 young are known to have flown from Shropshire nests. The number of nests found, successful nests and fledged young in each year is shown in Figure 3, and summarised in Table 2. Since the first successful nest, average productivity has been 1.25 fledged young per nest found and 1.73 per successful nest.

The annual figures are shown in Table 2 below.

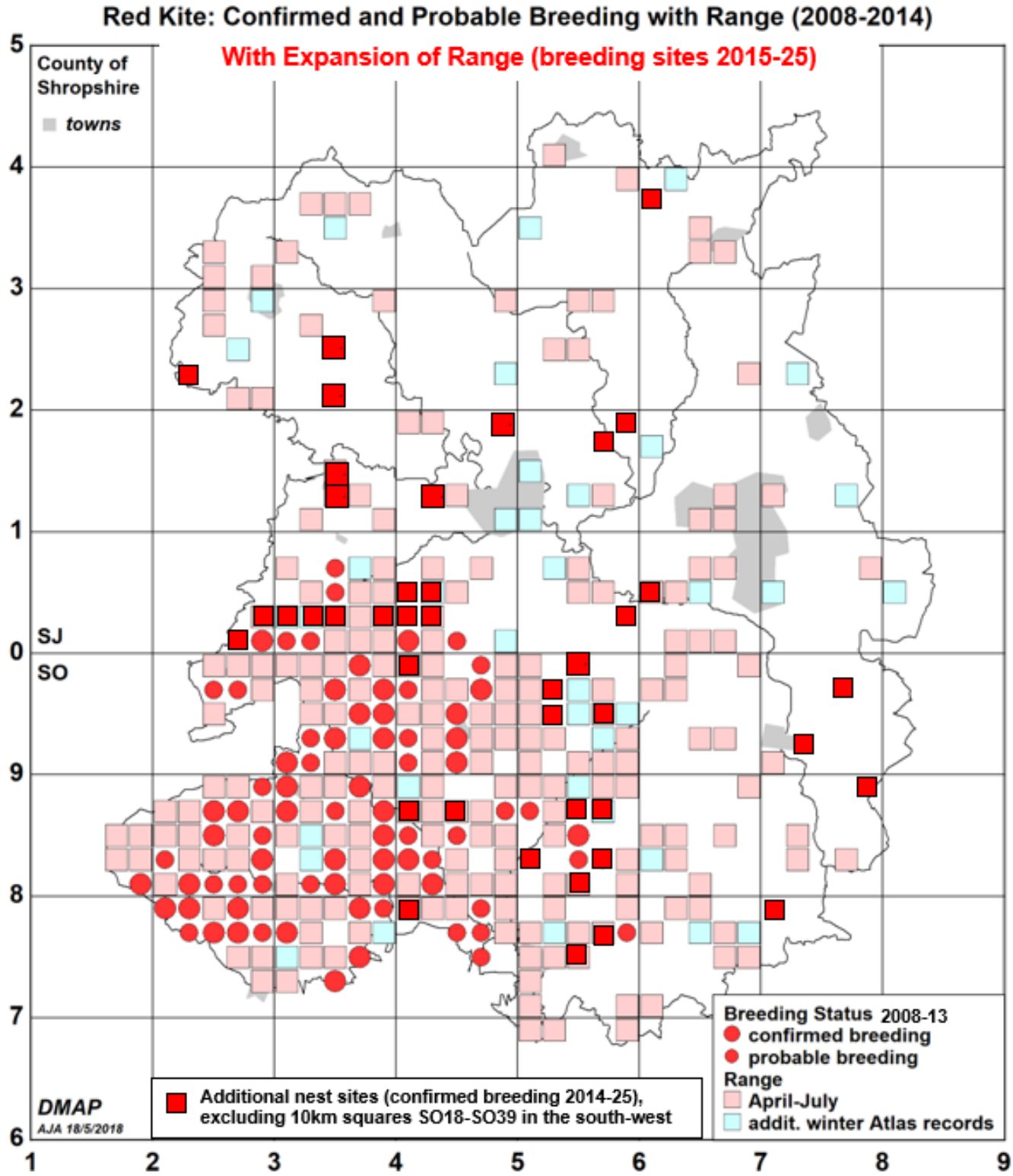


Figure 1. Distribution Map 2008-25

Productivity

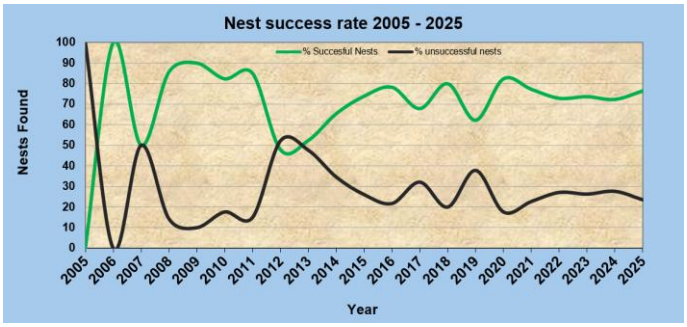
Up until 2019, the most productive year was 2011, when 36 young fledged from only 20 found nests. Fifty or more young have fledged from found nests in every year since 2020, and at least 67 are known to have fledged in 2022, 80 in 2023 and 64 in 2025.

Table 2. Nests Found, Successful nests, Fledged Young and Productivity

Nests and Outcome	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Nests Found	2	1	6	7	10	17	20	23	21	26	23
Successful Nests	0	1	3	6	9	14	17	11	11	17	17
% Succesful Nests	0	100	50.0	85.7	90.0	82.4	85.0	47.8	52.4	65.4	73.9
Fledged Young		2	5	12	18	31	36	21	19	31	31
Productivity / Nest		2.00	0.83	1.71	1.80	1.82	1.80	0.91	0.90	1.19	1.35
Productivity / Successful Nest		2.00	1.67	2.00	2.00	2.21	2.12	1.91	1.73	1.82	1.82

Nests and Outcome	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	Total
Nests Found	23	28	25	37	34	44	59	57	47	51	561
Successful Nests	18	19	20	23	28	34	43	42	34	39	406
% Succesful Nests	78.3	67.9	80.0	62.2	82.4	77.3	72.9	73.7	72.3	76.5	72.4
Fledged Young	31	32	29	35	52	50	67	80	55	66	703
Productivity / Nest	1.35	1.14	1.16	0.95	1.53	1.14	1.14	1.40	1.17	1.29	1.25
Productivity / Successful Nest	1.72	1.68	1.45	1.52	1.86	1.47	1.56	1.90	1.62	1.69	1.73

Figure 4. Nest Success Rate 2005-25



Productivity varies from year to year, affected mainly by weather conditions. Heavy rain, strong winds and cold temperatures all limit success at the incubation stage, while heavy rain or drought conditions affect the availability of prey to feed young in the nest. Figure 4 shows the proportion of successful and failed nests each year.

As usual, productivity in Shropshire nests was considerably higher than in the adjacent monitoring area in East Powys, where the comparable figures were an average of 0.84 fledged young per nest found and 1.28 per successful nest since 2003, and 0.83/1.3, 0.68/1.1 and 0.59/1.0 for the three years 2023-25.

Better productivity in Shropshire is attributed to better weather (generally warmer and drier), and better food supply, particularly the massive amount of Pheasant carrion available year-round from the estimated two million released in the County each year for shooting.

Estimated Date of Fledging

Eggs are laid at three-day intervals. Incubation starts immediately, and lasts for 32 (31 - 35) days per egg. If more than one chick hatches, the oldest is dominant, and is fed first. Second and third chicks only get food when their older siblings are satiated, so they tend to grow more slowly than the eldest, and take longer to fledge. If there are three chicks in a nest, their ages may be 9 days apart, and appear more. Therefore to estimate the first egg date, it is necessary to identify the oldest chick in the nest, from the extent of feathers and remaining down. Be aware that females are bigger than males, so in a few instances, a female which is the second oldest may be the biggest.

A spreadsheet was developed to forecast the date when the chicks were the right age to tag (between 5 and 6 weeks). They would fledge about one week later, at about 7 weeks. The spreadsheet has been modified to forecast the fledging date, assuming hatch to fledge = 49 days.

The chick is downy white for about 3 weeks, then brown feathers start emerging on the back and wings, then on the head. The tail feathers appear last. When they are not being fed, the

chicks usually lie flat in the nest, and only stand up for long periods when they are close to fledging. A couple of days later they move out of the nest onto the branches of the tree, and will fledge in another couple of days.

Observers note the amount of white down and feathers on the body, and head, and the length of the tail feathers (the length of feather protruding from the quill / sheath) if visible, and enter into the spreadsheet the date and a code number to describe the oldest chick, using reference photos of chicks in the nest. The spreadsheet automatically calculates the estimated date of fledging.

Estimated First Egg Date

The spreadsheet then calculates the estimated first egg date by deducting the fledging period (average 7 weeks i.e. 49 days) and incubation period (average 32 days) from the estimated fledging date. The word “estimated” is stressed – both the incubation period and particularly the fledging period vary from the average, especially if the spring is cold, or the available food supply is unusually poor.

Observers are advised to work quickly, to minimise disturbance. A visit around 20 June is likely to be the best opportunity to see all the chicks in the nest, just before they fledge, but a second, later, visit may be needed to a late or relay nest.

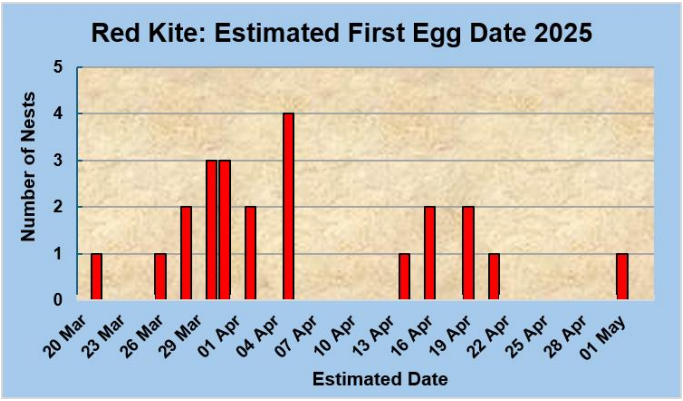
The Estimated First Egg Dates in 2024 and 2025 are shown in Figures 5 and 6.

Figure 5. Estimated First Egg Dates 2024

In 2024, the earliest nest had its first egg on 30 March, and all 22 nests had an average first egg date of 8 April

In 2025, the earliest nest had its first egg on 21st March, and all 23 nests had an average first egg date of 3rd April. The very late clutch started on 1 May was almost certainly a relay after the first nesting attempt failed.

Figure 6. Estimated First Egg Dates 2025



Nest Tree Species

The species of tree holding the nest has been recorded for 501 of the 568 nests found. Almost three-fifths (59%) have been in oak trees, and 12.8% in larches. Twenty-one tree species have been used altogether, but no other species has reached 5% of the recorded nests found. Six species have only been used once, and 2 only twice.

The number of species used has grown steadily, reflecting the increasing number of nests found.

In 2022, the year with the highest number of tree species recorded (56), 32 (58%) were in Oaks, 8 (13%) were in Larches, 5 (9%) were in Spruces, and no other species reached 5.

The annual totals are shown in Appendix 1, which also shows the full list of tree species used.

White Kites

White Kites are leucistic, lacking the brown pigment in the feathers. They are not true albinos, as they do have pigment in the cere and legs (yellow as normal), and in the iris in the eye.

This is believed to be a result of the genetic bottleneck in the Welsh population, when there were only two breeding females in the 1930s, and in 2010 it affected about 1 in 150 Kites. Few have attempted to breed, but all those known have been males, so they may all be males. None are known to have bred successfully.

As the population has grown the genetic diversity has increased, and white Kites have become even more rare.

A white Kite was seen several times in the Clun Forest in 2011, and was found as the male in a breeding pair near Newcastle in 2012, which failed.

Another white Kite was seen several times near Bridges, during 2017 and in the early spring in 2018. It was not found at a nest site, and has not been seen subsequently.

No other white Kites have been reported since then in Shropshire..

Poisoning
In 2014, an adult was found dead on the ground directly under one nest. There were no visible signs of injury or persecution, but the landowner had used rat poison in a nearby barn. Two well grown chicks were later found dead in the nest, presumably from the same cause. Rat poison is a common cause of death, and it is found in potentially lethal amounts in most dead Kites sent for post-mortem. The corpse of this adult was sent for post-mortem analysis immediately after it was found, but preliminary results were not received until 24 January 2017. Extensive haemorrhaging was found, similar to that “found in birds in which high levels of anticoagulant rodenticides have been detected”, and samples were sent to the Predatory Birds Monitoring Scheme for further analysis. No further results have been received.

Another dead Kite, found at a nest site near Hopesay, was sent to the Predatory Bird Monitoring Scheme for a post-mortem in June 2021. It was a young bird, not one of the adults, and apparently died of starvation, but it was too decomposed to draw firm conclusions. No poisoning was detected.

Wing Tags
A total of 207 chicks have been wing-tagged in 126 different nests since 2006, all except 11 in 2017 or earlier, by Tony Cross of the mid-Wales Ringing Group. This involved carrying climbing equipment to the nest site, often up steep slopes, and climbing the nest tree, often twice if the young birds were brought down to the ground for ringing and measuring. Nests were, on average, about 14 metres (45 feet) above the base of the tree. All these chicks were reared in the wild. None were captive-reared and released. BTO metal rings were also fitted, and the chicks were weighed and the length of the fifth primary feather was measured, which often enabled the sex of the nestling to be determined.

Each tag has an inscription (upper- or lower-case letters, numbers and / or symbols) on a background colour, and a coloured bar underlining the inscription. The background colour is different on each wing. That on the right wing identifies the year, and that on the left wing identifies the geographical area (black in the case of the Shropshire and mid-Wales tagging scheme). The coloured bar below the inscription shows the main background colour of the opposite wing tag. In early years the inscription was either white or black, but when all the available background colours had been used, they were repeated, using different colours for the inscriptions.

Observers therefore need to note the inscription, the colour of the inscription, the main background colour of the tag, the colour of the bar at the bottom of the tag, and which wing the

tag was on. A complete description of the colours used on wing tags can be found on the Welsh Kite Trust website https://welshkitetrust.wales/

Photographers who take digital pictures of Kites are requested to blow them up and check for wing-tags. If the photo is sharp, the tag can often be read, as in the cases below, and such photos provide very useful information.

i. Tags at breeding sites

In total, 34 tagged kites have been found at Shropshire nest sites. The adults at the first two Shropshire nests, in 2005 and 2006, were all untagged. In the following years, four of the early pioneers, three males and one female, (first breeding 2007-08) were tagged, and came from Welsh sites, and another came from Herefordshire. One of the others first breeding in 2008 was one of the first two tagged at a Shropshire nest, and almost all those first seen between 2009 and 2025 came from Shropshire Nest sites. The exceptions were a bird of unknown sex that came from near Llanbister in Wales, and was found at a nest only in 2014, right on the border near Llanfair Waterdine; and another of unknown sex that was found at a nest near Bucknell in 2023 only, and came from Coxall Knoll in Herefordshire. In addition, a female tagged in north Dorset caught several weeks after fledging, and an adult bird of unknown age or sex tagged prior to release from an animal rescue centre, have been found breeding, but they are not included in the data analysis as their natal site is unknown.

Excluding these two, 32 different tagged kites have been seen at local nest sites, and the tags read (14 males, 16 females, 2 unsexed).

The four early pioneers moved an average of 55 kilometres (km) between their natal site and first breeding site (3 males, average 47km, and 1 female, 80km). Excluding these early pioneers, the 11 tagged males moved an average of 8km (range 3-17km) between their natal and first nest site, and the 15 females moved the same average distance (range 2-23km)..

Figure 7 shows the age of these tagged Kites when last seen. Two were still alive in 2025. Many of these Kites were observed over several years, usually remaining at the same nest, but occasionally moving short distances to one or two different sites. Figure 8 shows the number of different tagged birds found at nest sites each year between 2007 and 2025 (102 observations in all).

Seven of the tagged kites reached an age of 10 years or more. The two oldest were both males, while one of the five 11-year-olds was a male, and 4 were female

While Shropshire has benefitted from immigration of tagged kites from Wales (5 altogether) and Herefordshire (3), at least one has moved in the opposite direction Blue/black 15, one of a brood of three tagged at a nest north-west of Skyborry, was found breeding at a nest near Monaughty, 7km south-south-west, in the four years 2016-19.



Figure 7. Age of Tagged Kites When Last Seen

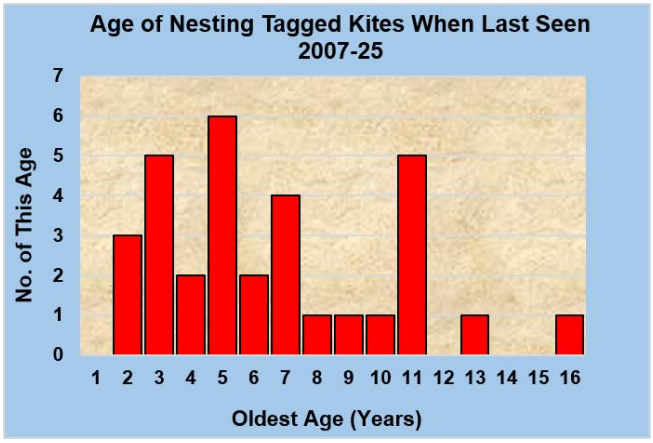
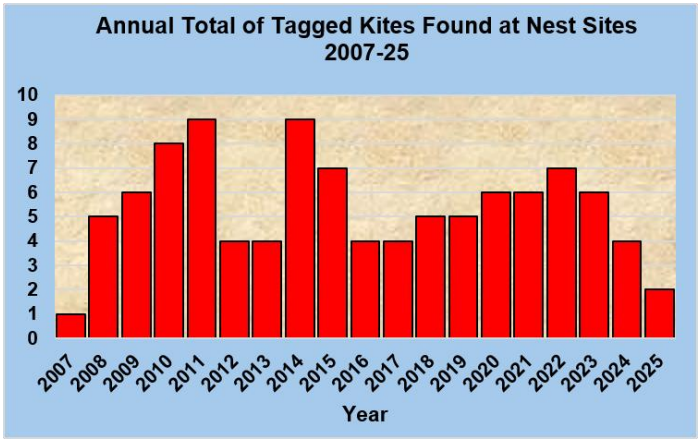


Figure 8. Number of Tagged Kites Found Each Year





Pride of place goes to Cerise (Pink) 30, photographed by Simon Marlow near Clunbury in 2020. This male Kite fledged from a nest near Craven Arms in 2009, nested as a one-year-old (the only example of such precociousness in Shropshire) in 2010, but moved to a different site near Purslow in 2011, the last time he was seen until 2020. The first photo revealed the area to be searched for the nest, and the second was taken from near the nest site, only a few metres from the 2010 site, in 2021. He was found at the same site each year since, and in 2025 he was 16 years old, the oldest known Shropshire Kite (the national longevity record from ringing, listed on the BTO website, is 25 years, 8 months, 28 days (set in 2018).





Male White / black Q, which fledged near Purslow in 2011, was first seen at a nest near Bucknell in 2016. He was then seen annually, apart from 2020, but was probably overlooked in that year. He was seen every year since then up until 2024, so he was 13 when last seen. The nest site was vacant in 2025.

Five individuals were last seen when they were 11 years old. Three were tagged in 2008 (black/black), and two in 2013 (yellow/black)-

Female black/black L1 was found nesting near Bridges in 2010, 2.0km from her natal site. The largest of a brood of three tagged in July 2008, she was found at the same site in 2011, then at a different nest site in 2013, 2015 and 2019 (also 2km from her natal site), but not in the years in between. The distance between her two known nest sites is only 0.8km. She was not found in 2020 or subsequently, although both previous nest sites were also checked each year.



Two other white-tagged birds from 2011 nests were present at breeding sites for some years. and were present in 2022, but not subsequently..

- White / black A, a female fledged on the western slopes of the Long Mynd, was present at her nest site near Bishop's Castle for the eighth consecutive year in 2022. She was not found in the following years.



- White / black O fledged from the same nest site as Cerise/black 30 two years later, and was found at a nest near Edgton in 2013 and 2014. He was not seen again until 2020, on the other side of Edgton. Kites had then been present at this site for three years that the current owners have lived there (Janet Cobb, *pers.comm*), so it is likely that this tagged kite had then been at this site for several years. He was present again in 2021 and 2022 but not subsequently..

There were also two Yellow / black tagged Kites from 2013 nests

- Yellow/black 01, a female, fledged from a nest near Knighton, and nested just west of Clun at two different sites, the first in 2016, then she moved to a new nest nearby, then nested in a different tree at the same location for the next 7 years, up until 2024. She was not seen after that date..



- Yellow / black 07 nested near Lydham in 2017. It was found at a winter roost site near Norbury in the winter of 2017-18. A tagged bird was at a nest near the roost site in 2018, but the tag could not be read. However, this female has been at the same nest, which was her natal site, each year from 2019 to 2024



Green/black 46 was photographed hunting near Chapel Lawn in April 2024. A nest was suspected nearby, but not found. A green-tagged Kite was found at a nest at a different site near Chapel Lawn in 2025, believed to be the same individual, but the tags had broken, and the inscription was missing. She fledged from a nest just north-west of Knighton in 2015, and was photographed in Kempton in February 2019. She had presumably been nesting in that area, but her nest had not been found., and no green-tagged bird was seen in that area.

The distance from the natal site to the Chapel Lawn breeding site is 5km.

As Green/black 46 was still alive at the end of the 2025 breeding season, she might become one of the longest-lived Kites in Shropshire.

A list of all the tagged kites seen at Shropshire nests is attached as Appendix 2. Almost all these birds were tagged as chicks in the nest prior to fledging, but the list also includes one female that was tagged as an adult of unknown age just before release after recovering from injury at a local rehabilitation centre, Cuan House in Much Wenlock, and another adult of unknown age tagged Cerise/Black y in the winter of 2018-19, which was found grounded (but uninjured) near Purslow and then the owner released it in his garden.



None of the 20 Kites tagged in 2014, or the 27 tagged between 2017 and 2022, has been found at a nest site, although black/black E5, with yellow letters, tagged at a nest near Adstone in 2017, was seen regularly at a farmyard near Marton each year between 2019 and 2022, and is believed to have nested nearby, but her nest site was not found.



The list does not include Yellow X3, a female found at a nest near Church Stretton in 2022. This tag is not one from the Mid-Wales and Shropshire tagging scheme, and is probably the first known example of a Kite from one of the reintroduction programmes nesting here. She was two years old, and had been caught and tagged in north Dorset in November

2020, 186km to the south, 4-5 months after fledging. It is likely that she was caught near her natal site, though some recently fledged young move long distances, and there is often an influx of Kites into south-west England in late autumn, so its origins are not known for certain.

The local 2022 nest was unsuccessful. She has been seen in the Church Stretton area each breeding season up to 2025, but her later nests were not found. She nested east of the A49 road, near Little Stretton, and fledged one young, in 2024, and was seen with one recently fledged young and her male partner in early August 2025.

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ii. Distance Travelled from Natal Site to Nest Site

A total of 32 different tags have been read at nest sites, 14 males, 16 females and 2 sex unknown, excluding the female from north Dorset. Males have moved an average of 16 km from their natal site, and females 12km. However, four of these (three males and a female) were long-distance colonisers from Wales in 2007 and 2008. If these four are excluded, the averages are 8 km for 11 males (range 3-17km) and 7km for 15 females (range 2-23km). If subsequent colonisers from Wales and Herefordshire, and a female that returned to Wales are also excluded (i.e. only birds that moved within Shropshire are included) the averages are 7km for 9 males and 8 km for 14 females (ranges unchanged). These figures illustrate again how sedentary Kites are, and there is no clear evidence that one sex is more mobile than the other.

iii. Age of First Breeding

At first breeding, one male was one year old, 4 males were two years old, and 5 males were three years old, average 2.4 years. Six females were two years old, and 6 were three years old, average 2.5. The average for all 22 is 2.45 years. Kites that were first found at 4 years or older, which are known to have been at different nest sites previously, or had possibly been overlooked, have been excluded from this assessment.

Nationally, the typical age of first breeding reported on the BTO website is two years old, so the Shropshire average is slightly older than the national average.

iv. Other Notable Observations and Recoveries

Note that some tags may tear or fall off, so some of these individuals may have continued to breed after losing their tags. For example, a ringed individual was killed by a car, early in 2015, 8 years 7 months 7 days after ringing. She had lost her tags, but was one of the early colonisers, found at a nest site in the three years 2008-10.. It is not known if she was present at a found nest in the following four years, but she is shown in Figure 7 as a 6-year-old, although she lived until over 8 years old.

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Blue/black E5 was 10 years old when last seen in 2020, This individual was photographed over the Stiperstones in February 2016, very close to her 2010 natal site, and the Kite is so sharp that the tag is readable when the photo is enlarged.



The request to photographers to check kite photos for tags is reiterated. She almost certainly bred for many years in this area, but her nest site was not found.

v. Tagged Birds at Winter Roost Sites

See next Section

vi. The End of the Tagging Programme

It has become impossible to tag a high proportion of the population, and the number found at breeding sites has been declining steadily since 2015. It was decided to continue tagging chicks in the nest in 2017, in the hope of reaching 200 tagged young from Shropshire nests. This target was just missed, so a further seven were tagged in 2018. Two more in 2019, and another two in 2021, brought the total to 207. None were tagged in 2022, or subsequent years.

To ensure that as much as possible is learnt from the tagging, finding nest sites in the hope of locating tagged adults will continue. All the surviving tagged Kites should have joined the breeding population by 2023 or 2024, but some may nest at unknown locations. .

vii. Reporting Tagged Kites

Reports of tagged Kites should be sent to Leo Smith (contact details below), or reported online to the Welsh Kite Trust website, www.welshkitetrust.wales Photographers are requested to check all photos for tags, please.

Winter Roost Sites

Kites often form roosts in the mid-winter months. The first roost was found near Kempton early in 2009, with up to 14 kites present, but only one tagged individual was seen at the roost on all six visits. Assuming that the turnover of tagged and untagged kites was the same, around 20 different individuals used the roost. A larger roost was found at the same site in 2010, and the tagged birds indicated that the majority were one-year-olds from Wales. The furthest travelled came over 100km, and four more came more than 50km. The roost was visited 43 times, no individual was present for as many as half the occasions, and seven out of 17 tagged individuals were only seen once. A second roost, near Wentnor, was also found in 2010. Tags suggested that most there were one-year-olds from Shropshire nests. Again, knowing that individuals did not join the roost every night, and assuming that the turnover of tagged kites was the same as untagged kites, around 60 different individuals were present at the two roosts in 2010. Only three were seen at both roosts.

Subsequent attempts have been made to find winter roosts. One of up to 32 individuals was found in 2012, but the birds disappeared quickly into the wood, and no tags could be read. No regular roost site was found in the following three years, but three winter roosts were found and monitored in 2016 (near Aston-on-Clun, maximum of 39 on 22 January; near Norbury, maximum 17 Kites on 23 January; and near Wentnor, maximum seven on 27 January).

In 2017-18, four roosts were found, near Onibury (max. 6 on 19 January), near Lydham (max. 29 on 27 December 2017), near Kempton (max 9 on 13 February 2018) and near Aston-on-Clun (29 on 2 and 29 January).

In the winter of 2018-19, five roosts were found, near Plowden, Clungunford, Norbury, Aston-on-Clun and Lydbury North. A monthly visit was made to each roost, a total of 29 visits altogether. The maximum count at each site was 29 on 20 January, 6 on 4 February, 7 on 17 January, 19 on 28 February and 9 on 26 January, respectively.

In 2019-20, five roosts were found, near Aston-on-Clun, Corvedale, Norbury, Onibury, and Plowden, three of which are similar locations to last year. Visits were made monthly, and the maximum count at each site was 10 on 9 December, 8 on three separate dates, 24 on 21 December, 17 on 7 February and 9 on two separate dates, respectively.

In 2020-21, four roosts were found, near Brandhill (12 in December and January) ,Choulton (9 on several dates between December and early March), Coston (12 in December, January and February) and Linley (19 on 7 dates between early December and late February).,

In 2022-23, five roosts were found, at Aston on Clun (max 17 in March), Brandhill (7), Choulton (16), Duxmoor (9) and Norbury (7). All maximum counts were in February, except at Aston.

In 2023-24, there were roosts at the same five sites, with maxima of 19, 11, 15 10 (in March) and 7, respectively, plus another site at Long Meadow End (6 in March). Apart from the two maxima in March, al the others were in February.

In 2024-25, roosts were found at the same six sites as the previous winter, with maxima of 21, 9, 17, 6 and 8 respectively, all in February apart from Choulton and Long Meadow End, both in March.

The total of these maximum counts for the 7 winters since 2017-18 is 70, 70, 64, 66, 58, 70 and 68, so there has not been an increase over the whole period.

As there has been little evidence in the past of tagged Kites visiting more than one roost, and the maximum count has been about half the total number visiting each roost, it is likely that the total number of Kites involved was well over 100 in each winter. As it appears that breeding pairs roost close to their nest sites, and monitoring of tagged birds at the early roosts referred to above found that a high proportion of them were in their first year, these are all also likely to be Kites in their first or second year.

No tagged Kites were seen at any roost in the last 7 winters, but the roosts were usually at the top of a hill, and the light was often poor, so it was usually impossible to reach a position to look for tags. However, the tags are usually visible, even if they can not be read, so the fact that no tagged Kites were seen also suggests that they were all young birds.

All these roosts were in the south-west, but, given the expansion of range of the breeding population, it is likely that there are roosts now in other parts of the County too.

The monitoring of winter roost sites confirms that the County population remains healthy, but the population in the south west may have stabilised.

Other Large Gatherings

In addition to roost sites, other large flocks of over 15 birds can be seen foraging over recently-cut farm grassland or ploughed fields, or other abundant sources of prey. Records of such large gatherings are often submitted to BTO BirdTrack or the County Bird Recorder.

In 2023-25, the Annual Shropshire County Bird report, published by SOS, listed gatherings of 29 at Choulton in January 19 at Clunton and 17 at Duxmoor, in December, all in 2023. Also at Duxmoor, there were 28 in January and 32 in November 2024, and the first large count away from the south-west, 15 at Upper Longford in SJ60, in December 2024. In 2025, there were seven counts of 20 or more, at Choulton (39 on 15 Nov), Bicton (33 on 8 Oct), Two Crosses (30 on 25 Jun), Hopton Castle (25 on 20 Apr), Cantlopgrove (24 on 3 Jan), Linley (20 on 30 Mar) and Little Brampton (20 on 2 Jun). but these were still not well reported. A report was sent to the Raptor Group of a regular roost at Marton, which has grown over the last few years, from a handful, to more than 50 on 21 Nov 2025.

Apart from roosts at Upper Longford in SJ60 and Marton in SJ20, all these large counts have come from the south-west quadrant of the county, suggesting that the population is still concentrated there, but the two large counts in SJ20 and SJ60 provide further evidence of the continuing expansion of range.

Further Information
If anyone knows the location of a previous Kite nest, or finds one in future, please don't assume we know about it. Photos of tagged kites that we have received in the past show that there are many that we are not aware of. Please send us the details.

Reports of Kite nest sites or large gatherings at feeding or roost sites, details of wing-tagged Kites or requests for further information should be sent to Leo Smith (contact details below).

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

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Leo Smith first started looking for Red Kite nests in south-west Shropshire in 2003 at the request of the Welsh Kite Trust, and found one of the two 2005 nests, and the nest with first successful breeding in 2006. He has actively searched large parts of the county each year since then, recruited helpers to search particular areas or monitor specific sites near where they live, sent out appeals for information, arranged the wing-tagging programme by Tony Cross annually between 2006 and 2022, and set up the Shropshire Raptor Study Group in 2010. He has been elected as convenor of the Raptor Group each year since then, and became a Trustee of the Welsh Kite Trust in 2012

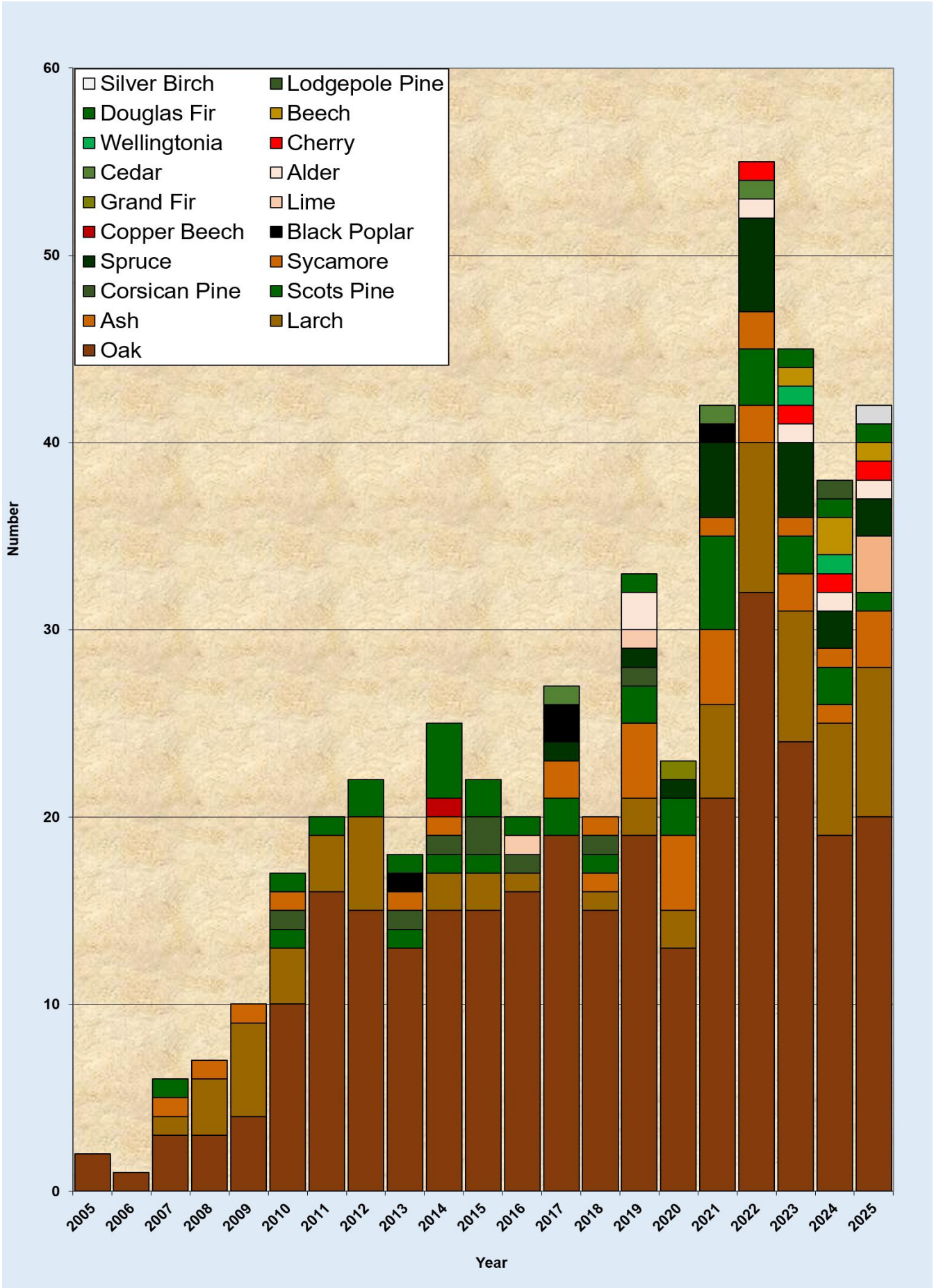
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Thanks especially to Tony Cross of the mid-Wales Ringing Group, for fitting 207 wing-tags to Kite chicks in 126 different nests, and to Mike Attwood for maintaining the Shropshire Raptor Group database.

Finally, thanks also to:-
- numerous other individuals for reports of individual Kites at widespread locations.
- Trevor Squire for information about the wing-tagging of Yellow X3 in North Dorset
- the various landowners who gave permission for monitoring on their land.
- Welsh Kite Trust, for supporting the nest finding and roost monitoring work since 2005.

Appendix 1. Tree Species Holding Found Nests



Appendix 2. Tagged Adults Breeding at Shropshire Nest Sites

Arranged in natal year order, then tetrad order (each nest appears once, so birds that move appear more than once)

Adult Nest Site		No. Years at this Site	Years Present at This Site	Age at Adult Nest Site		Distance frm Natal Site			Tags			Natal Site		
Tetrad	Near			Min.	Max	M	F	U	M	F	U	Year	Tetrad	
SO28W	Clun	3	2008-10	4	6	53			37			2004	Wales	Devil's Bridge
SO48B	Craven Arms	4	2007-10	2		11			h			2005	n / a	North Hereford
SO38X	Aston-on-Clun	1	2011		7				h			2005	n / a	North Hereford
SO38Y	Plowden	3	2008-10	3	5		80			K		2005	Wales	Llandovery
SO39Y	Bridges	1	2008	3		76			J			2005	Wales	Tregaron
SO39S	Bridges	4	2009-12		7				J			2005	Wales	Tregaron
SO18V	Beguildy	1	2010	4		12			V2			2006	Wales	Llanbister
SO27E	Llanfair Waterdine	1	2011		5				V2			2006	Wales	Llanbister
SO39X	Bridges	1	2008	2			23			★		2006	SO27S	Skyborry
SO28T	Mainstone	2	2009, 2012		6					★		2006	SO27S	Skyborry
SO38Y	Plowden	3	2009-12	3	5	11			h			2006	n / a	North Hereford
SO39X	Bridges	2	2010-11	2			2			L1		2008	SO39Y	Bridges
SO39S	Bridges	3	2013, 15 & 19		11					L1		2008	SO39Y	Bridges
SO39W	Adstone	2	2011, 13	3	5	4			L2			2008	SO39Y	Bridges
SO28T	Purslow	1	2010	1		5			30			2009	SO48B	Craven Arms
SO37U	Purslow	1	2011, 2020-25		16				30			2009	SO48B	Craven Arms
SO27J	Llanfair Waterdine	1	2011	2	2	3			45			2009	SO28F	Newcastle
SO28T	Mainstone	1	2018	9	9	13			46			2009	SO39S	Bridges
SJ20V	Rorrington	1	2011	2			10			50		2009	SO39Y	Bridges
SO39U	Bridges	1	2014		5					50		2009	SO39Y	Bridges
SO38E	Bishop's Castle	1	2012	2	2		15.5			A4		2010	SO48F	Onibury
SO39S	Bridges	2	2013-14	3	4	4			E0			2010	SO39L	Norbury
SO27I	Llanfair Waterdine	1	2014	3	3			13			56	2011	Wales	Llanbister
SO27S	Skyborry	1	2014	3	3	5			a			2011	SO37D	Chapel Lawn
SO37M	Bucknell	7	2016-24	5	13	4			Q			2011	SO37U	Purslow
SO38J	Lydham	9	2014-22	3	11		7			A		2011	SO39W	Adstone
SO38W	Aston-on-Clun	3	2014-18	3	7		3			U		2011	SO38V	Aston-on-Clun
SO38X	Aston-on-Clun	2	2013-14	2		9			O			2011	SO37U	Purslow
SO48D	Horderley	4	2020-23		11				O			2011	SO37U	Purslow
SO28T	Mainstone	2	2014-15	2	3		5			Q		2012	SO38E	Bishop's Castle
SO37T	Bedstone	1	2015	3	3		4			G		2012	SO38V	Aston-on-Clun
SO38X	Hopesay	1	2015	3	3		4			C		2012	SO38V	Aston-on-Clun
SO48T	Westhope	3	2014-16	2	4		16			O		2012	SO38E	Bishop's Castle
SO28R	Mardu	1	2016	3			7			01		2013	SO27N	Skyborry
SO28R	Whitcott Keysett	1	2016							01		2013	SO27N	Skyborry
SO28R	Whitcott Keysett	7	2018-24		11					01		2013	SO27N	Skyborry
SO37T	Bedstone	1	2015	2	2	17			45			2013	SO48F	Craven Arms
SO39K	Lydham	1	2016	4			2			07		2013	SO39L	Norbury
SO39L	Norbury	6	2019-24		11					07		2013	SO39L	Norbury
SO37S	Bedstone	6	2019-24	8	8			2			18	2015		North Hereford
SO49E	Picklescott	1	2020	5	5		5.5			29		2015	SO39W	Adstone
SO37D	Chapel Lawn	1	2025	10	10					46		2015	SO27N	Skyborry
SO37H	Chapel Lawn	2	2022-23	6	7		1.6			X		2016	SO37D	Chapel Lawn
Total For Shropshire		**101**				**16.2**	**12.4**	**13**	**14**	**15**	**2**			

Nesting tagged bird, tagged as an adult, age unknown

Adult Nest Site		Tags			
Tetrad	Near	M	F	U	Year
SO38Q	Clunbury			y	2012
SO37P	Purslow			y	2019

Nesting tagged bird, not from local tagging scheme

Adult Nest Site		Tags			Natal Site	
Tetrad	Near	M	F	U	Year	Location
SO49L	Church Stretton		X3		2020	Unknown (tagged 4-5 months after fledging)

Tags read, Adult Nest not found

Nest Site not found		Tags			Natal Site		
Tetrad	Near	M	F	U	Year	Tetrad	Near
SO38W	Hopesay	88			2011	SO38X	Edgeton
SO37D	New Invention		46		2015	SO27N	Skyborry
SJ20W	Marton		E5		2017	SO39W	Adstone