

Further research

Based on what is already known about the reintroduced populations in England it is clear that there are potential benefits as well as problems in providing food to attract red kites to gardens. The organisations involved in red kite conservation in England will continue to review

information from monitoring of the reintroduced populations and plan to carry out further research to review the effects of feeding on red kites. The following simple guidelines, aimed at maximising the benefits of feeding, whilst reducing the associated problems, are based on the best currently available information.

Red Kite Feeding Guidelines

- 1** Before putting food out for red kites, discuss the issue with neighbours and take their views into account
- 2** Avoid using cooked or processed meat and limit the feeding of pieces of meat that lack skin and bone (including butchers' offcuts) to small amounts
- 3** Food based on whole small-mammal carcasses such as mice and rats is ideal for feeding red kites and is widely available from pet food suppliers. Food based on captive-bred birds (such as day-old-chicks) should not be used as there is greater risk of disease transmission to wild birds
- 4** Clear up any uneaten food at the end of each day to avoid attracting rats and other scavengers
- 5** Consider feeding only in the afternoons to allow birds time to forage naturally in the first part of the day



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Red Kite Information Note -

The effects of feeding reintroduced red kites in England and guidance on best practice



Produced by the following organisations involved in red kite conservation work in England:

Chilterns Conservation Board, Natural England, RSPB, Southern England Kite Group, Zoological Society of London



**Southern
England
Kite Group**



Introduction and background



Pat Sparrowhawk

The red kite has become re-established in several parts of England and Scotland following a reintroduction programme which began in 1989. It is well-suited to the English countryside which provides abundant nest sites and a good food supply, and populations have increased rapidly. There are now more than 400 breeding pairs in England, the majority in the Chilterns of southern England.

The red kite has a long history of foraging around human settlements including towns and cities in

mediaeval times. A high proportion of the food taken by red kites is derived from human activities including game shooting, pest control and animals killed on roads. Other food is obtained from more natural sources in the countryside. In recent years, birds have also started to visit refuse tips where they scavenge for waste along with gulls and crows. Food provided by householders in gardens is an additional source.

There has been much debate recently about the practice of feeding red kites in the reintroduced populations in England. A recent survey has confirmed that putting food out for red kites in gardens is now common in the Chilterns. Many people derive great pleasure from the sight of these impressive birds of prey diving down into village gardens to retrieve food but some believe feeding is unnecessary and can cause problems.

This note has been produced by organisations involved in red kite conservation in England. It aims to provide information about the implications of feeding red kites to guide people who are already putting out food, as well as individuals who might consider doing so in future.

Effects of feeding on survival rates and breeding success

As for any bird species, the overall abundance of suitable food available to red kites in an area is likely to influence survival rates and breeding productivity (the number of young reared, on average, by breeding pairs).

The extent to which food currently provided by householders influences survival rates and breeding productivity is not known. Any beneficial effects of feeding are likely to be greater during periods of poor weather when foraging is more difficult, for example a spell of cold weather in winter, or several consecutive days with heavy and persistent rain.



Dan Powell (RSPB)

Effects of feeding on red kite distribution and abundance

The amount of suitable food available in an area is an important factor in determining the density of red kites that the area is able to support. The more food there is, the higher the resulting density of birds is likely to be.

The provision of a large amount of food at a single site can lead to very high local concentrations of birds. However, the red kite is an inherently social species and high densities of birds also occur naturally, not always in association with sources of food.

In the short term, providing red kites with extra food could result in birds remaining restricted to a smaller area than they would otherwise make use of. But feeding could result in increased survival rates and higher breeding productivity which, in the longer term, could result in more red kites being available to spread



Malcolm Schuyt

out into new areas of countryside. In this way, feeding red kites could lead to high local concentrations of birds as well as an increase in the rate of spread to new areas, which may initially seem counterintuitive.

Health risks from feeding

In recent years, health checks of nestlings, and post mortems of birds found dead, have identified a very small number of red kites suffering from growth abnormalities and bone defects. It is thought this is most likely to result from dietary deficiencies, and the provision of inappropriate food in gardens may be a contributory factor. Food based on scraps of

meat, such as butchers' offcuts, lacks the calcium and other minerals found in food based on whole animal carcasses that includes skin and bone.

Processed food, including cooked meats, may also lack calcium and minerals and, in addition, contains potentially harmful additives such as salt.

The views of neighbours

Whilst many people enjoy watching gatherings of red kites, others are worried that feeding may result in artificially high numbers of birds in and around their garden. There may also be concerns about the potential for food to attract other species such as gulls, crows and rats which are often seen as undesirable. Food scraps can be picked up and then dropped nearby by foraging red kites, so it is difficult to limit the impact of feeding to the garden in which food is placed.

