

A6.45 Red Kite *Milvus milvus* (breeding)

1. Status in UK

Biological status		Legal status		Conservation status	
Breeding	✓	Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981	General Protection Schedule 1(1) Schedule 4	Species of European Conservation Concern	SPEC 4 Favourable conservation status (secure) but concentrated in Europe
Migratory		Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985	General Protection	(UK) Species of Conservation Importance	Table 2
Wintering	✓	EC Birds Directive 1979	Annex I	All-Ireland Vertebrate Red Data Book	

2. Population data

	Population sizes (pairs)	Selection thresholds	Totals in species' SPA suite
GB	161	2	15 (9% of GB population)
Ireland			
Biogeographic population	17,400	174	15 (<0.1% of biogeographical population)

GB population source: DETR/JNCC Raptor Working Group 2000

Biogeographic population source: Hagemeyer & Blair 1997

3. Distribution

The Red Kite is globally confined almost to Europe. Remnant populations in western Asia and North Africa are virtually extinct, while populations in south and east Europe are also declining and fragmented. It is only in north-west and central Europe that numbers are stable or recovering (Evans & Pienkowski 1991). In the northern and eastern parts of the range (Sweden, Poland, Germany, Belarus and Ukraine) the Red Kite is a migrant, moving south and west to winter in southern Europe – especially around the Mediterranean Basin (Cramp & Simmons 1980).

Within the UK, Red Kites were once widely distributed, but persecution, especially in the 19th century, led to the native breeding population being restricted to central Wales. More recently, because of intensive protection measures in the 20th century, Red Kites are slowly expanding through Wales again. Recent and ongoing re-establishment programmes have resulted in new populations in southern England, and northern Scotland (Evans *et al.* 1997, 1999) and more recently in central and northern England and central Scotland.

4. Population structure and trends

The European population is currently estimated at 17,394–28,185 pairs (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997). Other than a few in the Canary Islands, the Cape Verde Islands, in north-west Africa, and possibly in western Transcaucasia, this amounts to the whole of the world population. Throughout Europe, Red Kite populations showed declines during the 20th century, with a 20% decrease from 1970 to 1990. This decline, resulting from human pressure and changes in land use (Evans & Pienkowski 1991; Evans *et al.* 1997) is continuing in south-west and eastern Europe. However, populations in central and north-western Europe have been showing signs of recovery.

The decline in the European population has been reflected within the UK where intense persecution over the past two hundred years led to extinction of the majority of the population. Since the 1960s, when the UK population was restricted to only about 20 pairs in central Wales, the introduction of protective legislation and focused conservation action have led to an increase of 6.9% per annum during the 1980s and 11.0% per annum from 1994–1997, (Welsh Kite Trust/Kite Watchers' Group *in litt.*). This resulted in an estimated Welsh breeding population of 161 pairs by 1998 (Welsh Kite Trust/Kite Watchers' Group unpublished). The successful implementation of protective legislation and other conservation measures for the Red Kite is very apparent from the dramatic increase observed in the Welsh population over the last thirty years.

Re-establishment programmes in other parts of the UK were initiated in 1989 (Evans *et al.* 1999) and by 1998 the re-established populations in southern England and northern Scotland had reached approximately 100 pairs (DETR/JNCC Raptor Working Group 1998). This re-established population is increasing more rapidly than the Welsh population, and is now being enhanced by additional re-establishments in central and northern England, and central Scotland. The re-establishment programmes have, however, been jeopardised by continued illegal poisoning of Red Kites (DETR/JNCC Raptor Working Group 2000), as well as possible effects of secondary poisoning from second-generation rodenticides (Carter & Burn 2000).

The species' range outside the native Welsh localities is currently determined by the location of release sites rather than by redistribution of released birds and this has consequences for the determination of locations of possible protected areas for Red Kites.

5. Protection measures for population in UK

SPA suite

In the breeding season, the UK's SPA suite for Red Kite supports 15 pairs. This amounts to about 9% of the British breeding population and less than 0.1% of the international population. The species does not currently occur in Northern Ireland. The SPA suite total is contained within a single site (Table 6.45.1) where Red Kite has been listed as a qualifying species.

Other measures

Within Wales, the Red Kite has been the focus of local tourist initiatives. These have led to the establishment of winter feeding stations, and video-camera coverage of nest sites during the breeding season, both of which have contributed to greater public understanding and support for the conservation of this species. This understanding has been further enhanced by the Welsh Kite Trust; a charity set up to ensure continued monitoring of and conservation action for Red Kite in Wales.

6. Classification criteria

The selection of Elenydd-Mallaen represents the core of the distribution of the Welsh breeding population. The site supports more than 1% of the national breeding population of Red Kite on a regular basis, was considered under Stage 1.1, and selected after consideration of Stage 2 judgements. Berwyn also supports more than 1% of the national breeding population of Red Kite on a regular basis. It was considered under Stage 1.1, but not selected after consideration of Stage 2 judgements since, as a site at the periphery of the species' core Welsh range, it is not the best example of a breeding site for Red Kite. The species occurs in greater numbers and at higher densities in more southerly parts of its range (for example on the Elenydd-Mallaen SPA), and in other areas of Wales where wider countryside measures are a more appropriate mechanism for the conservation of the species.

Outside the SPA suite, the Welsh population is now widespread and scattered, with the breeding range slowly increasing to many parts of Wales. The scattered distribution of breeding pairs makes selection of appropriate site boundaries difficult. Elenydd-Mallaen is a site of high naturalness, is a multi-species site, and has a long history of occupancy by breeding Red Kites.

The recently re-established populations in England and Scotland are still expanding, and selection of SPAs for these populations is not appropriate at this stage (section 4.7.2) owing to an active increase in numbers and range. This means that the identification of "most suitable" territories is currently not possible, although it may be possible at an appropriate future time.

Distribution map for breeding Red Kite SPA suite

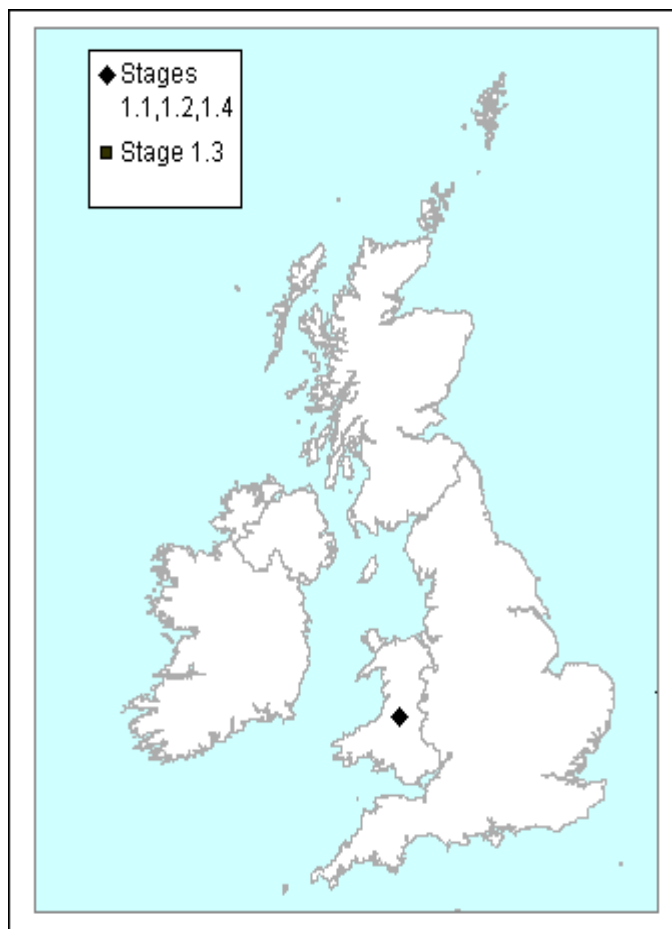


Table 6.45.1 – SPA suite

Site name	Site total	% of biogeographical population	% of national population	Selection stage
Elenydd-Mallaen	15	<0.1	9.32	1.1
TOTALS	15	<0.1%	9.3%	