

Red Kites Everywhere!

Every now and then we are privileged to meet animals that other people might only glimpse, once in a lifetime. And even then its miles away - a dot in the distance.

True red kites are making a comeback in Britain and being near to the Chilterns we are lucky enough to often see these majestic birds effortlessly surfing on the air currents above the hills. But until now the closest I had been to a red kite was to a dead one, that had been poisoned. All I could do for that bird was to bring in the police and assist them in bringing a successful prosecution against the murderer.

At St. Tiggywinkles its funny how birds or animals seem to come in groups - we won't see a sparrowhawk or woodpecker for weeks and

Les working on kite no. 1's injured leg



then, all of a sudden, they come in two or three a day for about a week before another lull.

Our first live red kite turned up in the middle of June - English Nature representative Nigel Snell was marking nestlings in secret locations when the ringer spotted on with a length of polythene wrapped

around and cutting deep into its leg. Luckily he brought it straight to us - a very large baby with plenty of fluff but the first showing of those glorious red feathers that make this bird one of the jewels of Britain's skies.

He had the ice clear eyes of a typical bird of prey, with a strong hooked beak and enormous talons. Mind you, he squeaked like a little baby as he was carried through to the prep room so that I could a better look at his leg.

It seemed to me that its parents had built their nest using a few strips of polythene (polythene is such a danger if left in the countryside). One of these strips of polythene had become wrapped around the birds leg, like a ligature, and had become so deeply

embedded that they leg above and below the wound was swollen out of all proportion.

My primary concern was to carefully remove the polythene so that we could restore circulation to

the bird's foot. If that did not happen the bird could easily lose its leg and, as it was a bird of prey; its ability to feed, even in captivity. To add to all this the swollen leg turned out to be a mass of the inspissated pus that is so typical of birds.

Initially we cleaned out the wound and leg as thoroughly as we

could and then dressed the leg with a product called Intrasisite-Gel. This encourages wound healing. Now all we wanted to do was get the leg healed and the baby back to its nest.

Then would you believe it, only a few days later Nigel turned up with another red kite baby, from another nest. But this one was a different kettle of fish entirely.

To start with the ice clear eyes were closed and matted shut: its mouth was full of all sorts of horrible debris caused by a massive infection inside the roof of its mouth and beak. Judging by its plumage it was older than the other kite but presumably it had not been able to see to feed and it was starving - only half the weight of its younger relative.

This bird was going to die unless we took extreme measure to stabilise and save it. Normally we deal with lifesaving emergencies ourselves before calling in one of our consultant vets. But this bird was in dire straits and a species we had little or no experience of - so this time we called on Mark Geech, one of our vets who lives only 20 minutes away.

Mark came straight in and gave the bird a complete check over including administering life-saving fluids, amino acids and vitamins to try and restore the metabolic balance. He cleaned out the eyes; one of which was scarred, possible permanently, and cleaned a lot of necrotic tissue from the roof of its mouth. That done it was then our job to try to feed the kite, to build up its strength to fight this horrific infection which we believe was a protozoal attack known as trichomoniasis which we knew very well, as we regularly treat it in collard doves, pigeons, tawny owls



Carson's eyes started to clear

and even sparrowhawks.

Meanwhile kite no.1 was doing very well - his leg was healing; he was taking food and

was getting aggressive, an essential trait in a wild bird of prey. Another of our vets Dr. John Lewis had to perform a minor surgical procedure on his injured leg. I would like to say made much simpler by our radio surgery equipment which we had managed to buy with donations - thank you.

And after a few weeks, with a noticeable circular scar on his leg, but a very healthy leg, kite no 1 was collected by English Nature to be returned to the red kite re-introduction programme.

Kite no 2, Carson as I called

her, is still here and probably always will be - she eventually regained her eyesight, but still took some weeks to be able to focus on food. The trichomoniasis was cured but left severe damage to her top beak and roof of her mouth. Its now healthy, we are just waiting to see how much of the beak regrows.

Apart from that Carson has settled and is now a magnificent bird glowing with health. If she cannot be released, because of a weakened beak, we shall try to raise funds to build her her own enormous aviary and possibly find her a mate who is also trapped in captivity. Then if they have youngsters we can release them to boost Britain's tiny but growing population of red kites, surely the most majestic flying bird we shall ever see.

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Please can you help to sponsor items in our visitor centre.

All of the following items are in need of sponsorship.

For every item sponsored we will put a plaque up in your name to show your kind support.

The items that need your support are:

Hedgehog Homes	£ 75
Dove Cote	£170
Stone Benches	£400
Chairs	£ 75
Benches	£109
Tables	£ 90
Tree Seat	£ 50
Gazebo	£380

If you would like to help us with any of these items please send a cheque made payable to St. Tiggywinkles stating the item you would like to sponsor and the name you would like on your plaque.

Thank You.