

Red Kite (*Milvus milvus*), Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*) and Buzzard (*Buteo buteo*)

The red kite is a large raptor, formerly common throughout the UK, but persecuted to the edge of extinction by the end of the 19th Century. It breeds in mature woodland, and feeds on carrion, small mammals, birds, frogs and invertebrates, and may even scavenge at refuse tips. The kestrel is Britain's most common bird of prey. It is often seen along roadside verges, either sitting on tall perches such as telegraph poles or hovering, hunting for small mammals, particularly voles. Kestrels do not build their own nests, but use old stick nests, on a rock ledge, in a tree hole or on a building. Buzzards are common in western England and parts of the Midlands, where they are often seen soaring over their nesting territories. They nest in crags or trees, and feed primarily on small rodents and rabbits, but will also hunt birds, squirrels, reptiles and moles.

UKBAP priority habitats of particular importance to red kites are: upland oakwood and upland mixed ashwoods. UKBAP priority habitats of particular importance to kestrels are: upland calcareous grassland, lowland calcareous grassland and lowland dry acid grassland. UKBAP priority habitats of particular importance to buzzards are: upland oakwood, upland mixed ashwoods, and upland calcareous grassland.

Current status

National status

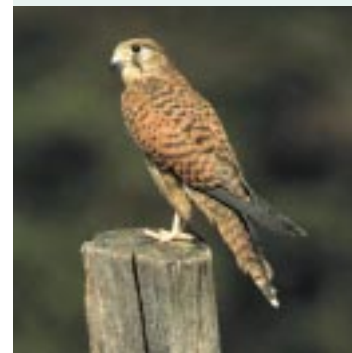
Red kites were extinct in England by about 1900 (although an isolated population survived in mid-Wales) and have since been re-introduced in England and Scotland at unpublicised locations, from surviving populations in mid-Wales. There are now over 400 breeding pairs in the UK. They are listed in the Red Data Book for British birds, on the Red List of Birds of Conservation Concern. Buzzards are common throughout western England and parts of the Midlands, but are less common further east. Kestrels are present throughout England, and particularly common in parts of southeast England such as East Anglia. They are, however, declining, and are listed on the Amber List of Birds of Conservation Concern.

None of the three species is UKBAP Priority Species but all three species are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (and amendments), and are also listed on Appendix II of the Berne Convention.

This protects the adult birds and their nests, eggs and chicks. Red kites receive additional protection, being listed on Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (and amendments), which makes it illegal to disturb breeding red kites and gives special penalties for doing so. They are also listed on Annex 1 of the EC Birds Directive.

Status on the network

Red kites are present along the M40 corridor near Aston Rowant NNR in the Chilterns (network area 3). Kestrels are common and widespread throughout England and are present on all areas of the network, and are well-recorded in the Highways Agency network ecological information. Buzzards are most common in the southwest and Cumbria (network areas 1, 2, 9 and 19) although they are present in all network areas.



Current factors affecting the species

Habitat loss and poor management

A key threat to all three species is habitat loss. This includes loss of suitable nesting sites within woodland, particularly for buzzards and red kites, and loss of hunting habitat for all three species. Raptors require large home ranges in order to be able to catch sufficient prey, and therefore it is the quality of the habitat for prey animals which determines the breeding success of the adults. Kestrels, for example, are almost entirely dependent on voles. Road developments, affecting nesting habitat and hunting territories, can therefore affect all three species. Kestrels, which hunt extensively for small mammals on road verges, are likely to be affected by management of the soft estate. Persecution, including the indiscriminate or illegal use of poisons is a threat for Red Kites.

Current action

Red kites are the subject of a re-introduction programme in parts of England and Scotland and their populations are closely monitored. Buzzards and kestrels are relatively common birds, and therefore are not subject to any specific current conservation programme.

Objectives

The aim of the Highways Agency Species Action Plan for red kites, kestrels and buzzards is to enhance the value of the soft estate for the three species, avoid adverse impacts associated with unsympathetic management, and to fully mitigate any potential effects of new schemes.

	Objective	Proposed actions
A	To avoid impacts of new road schemes or improvements on red kites, kestrels and buzzards.	4
B	To mitigate unavoidable impacts on red kites, kestrels and buzzards and/or their habitat.	5
C	To raise the awareness of HA staff, Managing Agents and consultants regarding the significance of red kites, kestrels and buzzards on the network.	1, 2, 10
D	To develop a greater knowledge of the distribution of red kites and buzzards in the soft estate.	3
E	To safeguard and enhance known red kite, kestrel and buzzard populations in the soft estate.	6
F	To safeguard and enhance potentially suitable red kite habitat in network area 5.	3, 6, 7
G	To safeguard and enhance potentially suitable buzzard habitat in network areas 1, 2, 9 and 19.	3, 6, 8
H	To safeguard and enhance potentially suitable kestrel habitat throughout the network.	6, 9

Proposed action

The following table lists the actions required to achieve the objectives set out in this Plan. For some of the actions, potential partners have

been assigned as likely sources of co-operation. Targets are provided to give an indication of the timescale for the proposed action.

	Action	Potential partners	Target
	<i>Policy, guidance and advice</i>		
1	Consider publishing an Advice Note on red kites, kestrels and buzzards in the DMRB.	RSPB	2004
2	Provide detailed information in TRMM on the management of highway vegetation for the benefit of red kites, kestrels & buzzards.	RSPB	2004
	<i>Surveying</i>		
3	Identify all areas on the network likely to be used by red kites and buzzards. Include all records on Environmental Database.	RSPB	2005
	<i>Mitigation and Management</i>		
4	For all new schemes and road improvements, include search for records of red kites, kestrels and buzzards in desk study at stage 1 and in surveys at stage 2. (Early identification of this constraint may allow impacts to be avoided).	-	Ongoing
5	Where impacts of new schemes and road improvements on red kite, kestrel or buzzard habitat are unavoidable, consider the options for habitat recreation and enhancement.	-	Ongoing
6	Ensure that best practice is employed in the management of verges where red kites, kestrels and buzzards are known to be present. In particular by timing of operations to avoid the breeding season.	-	Ongoing
7	Ensure that best practice is employed in the management of road verges in network area 5, to enhance the habitat for red kites.	RSPB	Ongoing
8	Ensure that best practice is employed in the management of road verges in network areas 1, 2, 9, and 19, to enhance the habitat for buzzards.	RSPB	Ongoing
9	Ensure that best practice is employed in the management of road verges throughout the network, to enhance the habitat for kestrels.	RSPB	Ongoing
	<i>Communications and publicity</i>		
10	Information on red kites, kestrels and buzzards should be included in environmental training for HA staff and Managing Agents.	-	2003

Links with other plans

This plan should be read in conjunction with the HAPs for woodland and grassland, and the SAP for Barn Owl.

Kestrels are listed as a Priority Species in the following LBAPs: Gosforth Park-Cramlington Wildlife Corridor, Birmingham and the Black Country, and Telford and Wrekin. None ascribe specific actions to the Highways Agency.

