

The Red Kite



Red Kites are now regular over and around Turvey. A glance upwards and there it is: almost heron-sized with long drooping wings and a deeply forked tail. When the light catches it the Kite shows off a gorgeous array of colours from chestnut red to grey to black to white. It has a slow steady flight, definitely going somewhere but taking its time with eyes down looking for the leftovers which nature and humankind have put out, perhaps a roadkill or a decomposing rabbit. In medieval England it was a protected bird precisely because of its efficiency as a scavenger - London's vulture - no need for different coloured bins then. But 'when the Kite builds, look to lesser linen', as Shakespeare notes in *The Winters Tale*, for it likes nothing better than a newly washed undergarment or a teddy bear to line its nest! If you think this is fanciful Monday's *Guardian* (12th May) carried just such a report from neighboring Buckinghamshire, of a green silky blouse taken from a washing line even as the rest of the washing was still being put out, and it's not been unknown for Kites to take hats off heads.

A few years ago one would have had to travel to central Wales or continental Europe to have seen this magnificent bird, but reintroductions of Spanish and Swedish birds to England and Scotland respectively have been astoundingly successful, with several thousand birds now populating our skies. Our nearest reintroduction sites are in Northamptonshire and the Chilterns but the birds we are now seeing over Turvey may well be local breeders. I had a pair recently nearby which paid me the courtesy of dropping a long-dead piece of rabbit at my feet. My first sighting was in 2003 and each year produces more, with half-a-dozen already so far this year.

We may be losing some of our smaller birds - mostly the result of intensive farming and changes abroad - but have regained some wonderful raptors, and not only through reintroductions. Buzzards and Hobbies are both increasing naturally. The former perhaps because of a population explosion in the West and less persecution, the latter perhaps because of our warming climate and the increase in large insect prey, especially dragonflies.

So, look to the skies for Red Kites, Buzzards and Hobbies, and even the occasional Raven, but also look to your lesser linen.

Br. John

