



giving  
nature  
a home

**Name:**

**Red kite**



## History

People valued kites in the Middle Ages because their scavenging kept the streets clean, but in the 16th century new laws branded them "vermin" and encouraged people to kill them. By the time birds of prey were given legal protection in 1954, only a few kites remained, in a small area of Wales.

In 1989, kites were reintroduced from Spain and Sweden to the Chilterns and the Black Isle in Easter Ross. As numbers increased, birds were carefully collected from the Chilterns and released into Yorkshire, Dumfries and Galloway, Northamptonshire and the Derwent Valley near Gateshead. Since then, kites have been reintroduced to Northern Ireland and East Scotland. These reintroductions were so successful that red kites are no longer of conservation concern.

## What is special about this bird?

Red kites have long, forked tails that they use like a rudder to steer effortlessly through the air.

## General info

**Scientific name:** *Milvus milvus*

**Size:** Up to 66cm long, with a wingspan of up to 1.95m (the average armspan of a 9-year-old child is 1.3m).

**Weight:** Males weigh an average of 1kg, while females are larger at about 1.2kg.

**Where they live:** Mainly Wales, southern England, East Midlands, Yorkshire, Gateshead area, Northern Ireland, northern and central Scotland, and Dumfries and Galloway. Young birds roam all over the UK for their first two years.

**How long they live:** On average they live for four years but the oldest recorded wild bird lived for 25 years, eight months and 28 days.

**What they eat:** Mainly carrion (dead creatures) and sometimes earthworms. Occasionally, they catch birds as big as gulls or crows.

**Conservation status:** Reintroduction schemes and the ongoing protection of red kites against illegal killing has allowed their numbers to rise rapidly. They are now on our Green List, which means we have no concerns about them.

## Fascinating fact

Red kites collect shiny, bright and eye-catching objects to line their nests. Flags, socks and even a pair of frilly knickers have been found in nests!