

GLOBAL RE-INTRODUCTION PERSPECTIVES

Re-introduction case-studies from around the globe



**Edited by
Pritpal S. Soorae**



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Published by: IUCN/SSC Re-introduction Specialist Group

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Citation: Soorae, P. S. (ed.) (2008) GLOBAL RE-INTRODUCTION PERSPECTIVES: re-introduction case-studies from around the globe. IUCN/SSC Re-introduction Specialist Group, Abu Dhabi, UAE. viii + 284 pp.

ISBN: 978-2-8317-1113-3

Cover photo: Clockwise starting from top-left:

- Formosan salmon stream, Taiwan
- Students in Madagascar with tree seedlings
- Virgin Islands boa

Produced by: IUCN/SSC Re-introduction Specialist Group

Printed by: Abu Dhabi Printing & Publishing Co., Abu Dhabi, UAE

Downloadable from: <http://www.iucnsscrg.org> (downloads section)

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Re-introduction of the red kite into Co. Wicklow, Ireland

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Introduction

Red Kite (*Milvus milvus*) EU Birds Directive - listed in Annex I, CITES Convention listed in Appendix II, EU Annex A. Bonn Convention listed in Appendix II. Berne Convention listed in Appendix II. IUCN Red List: Near threatened. Species of European Conservation Concern (SPEC) category 2 - declining. There is good evidence that red kites formerly occurred in many parts of Ireland. Red kite bones have been found during archaeological excavations in Wood Quay, Dublin, Lough Gur, Limerick and Roscrea Castle, Tipperary dating from the 11th, 14th and 17th centuries, respectively. There are several old Irish names for red kites from numerous sources, including Cúr (used in the modern standard Irish-English and English-Irish dictionaries), Préachan Ceirteach or Préachan na gCearc and variations of these dating from documentary sources from 507 AD to the 19th century. The Irish red kite project is based in Co. Wicklow, on the East Coast of Ireland. The Irish Raptor Study Group and the Golden Eagle Trust started development of the proposal in January 2006. The project plans on releasing Welsh red kites in Co. Wicklow over a five-year period, with a minimum of 100 kites released over the five years. The Golden Eagle Trust Ltd. Staff have extensive experience of re-introductions and red kites gained in Scotland. Expert opinion was also sought from re-introduction and red kite experts in Scotland, Wales and England. Funding for the project is primarily from two sources the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government and the Heritage Council.



First red kite (*Milvus milvus*) being released in Ireland © John Griffin

Goals

- Goal 1: Our primary goal is to establish a viable red kite breeding population in Ireland.
- Goal 2: Our secondary goal is to promote conservation awareness.
- Goal 3: We also aim to raise awareness of Ireland's other existing and extinct raptors.

Success Indicators

- Indicator 1: Release a minimum of 20 red kites per year over the five-year period.

- Indicator 2: Establish breeding red kites by 2010.

Project Summary

The Wicklow Red Kite project is managed by the Golden Eagle Trust (GET) Ltd. in partnership with the Irish National Parks and Wildlife Service and the Welsh Kite Trust. The project was initially proposed by the Irish Raptor Study Group (IRSG) in January 2006. Early on in the planning phase contact was made with the Welsh Kite Trust to discuss sourcing donor stock from Wales. The IRSG and the GET felt that as Wales contained the last remnant of the native British stock and given Wales' closeness to Ireland, Welsh red kites would be the most suitable stock for re-introduction to Ireland. The GET conducted a detailed assessment of potential release areas. From the outset it was felt the East Coast of Ireland was best suited given its lower rainfall and higher average summer temperatures. Co. Wicklow was selected primarily on the basis of the mixed habitat types present, high percentage of forestry and an increasing, productive population of common buzzards. The specific release areas were visited and endorsed by kite experts Tony Cross and John Roberts of The Welsh Kite Trust and Professor Ian Newton.

The GET engaged in consultation with Wicklow's farming community, forestry sector and Gun clubs. The GET organized for representatives of the National farming association and Coillte (Ireland's largest forestry company) to visit Wales to meet with their Welsh counterparts. The open and frank discussions between these groups went a great way to allaying any fears that the respective groups may have had about red kites. The Wicklow Red Kite Project will use donor stock solely from Wales. The collection of the donor stock is carried out by the Welsh Kite Trust. The GET funds the expense of the collection and extra nest monitoring that is necessary. We are currently entering year two of the project. In year one thirty kites were collected for the project. The chicks are aged between 4 - 6 weeks when taken. In year two, 50 Welsh kites will be imported into Ireland. Half the donor stock will be released at a second release program to be established in County Down, on the East Coast of Northern Ireland, by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds in 2008. With the Welsh Kite Trust being partners in the project and our funding the collection, we feel we have secured a steady source of donor stock. The captive stage is similar to that done in the Scottish red kite re-introductions. The donor stock are reared in wooden release cages for 5 - 6 weeks. Feeding is done through a cloth sleeve to minimize human contact. All foodstuffs are lead free, having been either trapped or shot with steel shot. During their



Welsh farmer donating a red kite to the project team © Damian Clarke

stay in captivity all the birds were fitted with PVC wing tags and tail mounted radios. Blood samples were taken for health screening and sexing of the kites. Post release of the red kites, supplementary feeding sites were established. These were monitored on a daily basis to monitor which and how many birds attended. When the birds ceased attending these feeding sites, the feeding was ceased. Since release regular radio tracking of the kites is conducted. The current number of kites in the general release area is assessed once a week as a minimum, although it is generally done more frequently. Contact is made with owners of lands where the kites frequent. Through the post release monitoring we have built up a good rapport with the community in the general release area. This local support from the farmers, gun club members and shooting estates has already proven vital in the project. The shooting of a red kite in Wicklow led to condemnation of the act from all sectors. The landowner, a local farmer, in a show of support subsequently banned all shooting over his lands. The Wicklow Kite Project is still at a very early stage, we are only now entering year two. In year two and year three monitoring of nesting attempts of the released red kites will become an important part of the project. This will be done concurrently with the import of donor stock from Wales. During all stages of the project liaising with local communities in Wicklow and the Welsh farmers and landowners who allow us to take “their” red kites will be high priorities.

Major difficulties faced

- Overcoming the concerns of the local farming community regarding the impact red kites may have on their farming activities, particularly in relation to designation of SPA’s for red kites.
- As it was not a conservation priority funding was initially difficult to secure.

Major lessons learned

- The partnership with the Welsh Kite Trust (WKT) has been invaluable in securing the donor stock. While we have only conducted one season of donor stock collection we are of the belief that the WKT will be able to supply all the donor stock required throughout the five years of the project.
- Liaison with the local farming community and gun clubs is vital. Arranging for Wicklow farmers to meet and freely discuss red kites with their Welsh counterparts was key in securing the support of the Wicklow farming community.
- High quality images have been key in getting excellent media coverage. The Wicklow Red Kite project has gotten front-page coverage in the National newspapers on a number of occasions. Quality images have been key to this.

Success of project

Reasons for success/failure:

| Highly Successful | Successful | Partially Successful | Failure |
|-------------------|------------|----------------------|---------|
| | | √ | |

- Too early to say at this point, but the project has so far gone as planned.