

## Country Notes for May 2018

Walking around with your eyes constantly turned to the sky is probably not – from a safety angle – recommended. However, if you are interested in birds, it definitely can be a good thing to do at this time of year. Throughout April we have been witnessing our summer migrants returning and there are now lots of swallows and house martins to be seen, and what a welcome sight they are. Swifts will be returning in the next few days and then virtually all of our summer visitors should be with us.

However, don't stop looking upwards as, rather excitingly, there have been numerous reports recently from Hollingbourne and surrounding villages of red kites flying overhead. Unfortunately, although quite a few people have seen them, your correspondent is not one of them! I'm still waiting – and looking upwards!

Until fairly recently the population of red kites was limited to about 20 in mid-Wales. However, successful introduction schemes mean there are now getting on for 2000 pairs in the UK. The nearest to us are on the South Downs and in Berkshire. I recently counted over 50 as I travelled along the M40 – and no I was not driving! It was inevitable, therefore, that they would start to spread. Who knows – before long they may be breeding in Hollingbourne!

They are easy to identify. We have all become used to the sight of buzzards in the sky. Red kites are roughly similar in size but, from below, the real point of identification is the tail, which is heavily forked and used like a rudder, constantly twisting to and fro as the birds move around in the sky. On closer inspection they have patches of chestnut red, brown and orange, but this is not so obvious from below. They are wonderful birds to see!

Keep watching!

Andrew Snowdon