



The Buzzard in Bucks

A plaintive kyaa-kyaa mewing sound from the spinney a hundred metres away across the field is a reminder that a pair of buzzards have nested there regularly for at least ten years. I have become accustomed to seeing them patrolling the skies in broad circles seeking their prey of small birds, mammals and carrion, and sometimes even large insects and earthworms at times of dearth. They are easily distinguished in flight from the red kites that have become such a common sight since their reintroduction to Bucks



more than twenty years ago – the buzzards have shorter tails rounded at the end, very different from the distinctive V shaped tail borne by the kite. I am always uplifted and excited by the sight of these buzzards above our home. When I lived in the Hertfordshire Chilterns in the 1960s, there was never a raptor to be seen in the sky other than the occasional hovering kestrel. We had to travel across to Wales or the South West, or up to the North to see any. Years of persecution by gamekeepers and farmers had driven the birds of prey from southern and

eastern England in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries until the species started to recover after the Second World War. Even then, rabbit populations were decimated by myxomatosis, reducing an important food source, while birds of prey were also affected by the use of organochlorine pesticides that affected their reproduction. Populations and range remained restricted until the late 1960s when these pesticides were withdrawn. At the same time, there was a reduction in illegal killing, and buzzard numbers started to increase slowly in SE England, and now are commonly to be seen flying and nesting over most of Bucks.

Thankfully, buzzards are a success story. To ensure their continued success, Wildlife Trusts work closely with farmers and landowners to promote wildlife-friendly practices. They are working towards a 'Living Landscape': a network of habitats and wildlife corridors across town and country which are good for both wildlife and people. You can support this greener vision for the future by joining your local Wildlife Trust.