Red Kite

no.10

The kite is a bird of prey which was common 150 years ago. Until recently it had been almost wiped out by shooting and poisoning, with only a few surviving in Wales. However, the species is now protected by law, and after their recent reintroduction to England red kites may be seen around Reading again.

An effortless glider, the red kite can range over hundreds of miles. Kites eat small animals and dead meat (carrion), especially rabbits. Before their decline they lived in towns and were useful in clearing up food scraps and butchers' waste. They were known as 'hat birds' because of their habit of taking things that interested them, sometimes even the hats from people's heads.

This bird was collected at Mountfield near Robertsbridge, East Sussex, in about 1912. George Bristow, the taxidermist who stuffed it, practised at St Leonards-on-Sea during the late 19th and early 20th century. The kite's body was removed from its skin, except for the bones of the feet and the front of the head. The skin was probably preserved with arsenic, then mounted on wire and padded to look like a live bird.

At the time this bird was killed, it was common practice to shoot animals in order to display them. Today, the climate of opinion has changed and Reading Museum Service does not kill any creatures for display.

Red kite
Object no. 1957.157.34

Reference

R. Lovegrove, *The Red Kite* (1990).

S. Cramp (ed.), *Handbook of the birds of Europe, the Middle East and North Africa : The Birds of the Western Palaearctic Volume II*, (1982).

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