

## Kestrels in Riddlesden

I was out on "my patch" in Riddlesden yesterday evening. I was delighted to see a Kestrel flying over me and noticed it was carrying something, something pretty large for a Kestrel, it looked like a big rat or mole. The bird flew onto a ledge in a disused Barn making a perfect dry nest. The nest was very close to me and making it possible to see right into it, due to the incline of the footpath I was on. A female kestrel was already in the nest so the male could not hang around for long as the nest didn't look large enough to hold them both. The female was grappling with the "meal". After a while it actually flew out of the nest with the left overrun its beak, to reveal 2 or perhaps 3 very young chicks covered in grey down. The female returned to the nest maybe five to ten minutes later, to brood the young, where she stayed put. The male returned maybe 30 minutes later with more food, which it just deposited and left. After tearing up the food the female brooded the young watching me watching her, but after a while she turned her back to me as I just sat quietly admiring this amazing scene.

Due to the fact I was still for some time watching the Kestrels, I kept scanning the area with my bino's, especially the dry stone walls. I used to report Little Owls here regularly, including young, however they have been missing for at least 5 years, however last night I saw my first Little Owl in all of this time..... Sitting on the wall, occasionally jumping down into the field. It did call to another bird, but I couldn't see it. I suspect there were two so I will be monitoring this area more closely as they have previously produced young birds nesting in the walls. Fingers crossed for this year.

I couldn't believe my luck last evening it was a very special event, with so much news of the loss of birds and seeing for myself how the numbers are down, to see breeding success of the kestrels and the return of "my" Little Owls is magical.



Kestrel at the nest site

photo: Penny French

I will record my sightings but just recording didn't seem enough for me today!!

I revisited the site each week from a distance. Through the extreme heat of the summer, 2 chicks went down to 1, which successfully fledged. The parents looked to do a great job. It was my first Kestrel nest and a joy to see.

Penny French