

# **Kemerton Conservation** **Trust**

## **Report from John Clarke**

**October 2009 to October 2010**

### **Summary**

*2009-10 has been another hugely successful year for Kemerton Conservation Trust. It is very important to note that the Trust achieves as much now – and perhaps even more – than it did 10 years ago, on a greatly reduced budget. This can be attributed to a number of factors but mainly because, as the person responsible for the day-to-day running of the Trust and the management of a number of wildlife habitats, I am fortunate to have a dedicated weekly team of volunteers led by Alan Marsh and a monthly team led by Kate Aubury. Alan works incredibly hard, using his diverse skills as an ex-captain of industry and often working unpaid to see a job completed to our mutual satisfaction. Since he began working with me there have been many changes, including more efficient use of machinery, prioritisation and flexibility of work, while attracting volunteers of the best calibre. Pamela Clarke gives many hours to the Trust by supporting me in all aspects of my work – from office duties to wildlife surveys. Always keen to help, John Cutler's skills and experience are of great help.*

*I am delighted and proud of what we have achieved. Nevertheless I must point out that it has been done with minimal financial resources, which puts me, Alan and his team under constant stress. Funding for KCT is a serious problem and I believe the subject requires the maximum focus of the board of governors.*

### **Heath & Safety**

Regular checks are carried out at Kemerton Lake Nature Reserve on the condition of fences, rides, viewpoints, hides, warning notices and life-saving equipment. The main access gate is kept clear of litter and overhanging vegetation. The sides of the main track and the reception glade are mown regularly.

I keep records of all visiting groups and work parties across the estate – as long as I am provided with the necessary information. Visiting groups and regular individual volunteers are provided with Risk Assessments and a Health & Safety check list – and made aware of the day-to-day risks by myself, Alan or Kate.

There have been several minor incidents of vandalism which cost the Trust valuable man-hours and of course, money.

## **The National Trust Orchard Restoration Project**

Funding for this project began at the end of 2008-9 and continues until February 2011. During the past year we have planted trees in 5 orchards, carried out wildlife surveys in 9 orchards and hosted visits from the Worcestershire Biological Recorders. Most orchards have been mapped and the trees and guards maintained. Slipstream Organics continues to buy the fruit from The Lillans - our largest orchard, Minchew's Cyder takes our cider fruit and the processing plant at Pershore College takes our perry pears. We do not yet have a market for the damson crop.

Several of our orchard volunteers have gone on courses on orchard maintenance, juicing and marketing and will report back to me.

We have obtained grafting material from 10 'rare' apple varieties and Walcot Organic Nurseries are producing a minimum of two trees from each. This winter we will repeat the exercise with a further 10 varieties. Grafts have also been taken and processed from the rare and ancient perry pear in Daffurns Orchard and from the same site we are producing young trees from Joeby Crab – another rare variety.

We have been trialling my design for a 'horse collar' to extend guards around trees where horses graze. To date it has been successful and the small trial will be extended.

As part of the project we are in the process of putting up specialised nest-boxes for Little Owl in several of the orchards.

Kemerton Orchard Workers (KOW) organised their annual Apple Day to raise funds for their work (see later).

During the final few months of the grant we will be buying materials for future work and planting more apple and greengage trees.

## **Kemerton Lake Nature Reserve**

The reserve takes up most of the Trust's basic resources. During the past year we have focussed habitat work on controlling invading willow and other scrub in the scrapes and reed beds – both BAP habitats. Maintenance work was required on the viewing hides, fences, paths, and rides. A grant of £2000 was received in 2009 from the Severn Waste Environmental Fund which supported this work.

The **Mining Bee Habitat** trials have not progressed – I had no time available for monitoring and Geoff Trevis, the county expert on aculeates was unable to make recording visits so I focussed any effort on maintaining the current habitats which had

been created in 2009 and earlier. By the time of the KCT AGM Geoff and I may have met to discuss what we can do next year and how we can complete the paper which we were obliged to abandon.

The **Leaf Litter** trials did continue - Alan was able to introduce more litter containing Bluebell from the railway embankment which was due to be reinforced. He also 'weeded' and repaired trial cages as required and took Bluebells from trial cages where they had proliferated and spread them in new trial areas. Whenever possible I visited the trial sites noting changes but did not have time to monitor as thoroughly as I would like.

Thanks to the three sponsors the **Woodland Shrubs and Wildflower Project** saw many piles of brushwood and some 'beetle lodges' and other log piles created. Blackcap, Willow Warbler, Chiffchaff and Wren were all heard singing from this artificial scrub habitat. A pair of Treecreeper nested in a log 'wigwam'. Later, some of the brushwood was taken for making faggots as part of the crayfish project (see below) and the remainder will be consolidated before the breeding birds return next year. Some shrubs were planted last winter and more will be added as they become available.

Regular bird counts were carried out by Rob Prudden while Mike Averill recorded dragonflies..

Each year we cut areas of dense rush in the wet scrapes to provide a good diversity of habitats and we still hope to begin practical trials of controlling *Crassula* by mechanical means – see HLS later.

Regular H&S checks were made and the main gate area, main drive and reception glade were kept clean and/or mown.

The **Crayfish Project** was started in partnership with Buglife. Some 10 years ago I attempted to set up a haven for the British Crayfish at the lake but failed. In early 2010 Buglife appealed for 'Ark Sites' in a new initiative and I contacted them, once again offering the lake as a suitable site. During the next few months and after several discussions a loose 'partnership' was formed between Buglife, KCT and the Environment Agency (EA). After extensive tests and feasibility checks the site was approved and we began work to provide extra crayfish habitat prior to their introduction. We were advised at all times by crayfish experts from Buglife and other organisations and this information was then combined with our practical knowledge and skills. Using some of the material from the woodland brushwood piles we made faggots which were then sunk in a chosen area of the lake, adjacent to a belt of reeds. Recycled stone of the required size is now to be placed in the water, alongside the faggots – thus providing the three diverse crayfish habitats recommended. By the time of the AGM it may well be that the crayfish have been introduced.

## Beggarboys

In last year's report I mentioned that we had begun a project to restore this important reserve and that in doing so we had discovered a serious leak in the bund bank, that the weir boards were rotting, that the emergency overflow was in a bad state and that the feeder ditches (and one in particular) were causing problems – including degrading the two grassy glades and a small block of woodland in Richards Wood above the wetland. I am pleased to report that thanks to the original grant from the Severn Waste Environmental Fund and another from the Cotswold Conservation Board's Sustainability Development Fund we have made a great deal of progress. The leak has been sealed and a temporary repair made to the weir – and the water level dropped until we finalise the work. Now Entrust have agreed further funding to complete the repairs to the weir and emergency overflow – and to clean out two natural silt 'traps' in the sedge bed – between Richards Wood and the lake.

We have begun work to improve the grassland habitat on the surrounding banks.

Parts of the sedge bed will be cut and encroaching willow removed to allow the area to act as a natural silt trap and filter for the water flowing in.

In Richards Wood, Alan's and Kate's teams dug out the badly silted-up feeder ditch – a considerable feat. Alan and the Gloucester Vale Conservation Volunteers (GVCV) 'coppiced' to 1 metre high a stretch of the old hedge alongside the ditch and bounding the wood. Afterwards some of the cut brushwood was woven into the coppice stems and around posts where the hedge had died, to form a 'dead hedge', providing protection from deer grazing. This has been very successful, flooding has ceased and the new hedge is making excellent new growth. The remaining brushwood was stacked under the mature conifers to provide extra cover for wildlife.

The small, circular ride has been cleared and cut back, providing light for plants including orchids. This winter a few shrubs and perhaps some woodland wild flowers will be planted and if possible a further stretch of hedge will be restored.

## John Moore Reserve

This small reserve, owned by the Trust on behalf of the local community is much-loved by those who visit regularly. Thanks to the sponsors of **The Woodland Shrub and Wildflower Project** we have been able to make considerable improvements – both to the wildlife habitats and to public access.

The earlier drainage works at the main access have been successful. We have removed several potentially dangerous overhanging branches and kept the access path mown and clear of debris.

During last winter a number of shrubs and wild flowers were planted, nest-boxes repaired and material from cut branches and coppiced shrubs was stacked as wildlife refuges.

This winter we intend completing the programme of planting shrubs.

There is an on-going problem here with the invasive Himalayan Balsam which is rampaging through the adjacent Old Garden woodland and spreading downstream. We have been only temporarily successful in removing it from the reserve and we need to pull up plants at least three times a year to prevent them seeding.

## **Daffurns Orchard**

This community orchard continues to be enjoyed by locals and visitors from further afield. KOW manage the orchard for the Trust and the local community. Their work includes the management of the trees, the cutting of sections of a hedge on rotation, the control of invading scrub and cutting and carrying the grass crop. As usual, sheep have been used to graze the aftermath, reducing the sward to help improve the diversity of plants and in preparation for the growth of spring flowers. Peter Doble cuts hedges on field and road sides.

The Marcher Apple Network (MAN) has completed the identification of all but 3 of the apple trees in the orchard. I now need to update the map and to get labels made for all the trees. A volunteer has agreed to make the labels – he has already made 46 for The Lillans!

KOW raise all the funding required to manage the orchard by holding the annual Apple Day and through the sale of cards and calendars.

This orchard nature reserve could not be managed to such a high standard without the help of local volunteers and the Trust is grateful for their dedication.

## **Lammas Meadows**

This year has seen the purchase of two parcels of land in Asham Meadow – on the Avon at Eckington – adding to the Trust's holdings of this nationally important wildlife habitat. As no doubt Adrian will report, these holdings should also provide a long-term financial benefit to the Trust through a variety of annual incomes. This purchase was financed by a 75% grant from Natural England supported through DEFRA's Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund. Of the £8,400 which the Trust has had to find itself, £1500 was contributed as volunteer time.

I have not yet had time to visit any of the meadows for monitoring purposes. However, Rob Prudden has agreed to carry out regular surveys of birds and to provide casual observations on other wildlife. I have noticed that, presumably thanks to Peter's influence, several sections of the meadow were mowed this year and this has been followed by sheep grazing. I do not recall noticing grazing there for a number of years and the return to the traditional management will be beneficial to wildlife.

## **Greenhouse and Nursery Project**

I continue to look after young trees prior to their transfer to the arboretum.

In the nursery, with the help of volunteers we grow rare and scarce arable wild flowers. The seed is harvested and stored. This year some seed was donated to Worcestershire Wildlife Trust (WWT) and also to Pershore College as part of their teaching programme. I am hoping that the HLS proposals for the arable area in Kemerton Lake Nature Reserve will permit us to use it as a demonstration site for these plants. Seed can also be used to bulk up the natural seed-bank in the conservation margins on Bredon Hill.

A number of volunteers help us by growing trees and shrubs from local seeds and cuttings. We could buy these quite cheaply - albeit not locally sourced – but I also believe it is important to involve the local community in other than menial tasks and it provides good publicity for the Trust. In addition, when we apply for funding it demonstrates that we work closely with the local community.

Much of our work in this project is funded via the Woodland Shrubs and Wild Flower Project. **Cotswold Agricultural Merchants, Stanway Screens and Bredon Forest School** are supporting the 5-year project. It would be ideal to have a further two sponsors. Knowing that funding is available in advance allows us to plan ahead.

## **Nest-boxes**

We maintain a chain of boxes across the estate. Most aim to attract common hole-nesting birds into young woodland where no natural sites are available. We are putting up specialised boxes for Little Owl, Barn Owl, Kestrel, House Martin, House Sparrow, Nuthatch and Spotted Flycatcher. Most boxes are made by local volunteers. Roy Cox manages boxes at Beggarboys, the Bushes and Adwyck Wood on the hill. In addition we maintain a chain of bat boxes across the estate and when funding allows we would like to increase the number and range.

## **Recorder**

The wildlife records collected during 2009 were entered on the database during January 2010. Once again, time diverted into grant applications and similar office management work prevented me from carrying out my main function – monitoring. However, records from volunteer observers helped us to boost the amount of data. This was placed on a copy of Recorder still retained at my house as the database was still not installed in the new office.

In spring 2010 Simon Wood, manager of the WBRC, loaded Recorder onto the Trust's computer, together with the latest data set which now contains over 52,000 records. He

has since installed Recorder onto Adrian's PC and the Trust is extremely grateful for his continued technical support.

## **Website**

The site continues to attract a steady number of visitors. Those who visit and contact me are invariably full of praise for its quality and content. The highest praise comes from the BBC who selected KCT for a proposed piece on the demise of the British apple, but due to timing difficulties this was cancelled. Via the website, KCT was selected for a shortlist of 'candidates' to provide material for BBC's 'Springwatch' but perhaps fortunately, we were not chosen.

We were on television though when BBC's Midlands Today filmed members of the Worcestershire Recorders surveying wildlife in Daffurns Orchard in a piece promoting the importance of wildlife recording.

In addition KCT receives enquiries about Elm trees, orchards, possible training opportunities and general advice.

Jim Verrechia, our webmaster, set up a facility so that selected individuals could add articles or news. This was later closed as Microsoft are about to issue an improved format. He is yet another volunteer to whom the Trust owes a great deal of thanks.

## **Monitoring**

I am acutely aware that I am not fulfilling my main function – that of monitoring wildlife across the estate and beyond. In the time available to me (ie. 10 hours per week) this is not possible. A considerable amount of time has been devoted to funding applications in particular – deadlines for applications often conflict with the need to survey wildlife at the right time of year. Nevertheless, with the help of volunteers we are still accumulating information - though each volunteer requires some of my time.

## **Site Job Sheets**

The original Management Plan has proved to be too cumbersome and detailed and has not been used for practical management purposes. I suggested that I design a series of site job sheets. I see this as an important tool both for present and future habitat managers but also when applying for grants, writing reports etc. Alan and I made a start on designing and compiling job sheets for a number of sites. Unfortunately there is no time at present to continue this work and perhaps it should get higher priority when applying for future funding?

## **Inventory**

Alan has produced a comprehensive inventory of KCT's tools and equipment. A number of items were lost during the early 1990's and when the extent became apparent we decided to keep better records. In addition, with our increased dependency on machinery and volunteers the Trust now owns many more tools and some valuable machinery. The smaller equipment is held in a store which Peter has made available to us and Alan has carried out improvements to its security. Peter stores the larger machinery in other secure sites. An up-to-date inventory also helps Alan to identify when servicing is required and to make regular checks on condition.

## **Outreach**

We have continued our close links with the Worcestershire Biological Records Centre (WBRC) and WWT. Several members of the WBRC carried out surveys in 4 of our orchards. In 2011 they will carry out 1 more orchard survey. In addition I hope to arrange for Geoff Trevis and I – and hopefully others – to carry out monitoring of invertebrates at Kemerton Lake Nature Reserve.

Bredon Forest School has an outdoor teaching area in South Wiseacre Wood. Apparently it is extremely successful and well attended. KCT helps whenever it can. This year Alan took them the willow from the scrapes at the Lake, cut by Kate and her team, which they used for basket-making and other activities.

Kate organised a successful Open Day which focussed on invertebrates. Some of the county's top entomologists led walks while KCT staff were on hand to explain habitat management.

I mentioned earlier our participation in a BBC programme to publicise the importance of wildlife recording.

Adrian and I attended the Worcestershire Biological Recorders AGM and later we attended the AGM of WWT where Adrian was presented with an award for his contribution to wildlife conservation in the county.

I hosted a visit to Kemerton Lake Nature Reserve by Worcestershire County Council Planners who intend writing a paper about best practice in the development of brownfield sites. They consider our reserve to be one of the best examples available to them.

I have already reported on the crayfish joint venture with Buglife. We are hoping that together we can develop a wider project on farmland invertebrates. Given that we already have 28 years of records from the estate and a number of on-going small practical trials, the feeling is that we should be able to do so. What is required is perhaps for Adrian and I to discuss with Buglife what might be possible and how we might approach the problem of funding.

I am heavily involved in organising and liaising with the wide range of volunteers who help us, both in habitat management and wildlife recording.

I continue to receive enquiries based around RELIC which seeks to promote the planting of probably disease-resistant elms.

I continue to act as advisor to the Beckford Nature Reserve Committee which manages a former gravel pit as a community facility.

## **Volunteer Work**

Alan Marsh has a small but dedicated team of skilled people available during the week and occasional weekends that provides us with (my estimate) between 500 and 600 hours per year. They focus on habitat management. In particular I would like to thank Mike Walton for his major contribution.

Alan himself contributes a considerable number of voluntary hours as well as donating materials at times.

Kate Aubury will be producing her own report. She has a larger team who meet once a month and provide us with (my estimate) around 300 hours per year of habitat management. She will also report on her voluntary work with bats.

KOW manage Daffurns Orchard.

Charles Ellis (Oak Tree Nursery), and Pershore College provide help with the Greenhouse and Nursery Project.

The GVCV have specialist skills and are in great demand but we usually arrange 2 days per year – up to 100 man hours per year.

Rachel Poloni has made a big commitment to be responsible for the greenhouse whenever I am away.

The Cutler family have always been great supporters of KCT. In recent times, John has been helping both Alan and I in a range of projects. Shelley has undertaken to grow some trees and shrubs from seed and David Semple makes nest-boxes and is voluntary warden of the hay meadow at Upton-on-Severn.

Gordon Long has volunteered to make tree labels for the orchards.

The following carried out surveys: Rob Prudden (birds), Mike Averill (dragonflies), Gavin Peplow (moths), Roger Umpelby, Geoff Trevis, Harry Green, John Meiklejohn and others (invertebrates).

Sue Chandler carries out glow-worm surveys and helps with the Greenhouse and Nursery project.

Roy Cox builds and sites nest boxes at Beggarboys, Aldwick Wood and The Bushes.

Jim Verrechia's work on our website, IT support and occasional donation of materials are entirely voluntary.

In particular I would like to draw attention to the contribution made by Pamela. At the present rate she contributes (my estimate) around 500 hours per year – in all aspects of the Trust's work from office duties to wildlife surveys.

I too need to contribute many volunteer hours so that Trust business can continue to run smoothly.

## **Funding**

I have already reported on The National Trust Orchard Restoration Project but it is worthwhile mentioning here that they are providing 100% funding and this has been of huge benefit as KCT does not have to provide any match funding.

£3,431 from The Cotswold Conservation Board and £2,000 from the Severn Waste Environmental Fund enabled us to carry out the major works at Beggarboys in the year to last March.

We have received an offer of a further £3,000 from the Severn Waste Environmental Fund to allow us to complete the work at Beggarboys. We had asked for more than £3,600 but Alan and I believe we can still achieve our objectives within the amount offered.

We have received an offer of £500 from Naturesave towards our work with Buglife on the Crayfish Project.

We must not forget the generous donation of £2,000 from Roger Workman at last year's AGM. His support enabled us to retain Alan during a difficult financial period.

Bredon Forest School have made 2 donations of £600 within a year to support Alan in his work.

Bredon Forest School have also joined Cotswold Agricultural Merchants and Stanway Screens in sponsoring the Woodland Shrubs and Wildflower Project. Each sponsor has agreed to donate £200 a year for 5 years.

I believe that Adrian and Kate are approaching a number of funding bodies with a general application.

Whilst I am aware that my input may be needed on many applications for funding, the time required to work up a full application for a single project can be considerable. This year I have applied for at least 4 grants (2 failed). I estimate that the time spent on these

applications would have been sufficient to carry out all the wildlife monitoring that I would wish to do.

## **Higher Level Stewardship**

I have had little input into the application – aside from being asked to propose specific conservation projects. I have submitted them for consideration to Adrian and Caroline Corsie who are drawing up the application. It would be greatly beneficial if within the HLS scheme funding was found for some of KCT's basic overheads.

In one of my proposals – at the Lake Reserve – I suggested that we sought funding for a small trial into managing *Crassula* mechanically. The Trust has previously invested a great deal of time and considerable expense in trying to control it by chemical means and in the circumstances I see the mechanical solution as the best option.

Aside from this, I have little to report on HLS until I get feedback on my proposals.

## **Acknowledgements**

I have acknowledged the contribution made by sponsors, funders and more than 50 volunteers elsewhere. I estimate the volunteers' contribution to be equal to more than 3000 man hours a year – approaching the equivalent of 2 full-time posts.

I would like to draw attention again to the work of Alan Marsh whose dedication and enthusiasm has been a vital part of the Trust's success.

The Trust should also acknowledge the support provided by the farm. We try not to call on Peter's help but there are times when the Trust's resources cannot cope without it. However I am aware that the increasing demands on Peter's time can make things difficult.