

Kemerton Conservation Trust

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Registered Charity No. 702488

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Kemerton Conservation Trust – Report to Governors

April 2024 – March 2025

Pamela Clarke – Conservation Advisor

Overview

Yet another very busy year with exciting developments across the board – from new bird and plant findings, new management works, ongoing survey work, and engagement with the wider community via social media. As ever we are indebted to the volunteers who contribute to the work of the Trust.

Recorder

Simon Wood (Worcestershire Biological Records Centre) helped with the transfer of Recorder data from KCT's old PC to the Secretary's PC at Kemerton Court, as two copies were merged into one master copy. He was able to come out end of July to address entering issues caused by the merger. Matt was concerned that all past records entered in the paper diaries had in fact been entered onto Recorder, so Simon and I performed random searches, and this confirmed that those records had been entered.

West Midland Ringing Group

After a short break in the summer Fergus Henderson and the group recommenced their ringing at the KLNK in December 2024. Records given on the Kemerton Ringing WhatsApp group were entered onto the Recorder Database.

19th May the group checked the Marsh Tit boxes which were occupied by Blue Tits and Great Tits – a brood of Great Tits was ringed.

Volunteers

Vivienne McGee continued to check the other Tit boxes in Aldwick Wood and repaired/rehung any as needed. At least 2 of the boxes were used.

George Day continued butterfly monitoring. He reported that last year was very disappointing 'although not a complete disaster. All butterflies were down in numbers except the Ringlet whose numbers only dropped a bit after a couple of good years. The Meadow Brown held its own as it seems to manage adverse conditions. Perhaps most worryingly was the smaller number of Bumblebees.'

Juliet Vines continued to carry out the monthly BTO wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) at KLNK and these were entered onto Recorder. (The December 2024 count found 9 Jack Snipe and 103 Common Snipe).

Nicola Marples and Dave Kelly, both former zoologists at Trinity, Dublin, moved to Twyning in 2024 and asked that I meet up with them to discuss what they might want to do here and how KCT could help. They are keen to be involved with practical projects in farming/natural history, and we discussed their areas of expertise. I suggested they contact Worcestershire Wildlife Trust initially and, as Dave is a ringer, I pointed him towards West Midland Ringing Group – he now rings with Fergus Henderson at Kemerton and with Paul Hopwood for Overbury Estate. I arranged a meeting with AMGD in January 2025 and subsequently it was decided that in April they would take on bird surveys in Beggar Boys and Aldwick Wood, recording all bird species in a quantitative way to work out densities of each species. They will cover each area twice as recommended by the BTO.

Glow-worms

With volunteers Penny Minta and Lis Coates two surveys were undertaken when weather conditions were favourable – 4 were seen on 14th and 6 on 28th July. Part of the transect area had undergone changes which could have accounted for poor numbers.

Sally King – Kemerton resident – passed on her sightings to me from her usual route 22:00 – 23:00 hrs from Bayliss Road up to Bells Castle and returning via Rocks Cottage. She comments: ‘Overall numbers are down I think, might be the mild winter not helped them. They seem to like grass verges with longer grass at the back of the verge and shorter grass at the front’. She suggests that possibly they retreat into the longer grass during the day and use the shorter grass at night to light up and attract a male. (She continues to copy her records to Kemerton Parish Council).

Spotted Flycatcher Study

Another poor year for the birds. First bird sighted mid-May. In Kemerton 1 nest with full clutch deserted c.10th June owing to heavy rain. 25th June pair seen locally (prob same birds) and during July. End of August breeding proved with juvs seen being fed. Beckford ?pair successful breeding unconfirmed. Overbury ?5 pairs but no evidence of breeding save for one nest with juvs seen mid-August. One other nest failed.

Last recording of birds – 2 seen in Overbury 13th September.

Wildflower seeds

With the removal of the Trust Portacabin the wildflower seeds which had been collected over the years in the Wildflower Nursery (and stored in the fridge there) were sown in Collins Meadow in the prescribed section to the north-east corner of the site. I broadcast the seeds in early November 2024 after the site was drilled. These included Prickly Poppy, Rough Poppy, Long-headed Poppy, Cornflower, Night-flowering Catchfly, Corn Buttercup and Shepherd’s Needle. The last two species had not been sown there before (i.e. when the original sowing was done in 2021).

Quantities broadcast:

Shepherd’s needle *Scandix pecten-veneris* 466 g
Corn Buttercup *Ranunculus arvensis* 310 g
Cornflower *Centaurea cyanus* 61 g
Night-flowering Catchfly *Silene noctiflora* 267 g
Rough Poppy *Papaver hybridum* 234 g
Long-headed Poppy *Papaver dubium* 30 g
Prickly Poppy *Papaver argemone* 586 g

Barn Owl

In early January a Barn Owl was seen in Lillans, then Vals, Squitterbrook, Coneygree. A pair seen on 17th January at Squitterbrook. With Peter and Rob, a Barn Owl box was put up in the barn by

PD's in February – probably too late for this season's breeding. The birds had been absent to the area for the past couple of years.

Records of note across the farm:-

2024

5th April First Willow Warbler – Far Park
19th April First Cuckoo – All Fours
26th April Swallow – Ivy Cottage
29th April Mottled Umber – Daffurn's
21st June Barn Owl young heard - Pad Barn
21st June Lesser Horseshoe Bat - Stable Yard roost - 41
26th July Silver-washed Fritillary – Stable Cottage garden
1st Oct 6 Swallow – Far Park
14th Oct Male Stonechat – Far Park
16th Nov 21 Pied Wagtail, 5 Meadow Pipit – Collins – arable recently tilled

2025

17th Jan Pair Barn Owl Coneygree and thereon single/pair seen thru Jan and Feb at Squitterbrook, Val's and Lillans
29th Jan Song Thrush singing – Ivy Cottage
1st Mar Barn Owl early morning - Lillans
8th Mar Brimstone – Ivy Cottage

KLNR

2024

13th April Grasshopper Warbler seen and heard at Settlement Pools
18th April First Cuckoo and Sedge and Reed Warbler
20th April Whitethroat
4th June 6 Oystercatcher including 3 juvs. 2 singing Cetti's – south-east and south-west corners.
19th June 2 Hobby hunting over reed beds
29th June Grasshopper Warbler heard reeling in marsh area
3rd July Pair Great-crested Grebe + 2 lge juvs. 10 Swift moving south, large fluffy juv Water Rail in marsh
20th July Flock 54 post breeding Lapwing incl. many fledged juvs. pair Tufted with 7 new duckling, 1 Great White Egret on island
12th/13th Aug Juv Marsh Harrier
14th Aug Lesser Emperor Dragonfly (only 2nd record for the site)
16th Aug Juv Marsh Harrier seen with yellow wing tag – it proved to be a male ringed in Manea, Cambridgeshire in June 2024
19th Aug 5 Common Snipe on marsh, Hirundines moving south (House/Sand Martins /Swallows/ Swifts
30th Aug Juv Whinchat in marsh + juv Stonechat
5th Sept At 16.15 AMGD flushed a Bittern between the lake and the reed lagoon which disappeared low over the lagoon, 10 minutes later he put it up again on the open area between Collins and the lagoon and it flew south over the lake (it came on to rain heavily so not known if/when it left - **first record for the site**
6th Sept Adult + juv Little Ringer Plover on central island left when female Sparrowhawk made attack on them, pair Stonechat on marsh, still 3 Reed Warbler, Common Whitethroat and Cetti's singing in reed beds

11 th Sept	Still few hirundines – 30 House Martin, few Sand Martin and Swallow
17 th Sept	1 Hobby hawking
21 st Sept	Migrating hirundines - 40 Swallow and 35 House Martin passing through, 5 Meadow Pipit in marsh area
24 th Sept	1 male Red-crested Pochard, 1 Little Egret
5 th Oct	1 Jack Snipe – first of the winter, 1 Great White Egret
11 th Oct	34 Common Snipe, 1 Meadow Pipit
18 th Oct	First wintering Wigeon (2)
30 th Oct	2 male + 1 fem Stonechat marsh area
30 th Oct	*2 Immature Marsh Harrier hunting marsh area, 2 male +1 fem Stonechat marsh area
31 st Oct	Starlings starting to appear and by 1 st December up to 1,000 murmuring - roosting in reed beds
11 th Nov	139 Coot, *2 Immature Marsh Harrier hunting marsh area, huge nos. of waterfowl - 112 Wigeon, 135 Teal (flew in from Overbury wetlands when shooting began), 14 Gadwall, 12 Mallard, 16 Moorhen
13 th Nov	Juv/imm Marsh Harrier hunting marsh area ('almost certainly a bird visited 30 th Oct and 1 st Nov, prob regular circuit in the area' R. Prudden pers. comm.)
16 th Nov	Pre-dawn visit – c. 320 Starling leaving roost, 30 Lapwing flew n-e to s-w (presumably after night feeding)
1 st Dec	Barn Owl hunting pools early morning, C. 4,500 Starling left roost in reedbeds by west hide, 12 Cormorant had roosted overnight in tall willow to s of lake, 2 Water Rail, 55 Common Snipe, 7 Jack Snipe on marsh, 25 Linnet flew from communal night roost in large bramble patch to east of marsh
18 th Dec	Male Mandarin, 2 male Shoveler, male Goldeneye east end of lake – first record for this site for more than 10 years
26 th Dec	No Starling roost

2025

13 th Jan	95% ice cover, 255 Wigeon, 3 Shoveler
16 th Jan	Pair of Otter fishing – seen visiting three consecutive days and occ through January
16 th Jan	Early Great Crested Grebe (prob moved from river habitat due to extreme weather), Marsh Harrier juv
22 nd Jan	450 Wigeon, 14 Gadwall
25 th Jan	1 Cattle Egret – first record for site
3 rd Feb	5 male and 4 fem Pochard
24 th Feb	675 Wigeon, 45 Teal, 5 Pintail (3 m, 2 f), 1 m Pochard, 12 Lapwing, pr Oystercatcher
5 th Mar	650+ Wigeon, 1 m Pintail, 9 Pochard, 14 Common Snipe, 1 Jack Snipe, pr Oystercatcher
3 rd Mar	Barn Owl – Lake Meadow

Autumn/Winter peak totals:

Coot	11 th Nov - 139
Wigeon	24 th Feb - huge number - 675
Teal	22 nd Nov - 75
Gadwall	26 th Dec - 18, and again in Feb
Common Snipe	15 th Dec - 103
Jack Snipe	15 th Dec - 9
Canada Goose	16 th Nov - 12
Greylag	1 st Jan - 24

Common Pochard at KLNR

An interesting note on this declining breeding bird in the UK - compiled by valued volunteer **Rob Prudden**.

In 1999 a pair of Common Pochard nested at KLNR, this was the first breeding pair in Worcestershire since 1985. The following detail shows nesting pairs recorded at the lake in subsequent years to date. During the period no breeding Common Pochard have been recorded anywhere else in the county. Although most of the breeding pairs have produced good numbers of ducklings, they do tend to be heavily predated shortly after hatching with only a small percentage going on to reach fledging. There are several obvious perpetrators of the predation, these commonly include large Gulls, Corvids, Otters & Mink. By 2023 the number of birds wintering in the UK had dropped hugely. Without doubt this is at least partly due to global warming, conditions in northern Europe are now less likely to freeze, hence birds do not need to make the trip across the North Sea to the UK. What affect this will have on British breeders is yet to be seen.

Breeding Records at KLNR

1999 – Single pair bred.

2000 – Single pair bred.

2001 – No breeding confirmed, although a pair were present during the breeding season.

2002 – Single pair bred.

2003 – Two pairs bred.

2004 – Two pairs bred.

2005 – Two pairs bred.

2006 – Several pairs present during the breeding season but no proof of nesting noted.

2007 – Two pairs produced three broods.

2008 – Three pairs bred.

2009 –2015 Two pairs bred.

2016 – Four pairs bred.

2017 – Four pairs bred.

2018 – Six pairs bred.

2019 – Two pairs bred.

2020 – Four pairs bred.

2021 – Three pairs bred.

2022 – Four pairs bred.

2023 – Two pairs were present during the breeding season, but no proof of success noted.

2024 – Single pair present during the breeding season but no proof of success noted.

2025 – Five males & four females were present by 3rd February.