

# **Kemerton Conservation Trust**

## **Report from John Clarke**

**October 2010 to October 2011**

### **Summary**

*This has been another successful year, with a great deal being achieved. The Trust has completed two major projects – in orchard restoration and in a wetland restoration. We also completed the establishment of Kemerton Lake Nature Reserve as an Ark Site for the native British Crayfish. The management of this reserve takes most of our resources.*

*The Mining Bee project has completed its final year but the Leaf Litter trials and the Woodland Shrubs and Wildflower project continue. The changes in local mining bee habitats under the HLS plan may provide opportunities for future comparative studies.*

*Wildlife Monitoring has again been restricted as most of my available hours are taken up by administration. I do rely heavily on volunteers to provide information and the Trust is grateful for their support.*

*I am concerned that no sources of funding have been found to update Recorder and compile Job Sheets. This will enable governors to plan for a smooth transition when I retire. We also need funding to update public information boards and to replace rotting sluice covers at the lake.*

*We continue to rely heavily on the support of a large number of volunteers – in particular Mike Walton and Kate Aubury - but very little would be possible without the support and sheer hard work provided by our part-time Warden, Alan Marsh. Alan's enthusiasm, dedication and hard work is part-paid, part voluntary and the Trust could not function as it does without him.*

### **Health & 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. Visiting groups and regular individual volunteers are provided with Risk Assessments and a health & safety checklist – and made aware of the day-to-day risks by myself, Alan Marsh or Kate Aubury.

There have been very few minor incidents of vandalism this year.

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

Funding for this project began at the end of 2008-9 and continued until February 2011.

I produced a comprehensive report on the project, accompanied by a pictorial record of the orchards, the work and those who took part. Thanks are due to Alan Marsh for printing the photographs and front cover. The report has been widely acclaimed.

During the project we were able to carry out work in a total of 9 orchards. Work included restoration of old trees as well as new plantings and the management of existing young trees. We also produced a complete set of orchard diagrams (maps) and once again thanks are due to Alan Marsh, this time for digitising the diagrams. More work was carried out on fruit identification and to that end a group from the Marcher Apple Network visited. They have virtually completed identifications of all the apple trees in Daffurns Orchard and have made considerable inroads in the Lillans. They have made no charge for this work and KCT is extremely grateful to them.

Wildlife recording continued and in addition members of Worcestershire Recorders made 3 visits to our orchards, focussing their intensive wildlife surveys on the Walled Garden, the Lillans, Daffurns and Upstones.

### **Other Orchard Related Work**

**Daffurns Orchard** continues to be a great success – both as an orchard nature reserve and as a community project. Kemerton Orchard Workers (KOW) which manages the orchard for KCT is still well supported, with good numbers turning out for work parties. Each year I produce a jobs list and advise on other management matters. It is due to their hard work and commitment that the orchard nature reserve thrives.

KOW called a public meeting which Alan and I both attended and this was to discuss the management and funding of the orchard. From that meeting a Teddy Bears' Picnic was organised which was well attended, raising funds for the orchard whilst also giving something back to the community and making families aware of their orchard. KOW continues to produce its annual calendar which is of a very high standard, as well as postcards and greetings cards.

This year beehives have been sited in the orchard and it is now possible to buy Kemerton honey.

The hay was cut and carried in July. During last winter KOW carried out work to manage a section of the hedge, pollard a couple of willow trees, control invading scrub and manage the orchard trees.

Peter Doble continues to cut the hedges on both the field and road sides.

This year sheep grazing has already taken place and the management works will be carried out before the emergence of winter and spring wild flowers. Thanks are due to Richard Jones for continuing to help us by providing sheep grazing.

In October 2011 KOW organised the Annual Apple Day. We were honoured to have two members of the Marcher Apple Network present who carried out identifications of apples. During the summer KOW had a stall at The Kemerton Country Fair.

Walcot Organic Nurseries have successfully grafted scions from both Barland (Perry Pear) and Joeby Crab (Crab Apple). The latter appears to be extremely rare and we hope eventually to produce enough stock to distribute to other orchard managers.

To my knowledge **Grange Orchard** has been grazed once so far in 2011. This orchard has a particular problem in that the young trees have never coped satisfactorily with the competition from the dense grass and other vegetation. While I appreciate that it is sometimes difficult for Peter Doble to move animals around it would be of great benefit to the trees if the orchard could be grazed regularly by sheep – thus reducing that competition.

The grass in **Upstones Orchard** was again cut and carried – by Alan Marsh and Kate Aubury's volunteers and hopefully Peter Doble will be able to arrange grazing of the aftermath. This year Kate's volunteers cleared vegetation around the gate. Then Alan Marsh and his main volunteer, Mike Walton, re-painted the gate and replaced the access notice. We provided damsons from the orchard for an Eco Fair held at Tewkesbury Town Hall in return for which the Trust received a small donation. I am concerned at the loss of some of the orchard trees and meadow grassland of one of our most important sites due to the development of the arboretum and woodland walks. While the extension may provide the opportunity to plant new fruit trees, it is unlikely that many of the meadow grassland species will spread into the area because of shading from the trees and enrichment from fallen fruit.

**Wade Muggleton**, a Countryside Officer from Worcestershire County Council, is compiling a photographic library of all Worcestershire apple varieties. In response to a request from him I arranged for him to visit during which time we visited the Walled Garden, the Lillans, Grange Orchard, Daffurns and Stable Orchard.

During the year I have also worked with Becky Lashley on the **Worcestershire Orchard BAP** and **People's Trust for Endangered Species** on a traditional orchard survey.

I have been working privately with the neighbouring **Overbury Estate** helping to establish a local community nature reserve for the villages of Conderton and Overbury. COCO (Conderton and Overbury Community Orchard) as it is known has aroused great local interest. I am hoping that KOW and COCO will soon be co-operating through the sharing of equipment, training, their own Apple Days and the production of local Perry wine. One of the aims of the Carrant Catchment Area Partnership (see Outreach) is to establish a chain of community orchards throughout the area.

### **Kemerton Lake Nature Reserve**

As the Trust's flagship, this reserve uses up most of KCT's resources. During the past year we have focussed work on maintaining the main entrance, access road and reception glade in good condition. Alan Marsh and his volunteers re-painted the main gates and replaced the No Parking notice. Alan also erected notices about access around the reserve, which were provided by Kate Aubury under a grant.

A second tranche of **crayfish** was introduced in April. Alan Marsh joined the team from Buglife during the trapping stage at the donor site and followed the process right through to the final introduction. Most of his work was carried out unpaid and we are grateful for what he did.

During the spring, many hundreds of empty mussel shells were washed up on the shores of the lake and I was concerned as to what the cause might be so arranged for a **dredging survey** to be carried out. In the event, several members of the Worcestershire Recorders came along and we have not yet received their various species lists but they were clearly impressed with what

they found. The experts suggest that the death of large numbers of Duck Mussel (and Swan Mussel) was caused by a combination of low water and last winter's severe freeze. I was relieved to see that the survey dredged up several healthy Duck Mussels. There is a dispute between experts as to whether the lake does indeed contain Swan Mussels as at least two empty shells have been identified as such. During the visit John Day, the county botanical recorder, found the orchid Autumn-lady's Tresses – a first for Kemerton and a rarity in Worcestershire.

Because of the success of this crayfish ark site at Kemerton, KCT and Buglife jointly hosted a workshop on Aggregates Sites and Crayfish which was very well attended by delegates from a range of backgrounds.

Recently I found a dead **Mink** at the lake. This is the first official record of this species here and even more worrying since they are known to favour crayfish in their diet!

This has been the final year of the **Mining Bee Habitat Trials**. The new management of the area will mean that any future data would not be comparable as one of the main breeding sites may be damaged by cattle trampling. However, the change in management may provide opportunities for future comparative studies. This year, in addition to the usual management of the breeding areas and monitoring of numbers, Geoff Trevis, the county expert on aculeates, made at least five visits following a set transect. If I can find resources I hope to pull together my data from the past eight years and together with Geoff would hope to write up the project. See Funding.

The **Leaf Litter Trials** continued. The exclosures were maintained and I monitored them for new species. Some of the small cages were overcrowded with Bluebell and Daffodil and so we established larger, unfenced areas into which we planted some of the bulbs.

More Bluebell bulbs were collected from the railway embankment at Bredons Norton and planted in the woodlands. Later, Matthew Darby negotiated with the company carrying out strengthening works on the embankment to provide the Trust with several lorry-loads of top-soil from the embankment and this has been spread in the woodlands.

The **Arable Area** in the north-east corner of the site is proving difficult to manage in some large part due to the presence of high numbers of geese at certain times of the year. The problem is particularly bad after crop sowing in late spring when the geese graze most of it off. In an attempt to deter them I designed a matrix of hazard tape which should have kept out even the most determined of grazers – however the geese completely ignored our efforts and the trial was abandoned.

The **Woodland Shrubs and Wildflower Project** received a large boost when a fourth sponsor joined, paying £1,000 to cover the previous two and the next three years of their contribution. In addition an existing sponsor decided to pay £800 covering the present year and the next three years.

The piles of brushwood continued to attract a range of birds – blackcap, willow warbler, chiffchaff and wren were all heard singing from this artificial scrub habitat. More beetle 'lodges' and 'wigwams' were created around the woods. Additional shrubs were planted and volunteers helped me to grow more from seed - some of the shrubs will be planted out this winter.

We have erected a series of Tree Sparrow nest-boxes in the North-east area of the site and close to the 'arable' area. We are hoping to attract the birds – initially to the wintering bird feeding area – and then to the boxes. However, the only two winters out of 17 when we

recorded Tree Sparrow were when we fed oats into a standing crop. This method also attracted large groups of Reed Bunting as well as other species.

Regular **bird counts** were carried out by Rob Prudden while Mike Averil continued his work on dragonflies. Mike tells us that we now have 23 species of dragonfly at Kemerton – one of the best sites in Worcestershire.

### **Beggarboys**

I am pleased to report that we have completed the major restoration project at Beggarboys. This final stage was particularly difficult as we needed to repair the old emergency overflow which had collapsed, causing erosion and damage to the bund bank. We were advised by a consultant from a quarry company on the most suitable material to use and this advice was followed. The bank was re-built and re-profiled and the emergency overflow set at the required height.

In order to repair the monk weir the water level of the pool had to be dropped carefully over a period of several days, then a temporary dam board put in place and new weir boards fitted. The water level is not expected to rise again until well into the winter as the feeder streams dried up some two or three months ago.

Squads of volunteers cleared areas in the sedge-bed where the two feeder streams enter the site. A contractor then excavated the two former natural silt pools.

This restoration of Beggarboys could not have been completed without the expertise and enthusiasm of Alan Marsh who together with his main volunteer, Mike Walton, worked extremely hard on a project that none of us had experience in.

During the winter Gloucestershire Vale Volunteers continued work on restoration of hedges and scrub clearance. The restoration of the two woodland glades is almost complete, cutting and carrying of the sward on a regular basis by Alan and his volunteers will continue until the fertility is reduced.

More recently, the lower glade has been cut for a second time, an area of the sedge bed cut and carried and willows cut and cleared - as part of a proposed rotation – and the small meadow at the southern end of the site has been cut and carried for the first time in many years. This work was made possible by Alan and Mike being joined by George Day and Richard Bennet, who all put in a great deal of hard work over several days.

### **John Moore Reserve**

Work under the Woodland Shrubs and Wildflowers Project continued and the reserve is now underplanted with shrubs and a coppicing rotation has begun. It is hoped that further introduction of wild flowers grown under the Leaf Litter Trials will be carried out this winter.

The John Moore Reserve is one of the sites where we are trialling nest-boxes designed to attract Marsh Tit. This species has been in serious decline nationally but is still found breeding on Bredon Hill where it is believed to nest in old, rotting Elder. Marsh Tit is to be seen feeding regularly at bird-feeders at Kemerton Court and Ivy Cottage.

Himalayan Balsam continues to colonise the reserve from the neighbouring Old Garden woodland where for some years it has been a serious infestation. This invasive plant is removed from the reserve by pulling all plants in spring – and again well before flowering. We

also use the strip of land between the two streams at the bottom of the reserve as a buffer-zone from where we also clear the plants.

### **Lammas Meadows**

I have been unable to make any visits to the 3 sites but continue to receive and collate wildlife records on occasions.

### **Greenhouse and Nursery Project**

Sadly the estate greenhouse is in a poor state of repair. I am aware that rebuilding the greenhouse would be extremely costly and so I would recommend that whilst a final decision is made on its future a small polytunnel greenhouse could be built at a cost of less than £500. Meanwhile I continue to do what I can to look after young arboretum trees and native woodland shrubs. I also continued to grow mainly arable but also other wild flowers within the greenhouse and in the small plot of land outside. This work will also have to be reduced considerably but I hope that the greenhouse project can continue - albeit on a smaller scale.

2011 has been a very successful year for the wild flower project and thanks to a great deal of assistance and hard work by Pamela Clarke and aided by Sue Chandler we have successfully harvested and processed considerable quantities of seed. I need to agree with Adrian suitable sites at Kemerton for the introduction of this seed and propose to offer any surplus to other farmers. One of our great successes has been the propagation of the true native species of Cornflower and the collection of a considerable quantity of seed. Again I need to agree with Adrian and Peter Doble suitable site or sites for the introduction of this extremely rare plant.

### **Nest-boxes**

We continue to maintain a chain of boxes across the estate. Alan Marsh is monitoring the effect of fixing mirrors below the entrance hole of tit boxes to deter Greater-spotted Woodpecker. We will collate the results and write a small report for the RSPB and BTO. It is hoped that it may be published in *British Wildlife*.

This winter we are increasing the number of Marsh Tit boxes across the estate. We are focussing our efforts in sites where mature Elder (favoured by Marsh Tit in this area) is found. At the Lake Reserve we are putting up boxes aimed at attracting Tree Sparrow.

In the immediate vicinity of any bat boxes we are increasing the density of tit nest-boxes to attract the birds away from the bat boxes.

Once again Barn Owl has been reported breeding in a nest-box in Pad Barn.

### **Recorder**

In January 2011 Pamela Clarke worked with me to upload all wildlife records from 2010 and we intend uploading this year's data in January 2012. This year I have not been called upon to provide any information from our database. The data produced by Worcestershire Recorders during three visits to our orchards over the last two years has greatly enhanced our knowledge of the wildlife in this important habitat.

Over the past few years, major changes have taken place at Kemerton involving amalgamation of sites, removal of hedgerows and changes in use. Further changes are proposed under HLS - both here and at Bredons Norton. The farm has acquired more land at Eckington while the

Trust has purchased a strip of Lammas Meadow at Eckington. All of this information needs to be on Recorder before the management of Recorder can be handed over to a successor.

### **Website**

I continue to receive contacts via the website. These include enquiries about job opportunities, the progress of the Elm project and a variety of enquiries about our orchards. Jim Verrechia updates the website as required.

### **Monitoring**

Once again I have been unable to carry out much monitoring within the hours available to me and this has been exacerbated by my health problems. I rely heavily on information provided by volunteers and visitors.

The Trust raised funding for equipment to carry out butterfly surveys and I suggested that these should be done using the same methodology that I developed for similar surveys I carried out 10 years ago. This will enable direct comparisons to be made. George Day, a local volunteer, was keen to be trained for this work and so he and I carried out a survey of butterflies and bumblebees during a training session. As this took place along one of the established transects and within the prescribed third 'window' of the survey, the data will be used. Subsequently, still within the required window, George walked the three other transects. During the winter we will transfer his data onto the standard spreadsheets. The Trust is extremely grateful to George for committing to this survey work.

### **Site Job Sheets**

The proposed sheets are intended to replace the original complex management plan and to be available in the future to my replacement – and indeed anyone else involved in the management of wildlife sites on the estate. Although Alan and I made a start on this work two years ago we have been unable to progress further. The Trust needs to raise funding for the extra work that will be involved to produce these sheets. I consider this now to be a priority and urge the Trust to seek funding.

### **Outreach**

We have continued our close links with the Worcestershire Biological Records Centre (WBRC) and Worcestershire Wildlife Trust (WWT). Several members of the WBRC carried out surveys in four of our orchards. Geoff Trevis and I completed the monitoring of the Mining Bees at the Lake and hope to write a report this winter.

Bredon Forest School has an outdoor teaching area in South Wiseacre Wood. They continue to support the work of KCT being one of the sponsors of The Woodland Shrubs and Wildflowers Project. This year they raised an additional £500 for the Trust.

Kate Aubury organised another successful Open Day which was well supported. John Meiklejohn – one of the best field naturalists in Worcestershire - who has supported our work here from long before the inception of the Trust – led two walks and Adrian Darby led two walks through the arboretum.

The BBC made enquiries about the possibility of including RELIC, the Elm Project, in one of their programmes but in the event programme timing precluded this taking place. Another

enquiry was received about filming apple-picking in an orchard but again we were unable to accommodate the film company.

I have been involved in the Worcestershire BAP Partnership – this year Adrian was made Chair of the group.

I continue to work closely with the Marcher Apple Network (MAN) hosting a visit from some of them this year and arranging for them to be present at this year's Apple Day. Two members of MAN are carrying out a comparative survey of apples between this area, mid Wales and west Wales. They have noticed that within any particular variety of apple considerable variations may occur regionally.

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

I continue to receive enquiries based around RELIC (which seeks to promote the planting of probably disease-resistant elms), about orchards and with enquiries about access and even the possibility of jobs. I have stayed in close contact with the nursery at Pershore College, where the 'Nurse' elm trees are kept and from which cuttings are taken. This year, the nursery was moved to the other end of the site but I am assured that all nine elms are fine and that an average of 50 cuttings per tree was obtained this year.

I continue to act as advisor to the Beckford Nature Reserve Committee which manages a former gravel pit as a community facility. This year I visited twice to discuss the progress of the Management Plan and to meet the new warden. After a break of several years, Sand Martin was back nesting on the reserve. I was also asked to comment on a planning application affecting the reserve.

I have been in contact with Buglife on a regular basis. Aside from our relationship over the crayfish project, we are looking to work more closely on other projects. This in turn has led me to deal with the People's Trust for Endangered Species (PTES) over a proposed project.

For some years Adrian and I have promoted the importance of the Carrant Brook Catchment Area for wildlife and landscape conservation. Earlier in the year we proposed the extension of the Wye, Severn and Avon Vales IBDA (Integrated Biodiversity Delivery Area) – to our frustration, shortly after getting some agreement for this, IBDA's were scrapped! Despite this setback we have formed a loose partnership which includes representatives from KCT, the local Gloucestershire and Worcestershire Biodiversity Area Partnerships, the Environment Agency (EA), People's Trust for Endangered Species, Natural England and Huntsmans Quarries. Overbury Estates, which owns much of the land bordering the Carrant, has expressed a strong interest and we will be approaching other landowners as soon as possible. The Environment Agency has raised £13,000 for what we hope is the first of several years of support for improvements to the water quality and conservation of the associated wildlife. Most of this year's money will be used for habitat mapping and assessment and initial contacts with farmers. However some money was available for a practical project to demonstrate to the funders what might be feasible. As KCT has a proven track record the EA were keen to establish a project on Kemerton land and so I proposed the restoration of an on-stream pool in one of our small meadows, with the possibility of a more complex project – the restoration of a former ox-bow – to be considered for 2012. The EA's preferred option for this year was the ox-bow and this has been completed.

## **Volunteer Work**

Alan Marsh has a small but dedicated team of skilled people available during the week and occasional weekends that provides us with many hours per year. They focus on habitat management. In particular I would like to thank Mike Walton for his major contribution. George Day, another of Alan's volunteers, has offered to carry out the butterfly surveys next year (see above). Mike, George and Richard Bennet turn out regularly to help Alan.

Alan himself contributes a considerable number of voluntary hours as well as at times donating materials. The Trust is extremely grateful to him for his enthusiasm and support. Alan now plays a pivotal role in the management of wildlife habitats across the estate. His effective use of machinery, his considerable practical skills and ability to work closely with others are invaluable.

Kate Aubury will be producing her own report. This year her team of volunteers have carried out a variety of important habitat management work for which the Trust is extremely grateful. Kate also gives her time to surveying bats and is now learning about fungi. Both will add considerably to our knowledge of wildlife on the estate.

KOW manages Daffurns Orchard and will be assisting at times with the newly established community orchard in the neighbouring villages.

Pershore College provided help with the Greenhouse and Nursery Project.

The Gloucestershire Vale Conservation Volunteers have specialist skills and are in great demand but spent two days on habitat management at Beggarboys. This winter we hope they will be able to provide at least one more day.

Rachel and Ruben Poloni have been responsible for the greenhouse whenever I am away.

The Cutler family remain great supporters of KCT. John is always available to help Alan or I when needed. Shelley continues 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.

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

Sue Chandler helped with the Greenhouse and Nursery project.

Roy Cox continues to build and site nest-boxes at Beggarboys, Aldwyk 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. This year she has contributed even more - in all aspects of the Trust's work from office duties to wildlife surveys. The Trust is extremely grateful for her contribution.

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

## **Funding**

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

The grant of a further £3,000 from Severn Waste Environmental Fund through Welcome to Our Future allowed us to complete the work at Beggarboys.

Bredon Forest School made a donation of £500 – in addition to their support for the Woodland Shrub and Wildflower Project.

Sharon Priest joined the Bredon Forest School, 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.

We have a 'Wish List' of items and projects which require funding but the most important are:

- The replacement of rotten sluice covers at the Lake.
- Production of Site Job Sheets. There is no record of what work should be carried out and when. I am very aware that the time is coming when someone else will take over my role here and the continuity of habitat management will be the most important aspect of the handover.
- Our Recorder database needs updating to account for the numerous changes to site names and land uses that have taken place over the past few years. Again, it is important that the latest information is available to whoever takes over Recorder from me.
- Completing the updating of the public information boards – two are in a parlous state.
- Funding to support the writing of a report on the Mining Bee Trials.

### **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 two 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.

Pamela Clarke has supported my work through some difficult times and continues to play an important role for the Trust.

As usual, the Trust acknowledges the support provided by the farm. We try not to call on Peter Doble for help but there are occasions when the Trust's resources cannot cope without it.