

Pamela Clarke

## **Overview**

*Following John's death in December 2019 this six month period has been a time of consolidation for me and I am grateful for the support I have been given.*

**Starling** – more than 10,000 roosted in the reedbeds by the Water Hide and as winter progressed were seen in the lagoon reeds to the east though in smaller numbers than the previous year.

## **Daffurn's Orchard**

Olivia Chance has supplied a report for the orchard (see below). I have asked that a couple of heaps of hay cutting for Grass Snake be left after the cut in September and if possible small sheets of corrugated tin laid out.

## **Worcestershire Biological Records Centre**

Inputting data into the Recorder database continued through the winter. Simon Wood of WBRC unfortunately due to illness was unable to come out to update Recorder database and advise re: certain aspects of Recorder and now with Covid is in self-isolation and possibly will continue to be for some time. I have been in touch with Harry Green recently to enquire whether there is anyone else at WBRC who can help with Recorder but unfortunately there is not.

Photographs from local naturalists continue to be added to the library.

Notes on particular bird species of interest on the estate:

**Raven** – nested in the Cedar adjacent to Ivy Cottage garden – heard from early January and young heard later (late April).

**Little Owl** – the box in the Plock used again in spring 2019 but was usurped by Grey Squirrel. Young Squirrels evicted and Little Owl eggs found flattened underneath squirrel 'nest' material. Checked in the winter and spring for squirrel signs – Little Owl did not return. The box further up in the Park was checked in the winter and had Little Owl feathers atop of what appeared to be very old squirrel material so we believe this site is still used occasionally.

**Willow Warbler** - nb this species is in increasing decline in this area. Only 1 recorded 20<sup>th</sup> March in Collins.

**KLNR – Bird Records.** The Trust has been fortunate in having the expertise of experienced local ornithologist Rob Prudden who has been recording birds at the lake since the mid 1990's. He has produced a detailed species list which will prove a valuable resource for the

future. It runs to 35 pages, is annotated and with photographs etc: it would be nice to have a limited printing of it were we to have funding. A copy of the introduction is included below.

### **Otter**

At the KLNR a pair was seen interacting/fishing on 29<sup>th</sup> November – John and I were lucky enough to join a photographer in the hide at the time and he supplied the Trust with photographs. I had found spraint on the boardwalk much earlier in the year but this is the first confirmed record although John Threadingham had reported having seen one in the past. Coincidentally, a pair of Otter was seen at the Gwen Finch reserve (at nearby Birlingham) 4 days later – a first for that site too. On 13<sup>th</sup> January there was a further record of 1 Otter seen at the lake.

**Sparrowhawk** - male hunting Ivy Cottage – seen from March onwards in the Old Garden area where it probably continues to nest.

**Cetti's Warbler** - A bird was heard 19 Nov churring quietly then a sharp 'spik' before showing itself briefly, returning to the reedbed. Another record a week later of a bird 'spikking' loudly from a different area of reedbed. On 27 Dec a bird was heard again from the reedbeds around the wader lagoon.

### **Wintering Water Fowl – peak numbers:**

104 Coot 17 Jan

550 Wigeon 3 Feb

24 Gadwall and 82 Teal 24 Feb

Pair Pintail for 3 days in February

20 Pochard 2 March

5 Shoveler and 36 Tufted 10 Mar

26 Lapwing 24 Feb

153 Common Snipe and 28 Jack Snipe 10 Jan around the marsh .. highest numbers for both species ever recorded at the lake.

Pair Curlew on island 18 Mar

Pair Great Crested Grebe 17 Feb arrived early to the lake with rivers rising with floods. They were nest building near Water Hide 9 Mar, failed and subsequently moved to reeds by East Hide.

1st Oystercatcher appeared 27 Jan and by end of March 2 pairs in territory

Male **Sparrowhawk** seen hunting the reserve through the winter (nested in Cherry Orchard wood in 2019)

4 Red Kite 2 Mar over the marshy area, landing at times.

**Sedge Warbler** heard churring in reeds 25 Feb – very early date (following fine period with easterly and south easterlies ideal for migrants moving through southern Europe) almost certainly a record breaker - earliest ever 29<sup>th</sup> March at Upton Warren) – RP pers.comm.

Other birds using the KLNR during the period of this report include Stonechat (2 pairs in autumn) 2 Kingfisher, up to 20 Meadow Pipit (Dec) Woodcock (singles) 2 Pairs Water Rail.

## **Scrub clearance in KLNR**

Areas of bramble were cleared during the early winter of 2020. These do not appear to have been grubbed out. Bramble scrub is an important habitat – from ground level insects, to aphids on foliage and insects on flowers and fruit and these become food for birds, mice etc. and in turn food for Owls and birds of prey. It is also important nesting habitat for many birds – Blackbird, Song Thrush, Whitethroat, Blackcap, Long-tailed Tit, Bullfinch - Cettis favour the habitat of bramble and Common Reed that we have at the reserve. Linnets nest semi-colonially and in 2019 6 pairs bred in the low scrubby bramble between the arable area and the main lake.

## **Polytunnel/tree stock**

1 Black Poplar, 12 Holly, 27 Box. 7 Black Poplar (more mature whips) were lined up in the Walled Garden with other young trees.

## **Proposed additional monitoring**

Glow-worms on the hill – July/August

Moth trapping at KLNR and Cherry Tree Cottage area to compare with historical data.

## **Annual Report for Daffurn's Orchard 2019/ 2020**

2019 was a successful year for Daffurn's orchard – there are now approximately 20 members of KOW who volunteer to look after the orchard on a fairly regular basis and a paid gardener who cuts the grass in the summer months.

KCT organised for the hay to be cut in September, and a working party went in to rake it up to be taken away.

Apple Day in October was again a popular event with the juicing as busy as ever and the teas being well attended – cakes are always welcomed!

KOW attended the COCO Apple Day with the juicing machine. Unfortunately the event was not as well attended as it has been in the past.

In January 2020 a working party managed to clear both of the boundary trees that had fallen onto the fence and to cut mistletoe from the apple trees. Some more work needs to be done to release the chicken wire around the base of the trees that was put up to stop the bark being eaten, but this will need to be done once lock-down has been lifted.

A tree surgeon was also employed to do some work on the Joeby crab as it was reaching out into the road. He also took some of the top branches out to drop the height of the tree.

Olivia Chance, KOW Committee

# KEMERTON LAKE CONSERVATION AREA

## BIRD SPECIES LIST.

The following notes cover the c20 year period from the mid-1990s through to the end of 2019. Constant coverage has been carried out during this time including monthly BTO Webs counts. Scrutiny of the content makes interesting reading and clearly shows the effect on the site of environmental changes, not only locally but also nationally & globally.

Newly created wetlands are always at their most productive for bird species during their first few years, this while the area is still relatively open and before becoming more heavily vegetated. During the proceeding years the site will then mature relatively slowly into a more constant single unchanging set of habitats, this then limits the amount of different species that visit or make the site their home.

At Kemerton Lake during the period covered the area has changed considerably while evolving from an open working gravel pit to a relatively shallow lake with sandy shorelines & bare islands, then finally becoming the heavily vegetated site with reed fringed & wood surrounded lake that exists today.

As the site evolved, so did bird populations. In the early days the sandy nature of the site proved a haven for passage waders, while seed eating passerines feasted on annual weeds which grew over the whole site. Many migrating birds also utilized the site as a staging post during passage periods. As water levels rose and the remaining islands & surrounding areas became more vegetated many species became less common, although waterfowl became more prevalent. With the surrounding woodland maturing, wintering Siskins & Redpolls arrived, while common breeding woodland birds became more numerous.

Although the site has gone through many years of transformation it is now in a settled state, but still needs constant management to maintain the future of this important conservation area.

A more worrying scenario that is more difficult to come to terms with certainly cannot be ignored. During the period covered most species have suffered huge reductions in numbers, not only at a local level but also nationally & across most of Europe, with some suffering catastrophic declines. It is estimated that there are now (2019) c44 million fewer birds in the UK landscape than there were 50 years ago.

These downward population trends make grim reading, with some once locally common species including Turtle Dove, Tree Sparrow, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Willow Tit & Grey Partridge now all but extinct in the whole of Worcestershire. Other species that have shown significant losses in the county and are in serious decline include Corn Bunting, Yellow Wagtail, Spotted Flycatcher, Marsh Tit, Nightingale, Whinchat, Little Owl & Curlew. Whether any of the latter species will be part of the Worcestershire avifauna in another twenty years must be in serious doubt.

Local declines have in part been due to habitat loss, as the countryside has changed

considerably, generally to the detriment of most species, but not all.

Changes in land usage have had an alarming detrimental effect on flora and fauna. Huge swathes of land have been utilised for housing and industry, while ever cleaner modern farming practises must also shoulder a large share of the blame both locally & globally. Other more complex factors in wintering areas or on migration routes have also had an impact on seasonal visitors.

Numbers of farmland birds visiting the KLNR recording area have dropped dramatically, this comes as no surprise as the site lies in an area dominated by agriculture. Shockingly farmland birds have suffered declines of up to 85% in the twenty years or so covered by these notes, with some species dropping by over 95%.

Although the above notes may have negative undertones, there are always positives and the importance of conservation areas like Kemerton Lake become ever more important in a less than ideal landscape.

Rob Prudden