

Kemerton Conservation Trust

Kemerton Court
Kemerton
Tewkesbury
Gloucestershire
GL20 7HY

www.kemerton.org

Registered Charity No. 702488

**GOVERNORS**

JONATHAN CHENEVIX-TRENCH
ADRIAN DARBY, OBE
MATTHEW DARBY (Chairman)
PETER DOBLE
ROGER UMPELBY
ROSEMARY WINNALL, MBE

EMERITUS GOVERNORS

PETER MARREN

May Wood Flora Enhancement Project Report 23rd February 2026

Project Background

May Wood is a young woodland that is adjacent to Kemerton Lake Nature Reserve (a designated Local Wildlife Site in south Worcestershire that supports a wide array of flora and fauna including many Section 41 Species of Principal Importance). The woodland is managed for wildlife in conjunction with the nature reserve, and for the visitors to the reserve who walk through the woodland enroute to the bird hides. The woodland is owned by the Kemerton Estate and managed in partnership with Kemerton Conservation Trust (KCT), a registered charity.

As a young woodland (different sections were planted from 1970 onwards, with the most recent planting in 2000), May Wood lacks floristic diversity and a well-developed shrub layer. Previous projects have seen the planting of Bluebell and Daffodil bulbs in the woodland, the creation of fenced trial plots filled with leaf litter from Tiddesley Wood and soil from a nearby railway embankment to import in native woodland flora, and the planting of shrubs such as Holly, Yew, Box and Spindle to begin establishing the shrub layer. These projects have begun the process, but more is needed.

Our existing flora exclosures, which had wooden fence posts, were in dire need of repair to protect the plants from deer damage, and the woodland would benefit from a wider variety of flowering plants and more shrubs. To minimise ongoing maintenance and extend the lifetime of existing exclosures, we wanted to switch from wooden posts to metal posts, which should last at least 25 years (compared to 8-10 years for wooden posts). We also wanted to create some new exclosures, which would allow us to introduce additional native wildflowers to a wider area of woodland. Sowing Bluebell and Primrose seeds in naturalistic swathes would benefit pollinators and add to the woodland visually for our visitors in spring. We also wanted to plant more Yew, Holly and Honeysuckle in the woodland to add more shrub layer habitat.

Stands of Hazel coppice have been neglected in recent years so we wanted to begin coppicing again. Coppicing opens up the woodland floor to sunlight, encouraging the growth of a wider variety of plants, which in turn supports insects, butterflies, and other wildlife. The cut stems and branches can be used to create habitats like log piles and as material for deadwood hedges, and coppicing can rejuvenate old or overgrown hazel trees, encouraging new growth and prolonging their lifespan. Coppicing on rotation would ensure a mix of habitat over many years.

The Trust therefore applied to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund through the Natural Networks programme delivered on behalf of Wychavon District Council for a grant to pay

for a significant programme of habitat restoration and habitat creation in May Wood to be carried out by contractors, supported by our warden and volunteers. We successfully bid for £4105.34, which represented 70% of the total project cost. The balance of funds came from a local benefactor, who wishes to remain anonymous, who made a generous donation of £1759.43 to the project.

Project Aims

The main aim of the project was to improve the woodland understorey. A healthy understorey plays an important role in natural ecosystems. This all-important layer provides essential habitat resources of food and shelter to numerous insects along with amphibians, reptiles, birds and small mammals. A secondary aim was to enhance the wood visually for the benefit of visitors to Kemerton Lake Nature Reserve. *Budget restrictions meant that we could only replace some of the existing exclosures, so the best eight (chosen for their high flora value) out of eighteen were chosen to be included in the project.*

Advice was taken from Worcestershire Wildlife Trust while designing the project.

The project focussed on the following.

1. Weeding 8 existing exclosures to remove Bramble, Ash seedlings and Sedge, which outcompete the wildflowers (volunteer task).
2. Removing broken wooden fence posts and rabbit wire fencing around 8 existing exclosures and replacing with Clipex metal fence posts and rabbit wire to a height of 1.2m (contractor task).
3. Erecting 2 new 8x2m exclosures using Clipex metal fence posts and rabbit wire to a height of 1.2m (contractor task).
4. Planting selected native bulbs, rhizomes, seedlings and seeds (English Bluebell, Wood Anemone, Wild Garlic, Sweet Woodruff, Yellow Archangel & Wood Spurge) in new exclosures (volunteer task).
5. Sowing native Bluebell and Primrose seeds in naturalist swathes across the woodland (volunteer task).
6. Planting 15 Holly & 15 Yew shrubs in wider woodland, complete with guards (contractor task). Planting 10 Wild Honeysuckle up trees within the woodland (volunteer warden task).
7. Re-coppicing 6 large, lapsed Hazel stools & coppicing selected young Hazel. Cut material was used onsite, including creating a dead hedge and natural guards for the stools (contractor task to re-coppice lapsed Hazel, volunteer task to coppice young Hazel and create guards etc).

Overview of Works

Project works commenced in August 2025, and the final works were completed in January 2026 (see Appendix A – Photo Montage).

In August Project Manager Kate Aubury ordered the fencing materials, shrubs, bulbs, seeds and guards. Kate also publicised the project on Facebook. Conservation Advisor Pamela Clarke began collecting wood spurge seeds from existing plants on site. (The drought had affected seed production, so only a handful of seeds were collected.)

In September, KCT work party volunteers weeded eight existing exclosures, removing all tree saplings, cutting back Bramble and digging out Pendulous Sedge. The eight exclosures chosen were nos. 5, 6, 9, 10, 12, 13, 16 & 17.

In October, Project Manager Kate Aubury marked out the location of the two new exclosures. Contractors from CRC Ecology replaced the broken wooden fencing on eight exclosures with new Clipex metal fencing and installed two new exclosures. Four of the existing exclosures (12 and 13, 16 and 17) were connected to create two larger exclosures.

In early November, KCT work party volunteers planted up one of the new exclosures (number 20) with half the Bluebell bulbs and Wood Anemone rhizomes, and half the Sweet Woodruff and Yellow Archangel plants. Our volunteers also sowed all the Bluebell and Primrose seeds. The Bluebell seeds were sown in patches under Hazel coppice on the south side of South Ride, while the Primrose seeds were sown in patches along the north edge of South Ride, these areas were chosen to match the plants' preferred habitats. Warden John Threadingham also dug up approx. 100 Wild Garlic bulbs from another site KCT helps manage to transplant into a new exclosure.

In late November, staff from Babcock DSG joined warden John Threadingham for a corporate volunteer day. They planted up the second new exclosure (number 19) with half the Bluebell bulbs and Wood Anemone rhizomes, half the Sweet Woodruff and Yellow Archangel plants and all the Wild Garlic bulbs. John also planted out the Honeysuckle in the woodland and CRC Ecology started coppicing the mature Hazel.

In early December, KCT work party volunteers coppiced some young Hazel, protected the coppice stools from deer grazing using 3 different types of guard (see Appendix A – Photo Montage), and used brash from the coppicing to create a dead hedge at Kemerton Lake to close up an unwanted gap on South Ride. CRC Ecology also completed the mature Hazel coppicing. The projects works so far were publicised on Facebook.

In January, CRC Ecology planted and guarded the Yew and Holly in the woodland and Project Manager Kate Aubury created a new woodland management plan for May Wood which included all aspects of wildlife management that KCT was responsible for (major forestry operations are the responsibility of the landowner).

In late January, an article about the project was included in KCT's Kemerton Clippings newsletter.

In February, the completion of the project was publicised on Facebook.

Project Results

Our project was completed on time. There were some minor changes to the budget as supply issues with some of the seeds meant we had to switch to potted seedlings for Sweet Woodruff and Yellow Archangel, and no Sanicle seeds or plants could be sourced, so we had to remove them from the planting plans. After the above changes, and with the additional cost of gripples for the fencing, the budget overran by £66.00, which was covered from KCT's annual budget.

All planned project works – except for sowing Sanicle seeds – were completed successfully.

The new metal fences are working well so far and as they are higher and more secure than the old, broken fences we replaced, should be deer-proof. We hope to replace more of the old exclosure fencing in time, as we are very pleased with the Clipex fencing system.

All bulbs, seeds, potted seedlings and shrubs were successfully planted, and Bluebell shoots are already appearing in the new exclosures.

Our contractors were able to coppice several more mature Hazel than we had originally planned, as they were able to complete each tree faster than estimated. The coppicing has opened up the woodland canopy and will allow more light in to the forest floor. We have not finished guarding all the mature coppice stools, but our volunteers are scheduled to complete that in March. Younger Hazel were successfully coppiced by volunteers and the stools guarded.

Our volunteers were involved throughout the project and thoroughly enjoyed it and learnt new skills in the process, including coppicing and creating a dead hedge.

The Future

As part of the project, we created a new woodland management plan for the site which includes ongoing rotational hazel coppicing on an 8-year cycle, as well as maintenance of the new exclosures.

We will monitor the flora within the repaired and new exclosures annually in spring (April-May) for 5 years to record the impact of the project work and how the newly planted flora does.

We will monitor selected trial patches of Bluebell and Primrose seeds in the wider woodland annually in spring (April-May) for 5 years to record the impact of the project work and how well the seeds germinate and grow. We will also record the impact of grazing from deer and rabbits on these unprotected patches.

We will monitor the effectiveness of the biodegradable guards over the next 3 years (using annual checks) and if they prove effective, will switch to using them for future tree and shrub planting on our reserves where possible.

We will monitor the different stool guards used and will continue to use the most effective for future coppicing works in May Wood. We will carry out more Hazel coppicing in winter 2026/27 as part of our rotational coppicing plan.

Acknowledgements

Kemerton Conservation Trust would like to thank the UK Shared Prosperity Fund through the Natural Networks programme delivered on behalf of Wychavon District Council for generously supporting this project and making it possible. We would also like to thank our local benefactor for their generous donation to cover the balance of costs for the project.

Thanks are also due to all those who assisted in the delivery of the project, including our Warden John Threadingham, our work party volunteers, and staff at Babcock DSG. Finally, we would like to thank our contractors CRC Ecology who carried out all other habitat management works, and to a high standard.



**Funded by
UK Government**



Appendix A - Photo Montage

Photos copyright Kate Aubury



Exclosure 5 and bluebells before works began
April 2025



Exclosure 5 after new Clipex fencing installed
October 2025



New exclosure 19 marked out before fence installation
October 2025



New exclosure 19 after Clipex fence installation
October 2025



KCT Work Party volunteers holding bulbs, rhizomes,
seeds and plants before planting out
November 2025



Bluebell seeds and bulbs during planting out
November 2025



Mature Hazel before coppicing
November 2025



Mature Hazel after coppicing
December 2025



Volunteers coppice stool guard
December 2025



Yew shrubs before planting
January 2026



Holly shrubs before planting
January 2026



Newly planted Holly in
biodegradable guard after planting
January 2026



Bluebell shoots in enclosure 16&17
February 2026