

Kemerton Conservation Trust

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John Moore Nature Reserve Woodland Restoration Project Report 8th August 2022

Project Background

John Moore Nature Reserve (JMNR) is a small woodland owned by KCT. It is a 0.5ha native woodland situated in Lower Kemerton, which was once owned by celebrated author and naturalist John Moore and gifted to the Trust in his memory in 2001. The Squitter Brook runs alongside its western boundary. The woodland has public access and is a delightfully tranquil spot to sit and listen to the birds on the bench provided.

JMNR is a small site, but it adjoins another woodland (privately owned) and together they form a significant block of wildlife-rich broadleaf woodland in Lower Kemerton. The woodland has been managed for wildlife for 20 years and in that time the Trust has recorded 190 species on the site including the rare Marsh Tit. It provides nesting habitat for a range of warblers and tits and Tawny Owl are frequently heard onsite. The light touch management, which includes leaving as much deadwood as possible (whilst keeping access safe for visitors) has meant the site has lots of invertebrates including deadwood specialists, and fungi grow on the decaying wood as well.

The reserve is managed by KCT's volunteer warden and work party volunteers, but lack of time meant it had been somewhat neglected in recent years and it needed a programme of contractor works to restore some of the habitat and get it back on track. The reserve also needed better signage and a new bench for visitors. There was also scope for adding new habitat to improve the reserve for birds and bats in particular.

The Trust therefore applied to the England European Regional Development Fund through the Natural Networks programme delivered in partnership between Worcestershire County Council and Worcestershire Wildlife Trust for a grant to pay for a significant programme of habitat restoration and habitat creation at JMNR to be carried out by contractors, supported by our warden and volunteers. We successfully bid for £1387.52, which represented 45% of the total project cost (the maximum the programme could fund). The project began in October 2021 and was completed in August 2022. The Trust also secured additional funding of £170 from Cheltenham Tree Group towards the cost of the new trees and guards. The balance of funds came from KCT's own reserves.

Project Aims

The main aim of the project was to enhance this lovely little woodland, which had been somewhat neglected in recent years due to lack of time and other sites taking priority. The

project focussed on the three management areas of the reserve (area 1: entrance, access track and permissive path, area 2; stream margins including stream bank, area 3; woodland) and planned to both restore existing and create new wildlife habitat. The stream which forms the western boundary of our reserve had become overgrown and some large fallen trees were preventing access for management, so our project aimed to open up sections of the stream and move the fallen trees to clear the bank and margins of the stream (the fallen trees to be used for creation of Marsh Tit nesting cavities, a new bench and deadwood habitat piles for invertebrates & fungi). The project also aimed to plant some new trees and shrubs to replace lost trees and create more understorey in the woodland, building on work done 10 years ago. It would also restart coppicing of Hazel, which has not been carried out for some years on the Hazel stands in the woodland. Other planned works aimed to improve visitor experience, with a new rustic bench and interpretation board proposed.

Overview of Works

Project works commenced in October 2020 as soon as our grant was awarded, and the final works were completed in August 2022. No scrub clearance was carried out during bird nesting season (April-August) to minimise disturbance to wildlife on site.

The contractors began scrub clearance work in November 2021, cutting back the overgrown access track, clearing bramble and small saplings from the stream margins and cutting up some large trees that had fallen a few years ago. The thicker sections of the trees were reused to create a new rustic bench in the glade, and to create artificial stumps with holes hewn into them for Marsh Tit nesting.

Project Manager Kate Aubury also carried out a fungus survey on the reserve in November, with the resulting records entered into Recorder. A second survey was completed in December. A total of 14 different species were recorded, including Purple Jellydisc *Ascocoryne sarcoides*, Cramp Balls *Daldinia concentrica*, Lilac Bonnet *Mycena Pura* and Bitter Bracket *Postia stiptica*.

In December the contractors returned to plant and guard 15 trees and 15 shrubs in the woodland, and erect bird and bat boxes on existing trees. KCT Warden John Threadingham also assisted with the tree planting.

Project Manager Kate Aubury worked on the interpretation board design and print in January 2022.

The contractors returned in early March to coppice the Hazel, remove the invasive non-native bamboo and install the new interpretation board. Some of the Hazel was chipped to create chippings for the permissive path and the rest was stacked in the woodland in piles to create extra deadwood habitat.

In late March Project Manager Kate Aubury and KCT's work party volunteers spread the chippings on the permissive path and also cut up the large bamboo stand that had been removed by the contractors so it could be removed to be burnt away from the site.

In March and early April Project Manager Kate Aubury installed a trail camera at the reserve facing the new artificial Marsh Tit cavities, and recorded lots of wildlife using the areas including Fox, Grey Squirrel, Jay, Rabbit, Muntjac and Pheasant. The Rabbits appeared to have a burrow under a large deadwood pile near the stumps.

In early May Governor Matthew Darby and Project Manager Kate Aubury led a member-only dawn chorus walk that ended at JMNR, where attendees heard more about the project work whilst listening to Chiffchaff and Wren singing loudly in the early morning air.

In late May Warden John Threadingham and KCT work party volunteers hand pulled Himalayan Balsam from the stream margins to prevent it spreading downstream.

Finally, in early August Project Manager Kate Aubury, together with moth trapping experts Gavin Peplow and Oliver Wadsworth, did a moth trapping session at the reserve which resulted in more than 50 species recorded. The records, once finalised, will be added to Recorder and ultimately uploaded to the county and national biological recording databases.

Project Results

Our project was completed on time and under budget, and the reserve is looking great, with the newly planted trees doing well (one tree has died since planting, we will replace this in Autumn/Winter 2022/23), and the new path and bench making the reserve more welcoming to visitors.

Cutting up and removing the fallen trees has given us better access to the stream bank for future habitat management, and the scrub clearance along the stream margin has allowed more light in to the water.

The bird and bat boxes erected will hopefully increase the nesting and roosting habitat for birds and bats on the reserve, while the artificial Marsh Tit nests may bring this rare bird back to the reserve. We had planned bat box checks in the spring but they are still not recommended because of cross-infection risks from Covid-19.

The Future

Preparing a management plan for the site to demonstrate how the improvements would be maintained into the future was one of the application requirements for the Natural Network programme. Although the Trust had a schedule of management for JMNR, which we have used for many years, the new management plan is more detailed and includes a three year plan for coppicing all the Hazel, after which we will revert to a 5-year rotation, which has been designed to build on the project's success and maintain the newly restored habitat into the future. With the assistance of contractors, as well as our brilliant warden and work party volunteers, we are confident we can maintain the targeted habitats that this project has so successfully restored.

Annual tasks such as mowing the permissive path, hand pulling Himalayan Balsam and clearing the access track and stream bank will continue as in previous years, and the bird boxes will be added to our existing bird box scheme and cleaned once a year in winter.

The Trust intends to carry out bat box checks in 2023 if rules allow and add the new boxes to our existing bat box scheme in future years. The bat box checks are carried out by a licenced bat worker as required under wildlife law.

Acknowledgements

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between Worcestershire County Council and Worcestershire Wildlife Trust for generously supporting this project and making it possible. We would also like to thank Cheltenham Tree Group for additional funding to support the tree planting element of the project.

We would also like to thank all those who assisted in the delivery of the project, including our Warden John Threadingham, our hardworking work party volunteers and moth trapping experts Gavin Peplow and Oliver Wadsworth. Finally, we would like to thank our contractors CRC Ecology who delivered most of the habitat management works, and to a high standard.