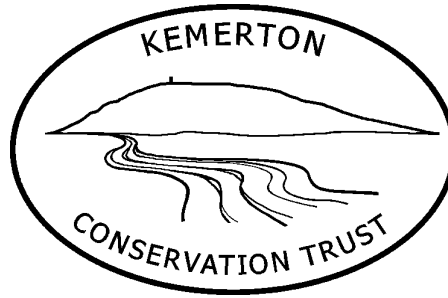


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LORD HOWICK OF GLENDALE, V.M.H.

C. F. NICHOLSON

DR. M. PALMER, M.B.E.

R. H. WORKMAN

Kemerton Conservation Trust

Report from Kate Aubury Support Coordinator

October 2013-October 2014

Overview

The last twelve months have again been very busy from my point of view. I have continued administering the Friends scheme, supervising the work parties, organising events, assisting in grant applications and carrying out bat and fungi surveys as in previous years. I also project managed the Ash Bed Trial, carried out the monthly recording visits and wrote the final project report when it completed in July this year, assisted with the Woodland Shrub and Wildflower Project and wrote the final project report when it finished in March this year and have been involved in the Higher Level Stewardship Special Projects, the last of which was completed this month. In addition, I undertook a complete update of the KCT website and launched a new blog and Facebook page. Although I have carried out some of this in the half day assigned to Trust work as part of my administrative role with Kemerton Estate, the vast majority is done in my spare time and it is proving very difficult to find time to juggle all these different elements. As stated last year, I feel a lack of staff resource is a major hindrance in the Trust taking on new projects. However, despite this lack of resource and my difficulties managing my workload, a lot was still achieved in the last year and below is a more in-depth look at all the activities I was involved in.

Friends of KCT Scheme

The overall Friends scheme numbers have increased slightly in the last 12 months. We have 166 individual or joint members and 7 corporate sponsors (the figures were 160 and 7 respectively in 2012/13). The membership mix continues to consist of a higher proportion of donors than volunteers (114) than volunteers (52).

This year, we recruited a reasonable number of new members but continued to retain the majority of our existing members. We only lost 11 members in the last 12 months (as against 25 members lost in 2012/13). Of these 7 were donors and 4 were volunteers (as against 16 donors and 9 volunteers last year). 1 of the volunteers was a younger members who has now gone to university, a trend we see every year as we do encourage teenagers to get involved.

The new donors were mostly recruited at our Open Day (5 individual or joint members joined on the day) and other events and talks throughout the year and most of the new volunteers are locals who have approached us interested in getting involved in the care of the reserves. Several potential volunteers have attended a 'taster session' this year but have not as yet returned to become fully fledged volunteers but I intend to follow-up on some of these to see if they want to.

All members continue to receive the bi-annual newsletter, which is very well received and an important part of our communications with members. I have now managed to increase the number of emails I hold to around two-thirds (up from approx. half last year), so those members receive all communications, including the newsletter, electronically. It substantially cuts our costs throughout the year if communications can go by email and also allows us to send last minute event reminders too.

At the request of one of our younger volunteers, who also assisted in the initial set-up, we have recently set up and launched a Facebook page for KCT. It is open to the general public and will be a more informal communication channel to advertise events, highlight the wildlife of the reserves and share the work of our volunteers and any project

successes. It has not as yet been formally advertised to our Friends of KCT; I intend to officially launch it in the January edition of Kemerton Clippings.

Volunteer Work Parties

The work parties continue to flourish and are invaluable in getting large scale habitat management jobs completed.

Turnout continues to be good although average attendance has dropped slightly from approx. 12 people per session last year to approx. 9.5 per session this year. A couple of volunteers have ceased to come and others have been more sporadic this year on availability. However, we continue to attract interest – I have had three new members come to a session in the last 4 months. We tend to find only about 50% of those who attend a taster session become regular volunteers so I am always looking to recruit new volunteers at events.

The work parties have continued to prove useful in supporting the Trust's work. The majority of our work is general maintenance and habitat management on the reserves but we have also assisted with hay raking and carrying as part of the HLS Special Project at Beggar Boys Wetland Complex and helped deliver project work for the Woodland Shrub and Wildflower Project, which completed in March this year, and for the Ash Bed Restoration Project, which completed in July this year.

I estimate that from March 2013 to March 2014, the volunteer work party donated approximately 285 hours of work worth £1781.25 to the Trust. (This figure excludes my time).

I continue to keep H&S records for all work parties. We had one minor incident to report in the period covered by this report; first aid was administered and an accident book entry completed.

Events

In February we held a slideshow talk at Kemerton village hall which was given by entomologist Roger Umpelby who is a Friend of KCT. The talk was well attended and rated as excellent by all. I hope to have Roger back to do another talk next year.

I gave a talk on behalf of the Trust in March to Dumbleton Gardening Club on the subject of Wildlife Friendly Gardening, followed by a talk about Kemerton Lake Nature Reserve through the Seasons to the Kemerton WI in September and finally a talk about Fungi to Kemerton Lecture Group this month. All talks were well received and gained the Trust both more publicity and a small donation each time.

As per my decision last year, we did not hold an Easter Egg Hunt this year. As my schedule is now even busier, I do not intend to reinstate this for the foreseeable future.

In May, my husband David & I attended WWT's Tiddesley Wood Annual Open Day with an exhibition and information stand. This was our fourth year at the event and we had another enjoyable day meeting people and telling them about the trust. Although we did not gain any new members or donations directly from this event, it helps to raise our profile in the area.

Our annual Open Day was held in June this year, with a focus on our wonderful orchids. Adrian led two walks to see the orchids, assisted by Matt and myself, and I also led a bug hunt specifically for younger children, assisted by Matt. In addition to the walks we had displays, refreshments and a nature trail for the kids. Volunteers assisted throughout the day. The weather was fabulous and numbers were about average at 50 odd, and we made just under £800 (including donations and new membership received on the day). After the event, we reviewed the current set-up, which is quite labour intensive for myself and husband David, and we have decided for next year to make some changes. Most attendees only come for the walks and some refreshment afterwards and the amount of effort involved for the numbers we attract is unsustainable, especially as all organisation falls on me. So next year we aim to pare it back to the bare essentials to make it slightly easier to organise.

In early August I held another bat walk and talk for members and the general public at Kemerton Lake Nature Reserve. Although we only had 3 Friends attend this year (together with members of Worcestershire Bat Group) it was as ever a lovely night and, as I combine the walk with my annual bat survey of the reserve, an event I intend to continue every year.

In late August, Adrian and I co-led another member-only walk to Beggar Boys Wetland to show off the restored habitat and highlight the additional HLS work being carried out there. A good number of Friends attended and we had a fun afternoon identifying invertebrates and spotting rare plants. The reserve looked stunning in the sunshine and was absolutely buzzing with the number of bees and butterflies in evidence! The member walks are a great opportunity to showcase the work we do on those reserves and managed areas that are not opened to the public.

In a couple of weeks we will be attending the annual Kemerton Orchard Workers' Apple Day with an information stand. I intend to publicise the work the Trust has been doing in conjunction with the wider Worcestershire Orchards project, as well as all our general work.

All in all this year contained a packed and successful programme of events. I have now begun planning for next year, and have identified a speaker for a talk in spring.

Grant Applications

This year I have completed three grant applications, all of which were successful.

Firstly, I applied for £500 towards the purchase of two trail cameras, which was granted in May. The trail cameras were purchased shortly afterwards and have been deployed on our reserves several times since June, with the footage giving us new insight into our wildlife. The footage from outside one of our badger setts was particularly wonderful!

Secondly, I applied for two grants to help with the agreed purchase of land at Upton Ham, as per the governors' request at last year's meeting. Both applications were successful and we received £4500 from Severn Waste Environmental Fund and £2500 from the Edward Cadbury Charitable Trust. This exceeded the 50% target of £6000 that I had been set, so a great result.

In addition, we again received a generous unsolicited £500 grant from the Miss K.M

Harbinson's Charitable Trust, which we intend to use to design and print a new information board for the West Hide at Kemerton Lake Nature Reserve.

Hopefully I can write a few more grant applications in 2014/15, but we have to be realistic about what we can deliver on, given our stretched staff resources.

Bat and Fungi Surveys

I have continued my programme of bat surveys for the trust in 2014, the sixth year the surveys have been conducted. Further monitoring of the Lesser Horseshow Colony has continued under NBMP as well. David Worley continues to assist me in the bi-annual bat box checks so I can learn from his experience. Pressures of time meant that I was unable to carry out as many bat surveys this year as in previous years, but I did my annual survey at Kemerton Lake and also carried out the first survey of John Moore Reserve, as well as the bat box checks and the roost counts for NBMP.

With the funds allocated by the governors last year, I purchased a new EM3 bat detector in the spring and used that over the summer. I have not yet finished analysing the records but it has already proved useful in helping with prompt ID on the surveys, thanks to the real time sonogram display, which cuts down the time needed on the computer later.

I have continued my fungi surveys this autumn, and after a late start due to the dry summer, the season is now in full swing and I am very busy! I attended a three day residential training course on fungi in September, which was taught by renowned Kew mycologist Geoffrey Kibby. I was particularly interested in learning more about the use of microscopy to improve my accuracy. It was a great course – if a little daunting at times! – and I feel I've learnt a lot more and intend to put it into practice this autumn/winter. I am struggling a bit with the kit I have and hope we can consider trying to raise funding for a better microscope and a microscope camera, which would really assist me. Although I still have a lot to learn on this complex kingdom, my knowledge continues to grow each season and I am gathering lots of valuable data on our sites, particularly KLNR.

All records from my bat and fungi surveys are sent to John for adding to Recorder.

Website

The major update of the website has now been completed, with the help of my husband David, our volunteer website designer. It was a huge job, which took longer than anticipated, and there are still a few minor tweaks needed, but the new site went live in July this year and I've had positive feedback on it from my volunteers. It's great to finally update the information, which was seriously out of date, and we've taken the opportunity to add membership forms online so interested people can download them direct.

The new website includes a blog, which will be a more informal space for communicating with the public. I have already written several pieces and posted video from the trail cameras amongst other things.

Vandalism at KLNR

We have continued to suffer from petty vandalism at KLNR throughout the year, particularly focussed on access signs etc. More seriously, someone damaged the green

gates at the vehicle entrance to the reserve and we had to replace a gate post, which cost quite a bit of time and money. The police community support officer continues to assist us but unless we catch the perpetrator(s) in action, there is little the police can do. It is a source of extreme frustration to us all and every time someone deliberately breaks or removes a sign we have to pay for a new one and it takes valuable warden time away from other tasks. However, there is little we can do except be vigilant when out and about on the reserves and repair and replace damaged signs when it occurs.

Conclusion

That concludes my roundup for the year – I would just like to thank Adrian, Matt and John for all their support this year. I would also like to thank David, who has continued to assist me at every event, attend every work party and accompany me on all bat surveys, as well as doing the web design for the updated website. His support has been invaluable to me this year as always and I could not achieve half of what I do without his unstinting assistance.