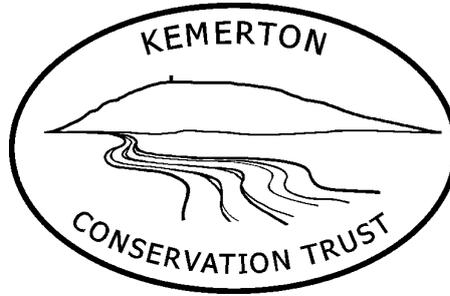


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GOVERNORS:

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P. S. DOBLE

LORD HOWICK OF GLENDALE, V.M.H.

P. MARREN

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

B. WESTWOOD

R. H. WORKMAN

Kemerton Conservation Trust

Report from Kate Aubury Support Coordinator

October 2016-October 2017

Overview

In the last 12 months I have been busy administering the Friends scheme, writing and issuing the newsletter and dealing with general queries, updating Facebook and the website, organising several events including the Annual Open Day, completing one grant application and supervising most of the monthly work parties, although our Warden John Threadingham kindly supervised a couple in my absence. I have recently been leading on dealing with the ongoing vandalism issues at Kemerton Lake Nature Reserve, including liaising with the local police community team. I have also become more involved in assisting the governors in setting management objectives, researching new conservation techniques and helping to liaise with our Warden John and supervise contractors when necessary.

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 majority is done in my spare time and it has at times been a real struggle to hit deadlines with the competing demands of a young child. As a result of my time constraints I have been unable to carry out any bat or fungus surveys in the last year, which is disappointing. However, despite the lack of time, a lot was still achieved in the last year and below is a more in-depth look at some of the activities I was involved in.

Friends of KCT Scheme

The overall Friends scheme numbers have decreased slightly in the last 12 months. We have 176 individual or joint members and 7 corporate sponsors (the figures were 185 and 6 respectively in 2015/16). The membership mix continues to consist of a higher proportion of donors than volunteers (126) than volunteers (50).

This year, we recruited a small number of new members but lost quite a few existing members. We lost 18 members in the last 12 months (as against 10 members lost in 2015/16). Of these 8 were donors and 10 were volunteers (as against 6 donors and 4 volunteers last year). One of the volunteers sadly passed away. 3 volunteers (from the same family) moved to another country. 2 of the volunteers were younger members who only attended a few times as part of their Bronze D of E, a trend we see every year as we do encourage teenagers to get involved.

The new donors were recruited either at the Open Day or via our website after visiting KLNR (membership forms can be downloaded). Most of the new volunteers are locals who have approached us interested in getting involved in the care of the reserves. I also issued a call for volunteers on the local Bredon Parish Facebook Page, which resulted in one new volunteer.

All members continue to receive the bi-annual newsletter, which is very well received and an important part of our communications with the Friends.

I continue to update the Facebook page, which is a more informal communication channel for members and the general public. I post photos of work parties, advertise upcoming events, highlight the diversity of the reserves with photos of flora and fauna throughout the year and write short pieces on any big news items. I try to ensure it's updated at least once a month and posts are generally viewed by about 50-100 people but sometimes as many as 1000 (our most popular recent post was photos of a

kingfisher at Kemerton Lake, whilst the post about the Open Day received the most views in the last year).

Volunteer Work Parties

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

Turnout has decreased slightly from 6.9 per session last year to 6.3 per session this year, which is disappointing as we managed to recruit some new volunteers and I had hoped this would improve the numbers. We lost several volunteers – as happens every year – but again we have also seen less regular attendance from some of our existing volunteers as other priorities compete for their time and some of them are getting older and health factors are having an impact. We gained 4 new regular adult volunteers, which is great, and I continue to advertise volunteering at all events and will repeat the Bredon Facebook appeal in January again.

Our Warden John Threadingham has kindly stepped in to supervise 2 work parties this year when I was unavailable.

The work parties have continued to prove useful in supporting the Trust's work. The majority of our work is habitat management on the reserves but we also assisted with site preparation ahead of the Open Day in June.

I estimate that from April 2016 to March 2017, the volunteer work party donated approximately 156 hours of work worth £975.00 to the Trust. (This figure excludes John's and my time).

I continue to keep H&S records for all work parties. We had no incidents to report in the period covered by this report.

Events

In October 2016, the day before the last Governors' Meeting, David, Charlotte and I attended the annual Kemerton Orchard Workers' Apple Day with an information stand. I publicised the Trust's orchard conservation work, as well as all our general work.

In December Governor Brett Westwood led a member-only Bird Watching Walk at Kemerton Lake Nature Reserve which focussed on the winter wildfowl and gave members a chance to use the new Water's Edge Hide. We had a decent turnout and there was plenty of interest to see and hear including Water Rail.

In early May Governor Matthew Darby led a small group of early risers on a member-only Dawn Chorus Walk at Kemerton Lake Nature Reserve and Kemerton Woods. I was sadly unable to attend due to the demands of parenthood but I received some lovely feedback from attendees and we are hoping to run this again next year as it is such a fantastic experience to offer.

In June we held our Annual Open Day at Kemerton Lake Nature Reserve. The focus of both our walks was the gorgeous orchids. Both walks were led by Adrian and Matt. The weather was lovely and sunny so turnout was good and everyone had a lovely time. I did struggle to recruit enough volunteers to help with both pre-event set-up and on the day

assistance with stands and car parking etc., which really increased both my and David's workload at the event. But we managed despite this and had a successful event.

In August we had a member-only Butterfly Walk on Bredon Hill led by Adrian, myself and local entomologist Roger Umpelby, who is a Friend of KCT. Unfortunately the weather was overcast and extremely windy and there was almost not a butterfly to be seen in a usually stunning butterfly-friendly wildflower area, so the small group of attendees had to make do with a handful of butterflies on buddleia at the end of the walk, but wildlife events are always unpredictable and everyone took the disappointment in good part.

As per our decision last year we did not arrange any slideshow talks.

There was a lower number of events scheduled this year, mostly because I simply did not have the time to organise more, and also because we did not organise any talks. However, given the demands on all our time and the low turnout to many of our member-only events, I feel we are providing enough to offer an interesting programme with limited resources. I therefore intend to organise a similar number next year.

Grant Applications

At the start of this year I completed one grant application requesting funds for bulb planting in Kemerton Woods, which was successful.

Lack of time has meant no further applications have been completed but we will review the situation at the start of next year and identify any projects which may require funds.

In addition, we again received two generous unsolicited grants totalling £500 from the Miss K.M Harbinson's Charitable Trust, which we intend to use towards volunteer tool and equipment costs.

Bat and Fungi Surveys

I did not carry out any bat surveys this year due to lack of time. As per 2015, I did check the Lesser Horseshoe Roost for bats in August and confirmed their presence but not count exact numbers as it was daytime and I needed to minimise disturbance.

I did not carry out any fungi surveys this year due to lack of time.

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

Website

David and I continue to maintain the website, updating the 'news and events' section as required. As mentioned above, we continue to have a number of new members download the membership forms directly from the website so that has proven a useful addition. We have not had time yet to amend the Kemerton Lake page to include details of the new hide but it is on my long term list of jobs and will hopefully be done over the winter.

On the blog page, I have not had the time to write any pieces this year. I hope to be able to occasionally add to the page in due course but it is not currently a priority given my lack of time.

Vandalism at Kemerton Lake Nature Reserve

The Trust has had ongoing issues with minor acts of vandalism at the reserve for a number of years, particularly focussed on causing damage to hedges and fences to create shortcuts to the East Hide, access signs being broken and/or removed and teenagers using the East Hide as a drinking spot. This year has seen the amount of problems increase and we have dealt with one very serious incident when teenagers managed to start our Warden John's tractor, which had been left onsite overnight due to ongoing site work, and attempted to drive it, losing control and reversing it into a tree. Thankfully no one was badly injured but the damage to the tractor was extremely costly and it could have been a very serious incident. We have also had a number of small, irritating incidents involving Water's Edge Hide, and also the East Hide, which appears to be the work of youngsters again. Items have been removed, the walls have been scribbled on with graffiti, posters torn down and rubbish left. The damage to signs has also continued, although John has now come up with a new method of protecting them onsite which appears to be working currently. Finally, we have experienced damage to hedging and fencing around our locked green gates on Cheltenham Road, as locals attempt to gain access to an area which is not open to visitors. Whilst most of the incidents are minor in and of themselves, the cumulative effect is time consuming, costly and frankly incredibly frustrating for all of us involved in managing the site. John has had to volunteer a lot of extra time in order to swiftly repair fences or put up replacement signs and repairing his tractor was a hugely time-intensive job.

After the tractor incident, I liaised with our local community policing team to consider how we could try and tackle the increase in vandalism onsite. It is a difficult situation to manage as the site is unsupervised for the majority of the time, so catching those responsible is very difficult. We have a few people on our radar but no evidence to allow us to take concrete action. At the police's suggestion, I have written an article about the vandalism and sent it to local parish magazines, posted it to our Facebook page and emailed it to members to make more visitors aware of the issue and perhaps reach some of the offenders and make them rethink their actions. Having identified an ongoing issue with trespassing at the green gate, John repaired damaged fencing with stronger barbed wire and brash to make it harder to jump – or cut - the fence, I erected a sign requesting the people stop causing damage and trespassing, and (again acting on a police recommendation) I erected 2 trail cameras for 2 weeks at the gate entrance to monitor the situation and potentially catch a vandal in the act. Whilst no vandalism was carried out when the cameras were up, we did gather valuable information on how some people were using the entrance and climbing the gate, which explains why John has had to re-hang it several times recently, so we have now added barbed wire to the gate top to discourage this.

Since the cameras were taken down, someone has managed to work out the combination lock for the green gate and several other locked gates and has removed the lock and accessed private areas so we have now changed all those affected locks to a new combination and have set up a master list of all those who have been given the code (volunteer surveyors, contractors, governors etc.) and asked that they take special care not to pass on the code to anyone else. Yet more work for myself and John!

We have also had some trespassing issues at Beggar Boys Wetland and are looking at ways to manage that currently.

Conclusion

That concludes my roundup for the year – I would just like to thank Adrian, Matt, John and John for all their support this year. I would also like to thank David, who has continued to assist me at every event, has looked after Charlotte whilst I supervise the work parties and write the newsletter etc., and has helped with maintenance of the website.