

Kemerton Conservation Trust

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**GOVERNORS**

ADRIAN DARBY, OBE (Chairman)

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PETER DOBLE

LORD HOWICK, VMH

PETER MARREN

BRETT WESTWOOD

ROGER WORKMAN

Annual Report from Kate Aubury, Support Coordinator

April 2020-March 2021

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 a couple of events, completing grant applications, assisting with Trust H&S administration and supervising the monthly work parties. I have also continued to assist in habitat management decisions and project management, including managing three grant funded projects at KLNLR. I assist Governor Matt Darby with organising the weekly warden work and liaising with contractors carrying out ad-hoc habitat management. I have also spent quite a lot of time dealing with ongoing vandalism and antisocial behaviour problems at KLNLR and assisting with actions required because of Covid-19 and the lockdowns. I also organised and took part in two moth trap surveys over the summer months and have been doing ad-hoc monitoring as I carry out regular site visits.

As always more could have been achieved if I had more time; the number of grant applications and projects we can do each year is dictated by my limited availability as currently I am the only one completing these.

Nevertheless, 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 increased significantly in the last 12 months. We have 278 individual or joint members and 7 corporate sponsors (the figures were 213 and 6 respectively in 2018/19). The membership mix continues to consist of a higher proportion of donors than volunteers (225) than volunteers (53).

Over the last year, we gained a lot of new members and lost 17 existing members (as against 7 members lost in 2019/20). Of these 9 were donors, 1 was a corporate sponsor and 7 were volunteers (as against 1 donor and 6 volunteers last year). Two donors had sadly passed away and the other 7 chose not to renew, of the volunteers, 1 sadly passed away, 1 moved out of the area and 3 had joined us only to complete Duke of Edinburgh awards and stopped once that was done.

The new donors mostly joined after discovering KLNLR during the first lockdown, we received a lot of correspondence highlighting how much locals were enjoying walking through the reserve and how vital it was proving for some during a difficult time. Many have yet to complete a full

year's membership so we do not yet know how many will choose to renew and become regular members and how many will lapse as life goes back to more normality. I anticipate quite a few of those who joined last year will not renew but we have gained some very enthusiastic new members, which is fantastic.

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 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. In the last year I have also posted about the vandalism issues at KLNR and about lockdown information/access arrangements for the hides. I try to ensure it is updated at least twice a month (often more frequently) and posts generally reach 250-500 people but sometimes as many as 3500. Average views have dropped to around 15-30 (was 30-50 last year) but some posts generate a lot more interest (our most read post this year was about vandalism to Water's Edge Hide, which reached more than 4000 people, attracted 1300 clicks and 155 reactions and/or comments, whilst our post asking for donations of tin for grass snake monitoring reached over 2000 people, attracted 170 clicks and 31 likes and/or comments). Many visitors and locals have also used Messenger, the Facebook messaging app, to send queries and requests, notify us of problems on sites or make complaints. I try to deal with all of these promptly.

Volunteer Work Parties

Our work parties were forced to stop at the end of March 2020 as a result of lockdown but restarted in August as the first lockdown lifted. I completed a specific Covid-19 health and safety risk assessment before we began and all work parties since then have been carried out with social distancing rules in place. During the second lockdown we were able to hold one work party with just 2 of us, allowing us to complete a time sensitive task, and during the third lockdown we carried on as changes to rules relating to charity work meant we were allowed to continue with social distancing measures in place.

Turnout has increased from 5.5 per session last year to 7.75 per session this year, which reflected the fact that many of our volunteers had no other commitments for much of the year due to Covid-19 restrictions. We had to cancel four work parties from April to July inclusive due to the first lockdown, and could only allow one other attendee at our November work party due to the second lockdown, so have only completed 8 work parties in the last twelve months, which obviously impacts on the total habitat management carried out, but with higher numbers at the work parties we did hold we still achieved an awful lot. We lost four volunteers, including three volunteers who joined to complete Duke of Edinburgh and stopped once that was done. We gained 6 new regular volunteers. I continue to advertise volunteering at all events and post regular updates on our Facebook page so anyone interested can see what we do and get in touch.

The work parties have continued to prove essential in supporting the Trust's work. The majority of our work is general habitat management on the reserves or in the orchards but we also helped in the delivery of several projects at KLNR this year including carrying out scrub clearance as part of the Natural Networks Programme project, and sapling removal as part of two grant funded projects. We also supported contractor works at Beggar Boys Wetland which completed a new path around the lake and carried out necessary scrub clearance onsite.

I estimate that from April 2020 to March 2021, the volunteer work party donated approximately 186 hours of work worth £1162.50 to the Trust. (This figure excludes John's and my time). This

is about a third higher than last year, which is remarkable considering we had to cancel 4 work parties due to lockdown and reflects the higher attendance rate.

I continue to keep H&S records for all work parties. We had one minor first aid incident in the period covered by this report, which was dealt with and recorded as required in the accident book.

Events

As a result of Covid-19, our events schedule was suspended when lockdown began on 23rd March 2020 and we were forced to cancel two planned events in the spring.

After the first lockdown ended, we managed to hold a small, socially distanced walk at KLNR in August, which was aimed at highlighting the Natural Network Project work. The attendees included some new members, who enjoyed learning more about the site and our work there.

Because of the pandemic restrictions and subsequent lockdowns, we were unable to organise any additional events in the last 12 months but hope to hold more in the coming year.

Grant Applications

In November 2019 I secured a large grant from Natural Networks Programme for Grassland and Reedbed Restoration at KLNR. The two-year project started in December 2019 and we completed it in December 2020. The funding from Natural Networks Programme covered 45% of project costs and I subsequently successfully applied for another £2000 from Rowlands Trust towards the project costs, and to pay for a moth trap to carry out moth trapping at Kemerton Lake as part of the project, and then to use the trap in the future on other reserves etc. The project was completed on time and on budget and was extremely successful, although the new bee scrape has not worked as hoped, having turned into a small pond.

In June 2020 I secured a grant from Postcode Local Trust of £1572 to pay for 5 new tree popper tools to assist in sapling removal at KLNR. This is part of a new strategy to minimise the use of herbicides in controlling willow, alder and ash saplings in the limestone grassland and reedbeds at the lake. The project began in August and was completed in February 2021. As part of the project we held three sapling popping work parties so our volunteers were essential to the delivery of this project. The new tools are a brilliant addition to our equipment and will be used at KLNR and Beggar Boys for many years to come.

In July 2020 I secured a grant from Severn Trent Community Fund of £3600 for a new boat and shipping container storage at KLNR. The project started in August and was completed in December. The new boat has already been used for island habitat management and will be a valuable piece of equipment for our warden and volunteers now and in the future. Having a secure storage container to allow us to keep the boat, our canoe and associated equipment onsite is invaluable.

Finally, in September 2020 I secured funding of £400 from a local grant giving Trust who prefers to remain anonymous to purchase another tree popper for our volunteers. The new tree popper was used at several sapling removal work parties before the end of the year.

In addition, we again received two generous unsolicited grants totalling £600 from the Miss K.M Harbinson's Charitable Trust, which was used to purchase an additional trail camera for use on the reserves and also helped cover the unexpected cost of replacing the East Hide roof, which had to be done in December after it sprung a large leak.

I have recently started a second Natural Networks application in respect of habitat restoration and creation at John Moore Nature Reserve and we should have a decision on that within a couple of months. If successful, the work will be carried out before March 2022.

Much of the grant application work has been completed in donated work time from Kemerton Estate Partnership, as with so many other tasks on my plate I simply could not complete the extra administration in my own time.

Bat and Fungi Surveys

I have not carried out any bat surveys in this period due to Covid-19. Bat box checks were not permitted during the last year because of the risk of cross infection and the NBMP roost monitoring was due during the first lockdown when travel was not permitted so I could not carry out the counts.

I carried out several fungi surveys in autumn/winter at KLNR and Kemerton Wood as well as collecting additional fungi records when out and about.

I organised two moth trapping events with the kind assistance of experienced moth trappers Gavin Peplow and Oliver Wadsworth. One was a survey of the moths at KLNR and was carried out as part of the Natural Networks Programme project and the other was held at Oathill Cottage and Oathill Track in order to update our records of a site that was extensively surveyed for moths during 1980s and 1990s. We gathered a significant amount of data; 154 species recorded at KLNR and 161 recorded at Oathill. As we now have the kit, we intend to carry out more trapping in the coming years at different sites to build up more of an understanding of our moth diversity and habitat requirements. We are very fortunate to have received assistance from experienced moth trappers who can identify the moths for us as they are a challenging group to study.

I continue to collect ad-hoc records whilst out on site carrying out project management or site surveys etc.

All records are sent to Pamela for adding to Recorder.

Website

David and I continue to maintain the website, updating the 'news and events' section as required and any other changes such as updating governor information.

Health & Safety including Covid-19 Lockdown

I continue to assist with ensuring our H&S documentation is up to date, which in the last year has included writing Covid-19 secure guidelines for events and work parties.

We kept our hides closed for most of the year because of lockdowns. When we felt it was safe to do so we reopened East and West Hide to members only, with a combination code to restrict access, which was much appreciated. Water's Edge Hide had to remain closed.

Vandalism at Kemerton Lake Nature Reserve

Unfortunately, the lockdowns and rise in numbers of visitors to KLNR brought with it an increase in vandalism, littering and anti-social behaviour through the summer of last year. The reserve became a hang out spot for groups of teenagers and problems arose on several

occasions. Water's Edge Hide was busted open with damage to the door and door frame, which had to be repaired.

I continue to keep the local Community Policing Team in the loop and they have been really good at responding and helping us with the issues. They patrolled regularly over the summer to try and discourage the antisocial behaviour.

The vandalism has cost the Trust money and a lot of valuable time as I, our warden, and Governor Matthew Darby in particular have all spent time dealing with the incidents and clean-up/repairs, reporting to the police etc.

Conclusion

That concludes my roundup for the year – I would just like to thank Adrian, Matt, Pamela and John for all their support this year. I would also like to thank my husband David, who has again helped with maintenance of the website and also acts as my IT support.