

Kemerton Conservation Trust

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Registered Charity No. 702488

**GOVERNORS**

ADRIAN DARBY, OBE (Chairman)

MATTHEW DARBY

PETER DOBLE

LORD HOWICK, VMH

PETER MARREN

ROSEMARY WINNALL, MBE

ROGER WORKMAN

Annual Report from Kate Aubury, Support Coordinator

April 2021-March 2022

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, 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 John Moore Nature Reserve, KLNR and on Bredon Hill. I assist Governor Matt Darby with organising the weekly warden work and liaising with contractors carrying out ad-hoc habitat management. Thankfully less time has been spent this year on vandalism and anti-social behaviour, with only a few incidents on the reserves. 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. Throughout the year Covid-19 was still with us but the effect on our activities was minimal as we were able to carry out socially distanced work parties and walks.

Friends of KCT Scheme

The overall Friends scheme numbers have continued to increase in the last 12 months. We have 310 individual or joint members and 7 corporate sponsors (the figures were 278 and 7 respectively in 2020/21). The membership mix continues to consist of a higher proportion of donors (255) than volunteers (55).

Over the last year, we gained a lot of new members but we also lost 38 existing members (as against 17 members lost in 2020/21). Of these 37 were donors and 1 was a volunteer (as against 9 donors, 1 corporate sponsor and 7 volunteers last year). 3 donors had sadly passed away. 11 donors left the area so did not want to renew and the other 23 chose not to renew, and 1 volunteer sadly passed away.

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, update on projects, 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 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 2500. Average views have increased to around 30-50 (was 15-30 last year) but some posts generate a lot more interest (our most read post this year was

about first sighting of the otters at KLNR, which reached 2500 people, attracted 297 clicks and 148 reactions and/or comments, whilst our post about vandalism of the West Hide reached over 1800 people, attracted 144 clicks and 37 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

Work parties were held as normal this year, although we had to cancel two sessions (one due to my ill-health and one due to stormy weather that was unsafe to work in).

Turnout has increased from 7.75 per session last year to 8.88 per session this year, which reflected the fact that we recruited more volunteers in 2021/22. Additionally, some existing volunteers who were concerned about Covid-19 risk returned during this year as rules were relaxed.

We gained several new volunteers following a Kemerton village survey which included a question about interest in volunteering with local organisations. The parish council gave me a list of those who indicated interest in KCT and I followed up and made contact. Several are now coming regularly to the work parties, which is excellent.

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 a woodland restoration project at John Moore Nature Reserve this year by supporting contractor work, and we cleaned up some of the storm debris at KLNR following severe winter storms that led to fallen trees and branches on some of the paths.

I estimate that from April 2021 to March 2022, the volunteer work party donated approximately 213 hours of work worth £1331.25 to the Trust. (This figure excludes John's and my time). This is a slight increase on the previous year, due to higher turnout.

I continue to keep H&S records for all work parties. There were no incidents to report in the year.

Events

With Covid-19 lockdowns over by April 2021 and rules relaxing we were able to hold small, member-only outdoor events through spring and summer. The decision was made not to hold an Open Day but KCT was able to attend the KOW Apple Day in October, which returned after a year's hiatus.

We held a member-only Dawn Chorus Walk to Aldwick Wood SSSI led by Matt in April, which booked out very fast and feedback was excellent.

We held a member-only Orchid Walk at KLNR in June led by Adrian, Pamela & myself, which was fully booked and was very well-received.

We held a member-only Guided Tour of Beggar Boys Wetland in August led by Adrian & myself, which was fully booked and a lovely afternoon for all attendees.

We held a Member-only Orchard Walk on the morning of KOW's Apple Day, with all attendees joining us at the Apple Day afterwards. The Apple Day was very well attended and there was lots of interest for the Trust, including new member sign-ups and donations.

Finally, I led a fungus foray at Kemerton Wood in November which was fully booked and received excellent feedback.

In addition to our own events, in February this year I gave a talk to Kemerton WI about the Trust at Victoria Hall and a similar talk to Tewkesbury and Bredon Hill Probus Club in Bredon. Both attracted a small donation for the Trust.

Grant Applications

In September 2021 I secured a grant of £1387.52 from Natural Networks Programme for Woodland Restoration Project at John Moor Nature Reserve. The project started in October and will complete later this year. The funding from Natural Networks Programme covered 45% of project costs and I subsequently successfully applied for another £170 from Cheltenham Tree Group towards the project. The balance of costs was paid for out of our annual budget. The project has gone very well and will complete on time and on budget later this year.

I began work on the John Clarke Memorial Walk Project late last year and secured £1000 from Highfields CIO in February this year. I also applied for £500 from Magic Little Grants from Postcode Local Trust earlier this year, which was successful and will be paid in 2022/23. Finally, long-time corporate sponsors Cotswold Agricultural Merchants agreed to support the project with their annual donation of £200 given their long association with John. This exceeded my fundraising target for the project, with the very small balance of costs to be paid out of our annual budget. This project has now started and will complete in July this year with a grand opening event.

In January I began fundraising for a large survey project at KLNR including a comprehensive fish survey and aquatic plant survey. I secured a £1000 grant from Highfields CIO in February and £500 from the Gordon Gray Trust in March. An application to The HDH Wills 1965 Charitable Trust was unsuccessful and another application is still waiting on a decision. Corporate sponsor Wittering SUP have agreed that their annual donations can be put towards this project, the total amount of their support will not be known until the end of 2022. Finally, an unexpected donation of £370.25 from Broadway Natural History Society was also allocated to this project with their permission. The project has not yet reached its fundraising target of 50% but due to its importance in our future management of the site, the project was given the go ahead and will start in April 2022.

In addition, we again received two generous unsolicited grants totalling £600 from the Miss K.M Harbinson's Charitable Trust, which was used to cover the cost of replacing the West Hide roof, which had to be done this year.

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. Bat box checks were only permitted where necessary during the last year because of the risk of cross infection and I did not feel our box scheme warranted the risk. I did carry out NBMP roost monitoring and the results were submitted to both the national scheme and to Pamela to enter into Recorder.

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. The highlight was discovering *Amanita phalloides* Deathcap in Kemerton Wood.

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 on Westmancote Banks (mostly carried out on Overbury land with their kind permission) and the other was held at Beggar Boys Wetland. We gathered a significant amount of data; 102 species recorded at

Westmancote Banks including confirmation of a rarity Netted Pug which was recorded on the site 20 year ago and 71 recorded at Beggar Boys (this was lower than expected, but weather conditions were not great). More sessions are planned in the coming year. 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

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 re-opened Water's Edge Hide in April 2021 as pandemic restrictions were relaxed, which was much appreciated by our members and the local residents. East and West Hide remain open to members and keen local birdwatchers/photographers only, with a combination code to restrict access, to limit vandalism.

Vandalism at Kemerton Lake Nature Reserve

Thankfully this last year has seen a drop in vandalism at KLNR as more places opened up with relaxing pandemic restrictions. The sunny weather over Easter weekend in April 2021 attracted teenagers to the reserve and resulted in damage to our West Hide, which a volunteer kindly repaired. A decision was made to add chicken wire to the outside of both East and West Hide to try and prevent further damage to the buildings, which our warden John completed that month.

There have been a few more small incidents of damage or antisocial behaviour at KLNR and in the surrounding woodland, as well as at Beggar Boys Wetland.

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.

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 acts as my IT support.