

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 2022-March 2023

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 events, completing grant applications including a major appeal for the new land purchase at Upham Meadow SSSI, 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 five grant funded projects at John Moore Nature Reserve, KLNR, Upham Meadow SSSI 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 one moth trap survey over the summer months, carried out several fungi surveys in the autumn, and have been doing ad-hoc monitoring as I carry out regular site visits.

Friends of KCT Scheme

The overall Friends scheme numbers have continued to increase in the last 12 months. We have 330 individual or joint members and 6 corporate sponsors (the figures were 310 and 7 respectively in 2021/22). The membership mix continues to consist of a higher proportion of donors (269) than volunteers (61).

Over the last year, we gained plenty of new members, but we also lost 34 existing members (as against 39 members lost in 2021/22). Of these 28 were donors, 5 were volunteers and 1 was a corporate donor (as against 37 donors and 1 volunteer last year). 1 donor had sadly passed away, 1 had moved away from the area, and the other 27 chose not to renew (at least 1 due to cost of living crisis), 2 volunteers were youth volunteers who have now moved on 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. I try to ensure it is updated at least twice a month (often more frequently) and posts generally reach 350-500 people but sometimes as many as 1200 (lower than last year). Average views have increased to around 50-75 (was 30-50 last year) but some posts generate a lot more interest (our most read post this year was about the purchase of land at Upham Meadow SSSI, which reached 1229 people and

attracted 79 reactions and/or comments, whilst our post about otters at Kemerton Lake reached over 800 people, and attracted 124 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, with no sessions cancelled.

Turnout has decreased slightly from 8.88 per session last year to 8.54 per session this year.

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 the Natural Networks Aquatic Habitat project at KLNR, with volunteers making and filling steel gabion baskets ahead of contractor works, and helping to move dried waterweed after contractors had been onsite. We also visited Upham Meadow for the first time to carry out essential Ragwort pulling on our parcels, allowing the Trust to avoid using sprays on these floristically important areas. The visit was very successful, and we intend to repeat the exercise this summer.

I estimate that from April 2021 to March 2022, the volunteer work party donated approximately 213 hours of work worth £1518.75 to the Trust. (This figure excludes John's and my time). This is a slight increase on the previous year, due to more work parties taking place this year.

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

Events

2022 saw the return of our Annual Open Day after a 2 year hiatus caused by the pandemic, as well as a varied programme of member-only events.

We held a member-only Bird Watching Walk at KLNR led by Rob Prudden and Pamela in April, which booked out very fast and feedback was excellent.

We held a member-only Village Birdsong Walk in May led by Matt & me, which was fully booked and was very well-received.

We held a Grand Opening of the new John Clarke Walk in July, which was attended by members and other locals who knew John well, it was extremely hot so we had to shorten the walk, but it was a lovely event nonetheless.

We held our KLNR Open Day in June after a 2 year pandemic hiatus. It was well attended with two walks; the first led by Adrian and Governor Rosemary Winnall focussed on invertebrates and orchids, and the second led by Matt, Pamela and I focussed on mob grazing and orchids. It made a small profit and we recruited some new members on the day.

We held a Member-only Dragonfly Walk at KLNR in August led by Mike Averill, the county Dragonfly Recorder, and me, which was fully booked and enjoyed by all attendees.

I led a member-only Bat Walk at KLNR in September, which was fully booked. Unfortunately, there were technical problems with the bat detectors on the night which was frustrating, but attendees thankfully still got to see and hear some bats and seemed to enjoy the event despite the issues.

Finally, I led a fungus foray in The Bushes and Aldwick Wood SSSI in November, which was fully booked and received excellent feedback, although the mild, dry weather meant numbers of fungi were lower than expected.

We were expecting to attend the annual KOW Apple Day as usual but a last-minute change of date by the organisers meant we were unable to take part.

In addition to our own events, in February this year I gave a talk to Hartlebury Common Local Group in Stourport. This attracted a small donation for the Trust.

Grant Applications

In June 2022 I began a major fundraising campaign for our planned Upham Meadow SSSI 16 acre land purchase. This was the biggest campaign we have run in many years with a fundraising target of £17,500. Between June and December 2022, I completed 15 grant applications, of which 6 were successful. I raised £11,000 from grants. Although I did not hit the target, the purchase was considered too important not to proceed so the Trust made up the shortfall from prior year surplus. The campaign was hampered by tight timescales, which meant I was unable to apply to several key potential funders, however we did receive generous funding from Build Back Better (GCC), The Martin Wills Wildlife Maintenance Trust, The Woodroffe Benton Fund, The Summerfield Trust, The Rowlands Trust and Grundon LCTF. The purchase was completed in February this year but the project itself runs until December 2023.

In November 2022 I secured a grant of £2307.03 from Natural Networks Programme for an Aquatic Habitat Restoration and Creation Project at Kemerton Lake Nature Reserve. The project started in December and will complete by the end of April this year. The funding from Natural Networks Programme covered 45% of project costs and I subsequently successfully applied for another £2500 from Highfields Trust CIO towards the project. The balance of costs was paid for out of our annual budget. The project has gone very well. We applied for a one-month extension and it will complete within that new timescale.

In January 2023 I began grant applications for a part-time assistant warden role, to support our Volunteer Warden. I have applied to two funders so far but neither has been successful. Raising funds for core costs is always challenging but I plan to complete more applications in the coming months as we urgently need more habitat management assistance.

In addition, we again received two generous unsolicited grants totalling £400 from the Miss K.M Harbinson's Charitable Trust, which was used to cover the cost of additional signage at Kemerton Lake Nature Reserve purchased earlier 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, The Bushes and Aldwick Wood SSSI, and Far Park, as well as collecting additional fungi records when out and about.

I organised a moth trapping event at John Moore Nature Reserve with the kind assistance of experienced moth trappers Gavin Peplow and Oliver Wadsworth. This gathered a significant amount of data; 66 species. We had very few moth records for the site, so it was very helpful to understand better what species use the reserve. 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.

Vandalism at Kemerton Lake Nature Reserve

This year has seen only minor vandalism issues, mostly signage damage and littering at KLNR and in the woods. On one occasion our Warden John witnessed two people riding dirt bikes through the reserve and chased them off.

I continue to keep the local Community Policing Team in the loop and during the summer months they patrol occasionally through the reserve.

We have seen an increase in trespassing in non-public areas at KLNR, Kemerton Wood and Beggar Boys Wetland, which threatens delicate ecosystems and sensitive wildlife. We have increased signage and used natural barriers where possible. More fencing will be needed in the future.

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.