

Kemerton Conservation Trust

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**GOVERNORS**

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PETER MARREN

ROSEMARY WINNALL, MBE

ROGER WORKMAN

KCT – Report to Governors April 2021 – March 2022**Overview**

With few Covid restrictions in place, the year has seen opportunities again for further collaborative work.

Nest-boxes

The Little Owl box in The Plock failed to be used – again a problem with Squirrels. The box in Lillans however was used again – no evidence in the box to suggest chicks had not fledged successfully.

Aldwick Wood: Richard Coughlan who had been looking after the tit boxes sadly died in December 2021 (a letter of condolence was sent from KCT to his widow, Dicky). A new Friend, Vivienne McGhee (of Bredons Norton) was very keen to take over the boxes and I walked the site with her and her husband John. Some boxes were beyond repair but in view of the numbers of natural sites in the wood it was felt unnecessary to put up any more.

West Midland Ringing Group

Fergus Henderson, of the WMRG and who worked for the Trust some years ago, is keen to mirror work done by the group at Overbury on the Bredon Hill Bird Recovery Project. He is setting up a ringing programme here focussing initially on the KLNRR, monitoring the use of the site using thermal imaging and netting/ringing. He has expressed the wish to expand ringing activities across the estate and I hope he will be taking in particularly lowland farmland birds of conservation concern. Nick Berry (of Ashton-u-Hill) and a Friend has made several nest-boxes for Kestrel, Barn Owl, Tawny Owl (funding for this is coming through a scheme run by FWAG) and some of these have been put up around the farm. More are planned.

Marsh Tit boxes: 6 boxes were put up in March along the track in the west section of the Bushes and in Aldwick Wood and these boxes will be checked by Fergus.

Big Farmland Bird Count

On 10th February Adrian and Matthew covered the Black Barn site at Bredons Norton and I covered Cross Furlong/Cheltenham Road site (pheasant feeding area) the results being entered to the GWCT (Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust). The WMRG plan to provide supplementary feed for wintering finches ideally mid March to early June to bridge the hunger gap and with us will be identifying suitable areas. The area of existing pheasant feeding by the Black Barn (Bredons Norton) has been identified as an ideal site and this and its access etc has been discussed with Fergus for next year – 2023.

New Volunteers

A new resident to the area, Juliet Vines, now a Friend to KCT, volunteered to take on the monthly Breeding Wetland Bird Surveys (WeBS) for us at KLNLR. (Rob Prudden had been responsible for them for many years and chose to step down - he continues to do his regular weekly/fortnightly counts for us). I took Juliet round the site to familiarise her with it, went through H&S issues. We asked her to flag up when she is going to start each survey and she sends us her findings. She has also negotiated with the BTO to change the name of the site on the online system which had been down as Kinsham Pool: it is now Kemerton Lake NR.

Juliet also asked to be involved in some other bird monitoring on the estate and in the spring she will be monitoring breeding farmland birds on one block of fields – targeting particularly Skylark and Yellowhammer. Again I took her round the sites.

A long-time resident of Kemerton and Friend of KCT, Judy Woodman, also got in touch wanting to volunteer and she is to take on a block of fields .. again looking at breeding farmland birds and I familiarised her with the area.

Glow-worms

Unfortunately several of the evenings scheduled for counts were either unsuitable (windy or wet) or individuals who were due to accompany me either had Covid or were contacts so little work was done. We will be trying again this year.

Sally King – Kemerton resident – passed on her sightings which were found somewhat later possibly due to the cold spring. It was noted that the verges outside Brockwood and Merecombe were not cut as short and were therefore more suitable for the glow-worm. There were fewer from Rock Cottage to Northwood due to works going on in that area.

Dung beetle surveys

Ray Thomas, a volunteer who helped with the Rugged Oil Beetle Survey in October/November 2020, was keen to take on a project here and Adrian suggested he help with dung beetle surveys. With the arrival of Rob Havard (the cattle contractor) and his work on mob-grazing with its focus on the sward and its composition, it was decided in spring 2021 that it would be a good fit for Ray to look at cowpats and their associated dung beetles. Rob suggested The Hangings and West Middle and Centre Banks as suitable areas to start. In September Ray and Rob visited a couple of sites and though not ideal - because of the rain - they did see some Aphodines and evidence of Geotrupes. (The ideal temperature for surveys is a min of 15c and above: the temperature was below this). In this 'training session' Rob discussed the merits of high-sided cowpats v fresher ones. Ray is planning furthering this project in 2022.

Moth records:

Survey work continued with the team of Gavin Peplow, Oliver Wadsworth and Steve Whitehouse with Kate Aubury assisting. On 12th June traps were set up on Overbury's Westmancote Banks with and one trap at the top of Westmancote Hill. A total of 489 specimens were recorded comprising 102 species. These were entered onto Recorder.

Back from the Brink: Red Hemp-nettle *Galeopsis angustifolia*

Following the reintroduction programme and the sowing of the seeds in October 2020, Alison Mitchell returned in July 2021 and met myself and Adrian at Oat Hill to check the site. We did not see any Red Hemp-nettle but Alison reassured us that there is still a good chance that it will germinate in subsequent years, given the correct conditions. The hard seed coat can take a few seasons of weathering and microbial action to break down and therefore germination is slow and sporadic. (In fact Kew MSB data suggests only a 5% germination rate).

We were provided with a full report with recommendations: the most important factor being spring cultivation (March-April) from 2022 onward. (Red Hemp-nettle is spring germinating and flowers July to October). The site has been cultivated end March, 2022.

Otter

Between October and March Otter were seen on several occasions – often 1 female + 2 cubs but singles too. They featured on social media and inevitably new visitors were drawn to the KLNR and the otters were photographed with fish prey. They are charismatic creatures - we hope the native Crayfish continue to survive.

Collin's

This site to the north-east corner of the KLNR has been set aside for the cultivation of rare arable plants. In mid April after Jake Freestone scarified a 500 sq m. plot and Adrian and myself marked out an area and sowed a seed mixture of Night-flowering Catchfly, Prickly, Long and Rough Poppy and Cornflower. (The seeds had been harvested in the Wild Flower Nursery here and are part of a collection stored in the fridge in KCT office.). We will be hoping for a good take and will be visiting the site through the spring and summer.

Recorder:

I have made continuing contact with Simon Wood of Worcestershire Wildlife Trust over the year in an effort to have our copy of Recorder updated. The process to date remains unfinished. Simon has continuing health issues but assures me that the work will be done.

Bird records note:

KLNR

Juv Marsh Harrier 30th and 31st Aug and again on 1st Sept seen early morning rising from the reeds – believed roosting (Rob Prudden)

Female Pintail 15th Sept with singles seen through October

Male pintail 24/26 Nov, 1st and 9th Dec

Russian White Fronted Goose – 22/23 Sept 8 very early birds with flock of Greylag- presumably on way to wintering sites around Severn Estuary (RB)

Lapwing pair on eggs Collins arable 29th April. Young not seen ? unsuccessful

Linnet – small colony breeding in bramble scrub between wader lagoon and arable area

Oystercatcher – 2 pairs only 1 fledged juv survived.

Great-Crested Grebe 2 pairs bred successfully – 3 + 2 Y

Wintering male Stonechat seen since early December

First returning: 4th April 2 Swallows, 7th April c. 40 Swallow, 10 Sand Martin and 1 early House Martin. 23rd April Cuckoo.

Elsewhere on the Estate

Spotted Flycatcher – small study on-going. 1st bird 9th May at Ivy Cottage – 1st brood saw 3 fledging, 2nd brood failed with heavy rain on hatching. Few other sightings in the village.

Kingfisher 24th March pair seen Carrant Brook Meadow in area of ox-bow

Autumn/Winter peak totals:

Wigeon 212 - 26th Jan

Teal 175 - 14th Oct

Pochard - none recorded autumn/winter with 8 seen end March

Tufted 3 - 31st Dec – both Tufted and Pochard numbers have dropped massively in the UK over the last few years (RB pers.comm)

Shoveler 15 - 20th Oct

Coot 164 - 11th Nov

Lapwing 220 - 26th Jan

Jack Snipe 17 - 3rd Feb

Common Snipe 48 - 17th Feb