

Kemerton Conservation Trust

**Report from Kate Aubury
Support Coordinator**

October 2011-October 2012

Overview

It has been a mixed year for the Trust. After a busy and successful start to the year, the retirement of our part-time warden Alan Marsh in June has impacted on our ability to manage the current schedule of works. Hopefully a replacement will soon be in position. My workload has increased even more as a result of Alan's resignation and I have been very busy administering the Friends scheme, supervising the work parties, organising events, and carrying out bat and fungi surveys. Here is my report on those activities.

Friends of KCT Scheme

The Friends scheme has continued to grow in the last 12 months. We now have 160 individual or joint members and 7 corporate sponsors (the figures were 157 and 6 respectively in 2010/11). The membership mix has skewed more towards donors (105) than volunteers (55), which results in more annual income for the Trust. Our annual renewal rate for donors remains high (we lost 11 members in the last 12 months including 4 who sadly passed away), but we had quite a high turnover of volunteers this year (we lost 10 volunteers including 5 who helped out with one-off projects and received one year's membership as a result).

Some new members were recruited at our events throughout the year, but the majority of new members were recruited through a direct appeal coordinated by Governor Roger Workman. This appeal, which was delivered to all residents within Kemerton, Kinsham, Westmancote and Bredon, resulted in 15 new members and initial donations of £920.00 in total. 53% opted for standing order, which usually results in a higher retention rate in future years, and 60% completed a gift aid form, which adds to the value of the donation. My thanks to Roger for all his time and effort on this appeal.

Early this year we introduced a new member card which for a small outlay has improved efficiency and looks more professional. New sign-ups now receive a member pack consisting of a welcome letter complete with member card, copy of the KLNR map leaflet and copy of the latest newsletter.

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

Volunteer Work Parties

The work party has seen a slight fall off in numbers since the summer. This has been caused by several factors; one of our volunteers left at the same time as Alan quit, three of our teenagers began university in September and so can no longer attend and two of our volunteers are off due to recent operations, although they intend to return in due course. A couple more have stopped coming due to lack of time. We are now averaging about 8 attendees at each work party, which does impact on how much work can be achieved. I have begun advertising for more volunteers and recently signed up two interested parties at an event. Hopefully we will see an increase in numbers again soon.

With Alan's departure, it has been necessary for me to receive training in the use of the Trust's vehicle for use during work parties and I am also attending a brushcutter training day at the end of the month. I also have to do more of the planning for each work party, including ensuring any prep work has been organised and materials ordered. This was previously handled by the warden and it has been quite difficult for me to find the additional time to deal with this, so I look forward to handing this off to the new warden once they start.

The work parties have continued to prove useful in supporting the Trust's work. The majority of our work is general maintenance and habitat management on the reserves but in winter 2011/12 we also assisted with scrub clearance in addition to the HLS Special Project at The Bushes SSSI. I estimate that from March 2011 to March 2012, the volunteer work party donated approximately 297 hours of work worth £1856.25 to the trust. (This figure excludes Alan & me).

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

It has been another busy year with regard to events.

We started the year with a slideshow talk at Kemerton village hall in March which focussed on Kemerton Lake Nature Reserve. The illustrated talk highlighted the wildlife, plantlife and management of the reserve throughout the seasons. The talk was incredibly well attended – we filled the hall to capacity – and we raised enough from the talk to cover all costs of the event.

I followed that with our annual Easter Egg Hunt in April, which was again a lot of fun. The day was hot and sunny and we had a good turnout of about 60 children and made a small profit. This event is the only one that is aimed specifically at young children and their parents, which helps widen the appeal of the Trust.

In May, my husband David & I attended WWT's Tiddesley Wood Annual Open Day with an exhibition and information stand. This was our second year at the event and thankfully the weather was much nicer this time! The Trust offered us the stand for free as before and we had an enjoyable day meeting people and telling them about the Trust. Although we did not gain any new members or donations directly from this event, it all helps to raise our profile in the area.

In July I held another bat walk and talk for members at Kemerton Lake Nature Reserve following the success of the walk in 2011. We had 10 attendees this year and again it proved extremely popular – members love using the bat detectors to discover a fascinating world normally hidden from view in the dark. I will definitely ensure I run one every year.

Our annual Open Day was held in July this year, with a focus on plants. We were again lucky enough to secure the services of one of our expert 'friends' John Day, who led 2 guided walks around the lake focussing on the flora of the site. In addition to the walks we had displays, refreshments and a nature trail for the kids. Volunteers

assisted throughout the day. Disappointingly numbers were down on the previous year, despite good weather, and we made just over £500 (including donations and new membership received on the day), which was £200 less than 2011. One of the issues was that with Alan quitting in early June, I lost a lot of help with the event, and was unable to organise as much publicity as the previous year. Moving the event to the middle of summer also meant we were competing with a lot of other events on the same weekend. Planning for next year has already begun and we are considering moving the event to autumn to focus on fungi in 2013.

Finally, a few weeks ago we had the annual KOW Apple Day. This year we again had an information stand at the event, and it was a good opportunity to publicise our work further and talk to our members and locals. Although overall numbers were down for the event and KOW will not match last year's profit, we spoke to lots of interested parties and gave out lots of information so it was successful from the Trust's point of view. We signed up 4 new members on the day (2 donors and 2 volunteers), which was great.

Due to pressures of time I have not issued any press releases this year. The Trust did receive coverage in local papers over its involvement in the Carrant Brook Catchment Area Project following press releases organised by the project coordinator Becky Lashley.

All in all this year contained a packed and successful programme of events, and I have already begun planning for next year. In 2013 I intend to focus on more member-only walks, which are quick and easy to deliver and are popular with our Friends of KCT.

Grant Applications

Due to pressures of time, I have been unable to complete any grant applications in 2012. Hopefully this situation will improve in 2013.

Bat and Fungi Surveys

I have continued my programme of bat surveys for the Trust in 2012, the fourth year the surveys have been conducted. This year much of the work has focussed on the Lesser Horseshoe bat roost confirmed on estate property in 2011. With the assistance of licensed bat expert David Worley (Gloucestershire Bat Group) I have carried out two roost visits, and I have also carried out two emergence surveys as part of the National Bat Monitoring Programme (NBMP). I am delighted to have confirmed the site is a Lesser Horseshoe Maternity Roost consisting of at least 80 bats, which makes it a very important site to protect and monitor. With the estate's permission, I intend to continue monitoring the site in future years.

Unfortunately the wet weather throughout the summer played havoc with survey plans, and in addition to the above work, I only managed one other survey at KLNK. I also carried out two bat box checks in spring and autumn (accompanied by David Worley), with a small number of Pipistrelle bats found in the boxes. David and I are keen to expand the box scheme to make it more effective, so I hope we can find funding for this in the near future.

On a positive note, I hope to receive my bat licence in the next few months, which will allow me to carry out licensed activity work on the reserves without needing supervision.

I have continued my fungi surveys this autumn, and here the wet weather has resulted in a great year so I am very busy at the moment.

All records from my bat work and fungi surveys are sent to John for adding to Recorder, although pressures of time have meant I got rather behind on my bat records. I intend to catch up over the winter and try to stay on top of it going into 2013.

Website

Earlier in the year our previous website designer Jim Verrechia informed us he did not have the time to continue maintaining the site. The website had gotten quite out of date and several jobs were waiting for completion. The website hosting was changed in January, and as Jim was no longer available, the Trust paid a local IT consultant to move the website, update links and ensure all was working following the hosting move. However, long-term we wanted to find another volunteer willing to update and maintain the website. The obvious choice was my husband, who is an IT consultant and website designer by day. I am pleased to confirm David has agreed to take on the role and work has already begun on updating the website. Matt will be working with David & I to look at what changes are required and we will be rolling it out on a page by page basis, beginning with the home page. One major change will be to make it easier for interested parties to make donations or sign-up as a volunteer via the website.

That concludes my roundup for the year – I would just like to thank Adrian, Matt and John for all their support this year. I would also like to thank David, who has continued to assist me at every event, attend every work party and accompany me on all bat surveys. His support has been invaluable to me this year as always.