

Kemerton Conservation Trust

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GOVERNORS

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PETER MARREN

BRETT WESTWOOD

ROGER WORKMAN

Kemerton Conservation Trust

Report from Kate Aubury Support Coordinator

October 2018-October 2019

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 including the Annual Open Day, completing grant applications, assisting with Trust H&S administration and supervising the monthly work parties. I have also continued to become more involved in habitat management decisions and project management, in part due to John Clarke's illness. In addition to assisting Governor Matt Darby with organising the weekly warden work and contractors carrying out ad-hoc habitat management I have also been working on two major planned projects including writing grant applications and meeting with project partners and contractors.

Lack of time continues to be a major issue which is limiting what the Trust can achieve and unfortunately a grant application we made earlier this year for funds to pay for part-time staff was unsuccessful. I continue to believe we need to make more effort to find additional staff or volunteer resource to help with fundraising, project management and habitat management.

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 again increased in the last 12 months. We have 212 individual or joint members and 6 corporate sponsors (the figures were 191 and 7 respectively in 2017/18). The membership mix continues to consist of a higher proportion of donors than volunteers (160) than volunteers (52).

This year, we recruited quite a few new members and lost a few existing members. We lost 10 members in the last 12 months (as against 7 members lost in 2017/18). Of these 5 were donors and 5 were volunteers (as against 6 donors and 1 volunteer last year). Of the donors, two sadly passed away and the others did not renew, of the volunteers, two moved away and one was involved in a one-off survey that had completed.

The new donors were mostly recruited either at the Open Day, Apple Day or via our website after visiting KLNLR (membership forms can be downloaded). Most of the new volunteers are locals who have approached us interested in getting involved in the care of the reserves. This year we designed a new membership leaflet which includes the donation form as well as information about our work and the member benefits, and we are using the form at all events to hand out to interested parties.

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 general 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 KLNLR. I try to ensure it's updated at least once a month and posts generally reach 250-500 people but sometimes as many as 4000. Average views have increased to 50-100 (was 35-50 last year) but some posts generate a lot more interest (our most read recent post was about the boys who stole our canoes and used them on the lake, which attracted over 2000 clicks, whilst our post about the Smew in January attracted 400 clicks and 90 likes and/or comments). Many visitors and locals have also used Messenger, the Facebook messaging app, to make contact with queries, requests or complaints. I try to deal with all of these promptly.

Two events in the last 12 months led to a flurry of interest both on Facebook and at Kemerton Lake Nature Reserve; firstly we had the most spectacular Starling murmuration for several years, with the birds staying and performing for about 3 months which, after we were featured on an interactive Starling Murmuration Map, led to large numbers of visitors coming from as far afield as Birmingham and Bristol to see our birds in action. Secondly, the arrival of a rare Smew in January also led to a lot of interest online and in the local birding community, and the hide was busy with photographers and twitchers for a couple of weeks, until he flew away.

Volunteer Work Parties

The work parties continue to flourish and are invaluable in getting large scale habitat management jobs completed.

Turnout has decreased from 9 per session last year to 7.9 per session this year, so I am planning to try and recruit some new volunteers in the new year. We had to cancel one work party due to unexpected illness so have only completed 10 work parties in the last twelve months, which obviously impacts on the total habitat management carried out. We lost three volunteers, two because they completed their DoE award, and we have seen lower attendance from some of our regulars who have competing priorities, health issues or work commitments. We gained 3 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 useful in supporting the Trust's work. The majority of our work is habitat management on the reserves or in the orchards but we also planted daffodil bulbs in September as part of the Woodland Wildflower Project 2019 and assisted with site preparation ahead of the Open Day in June.

I estimate that from April 2018 to March 2019, the volunteer work party donated approximately 220.5 hours of work worth £1378 to the Trust. (This figure excludes John's and my time).

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

In November 2018 we held a slideshow and talk evening entitled 'Our Wild Nightlife' at Kemerton Village Hall. The evening started with an excellent slideshow comprising video footage from local farmer Jamie Smith of Otter, Badger, Deer and other secretive mammals he has recorded in the local area and was followed by a talk on Bats by me. It was well-attended and feedback was excellent.

In late April Governor Matthew Darby and I led a Member-only Woodland Walk through The Bushes SSSI and Aldwick Wood SSSI on Bredon Hill. We had a good turnout and although the weather was a bit overcast, everyone enjoyed learning more about the sites and seeing some spring flowers including wild garlic in the woodland and hawthorn in the scrub.

In June we held our Annual Open Day at Kemerton Lake Nature Reserve. Both our walks focussed on the beautiful orchids flowering around the reserve and were led by Chairman Adrian Darby and myself. The weather was poor, with several heavy showers before, during and after the event so turnout was sadly very low as a result but the orchids looked fantastic and all those who came enjoyed seeing them. Unfortunately the poor turnout meant the event only just made a profit and given the enormous amount of work I have to put in to plan and run the event, and the difficulty juggling that with my other commitments, I have – after 12 Open

Days – decided that the time has come to step down from running it. If anyone else wishes to take it on I will be happy to assist in a reduced role but it looks likely that next year we will not have an Open Day.

In mid July we held a Member –only walk focussed on rare and specialist wildflowers of Arable Margins. This was led by Chairman Adrian Darby and myself. Turnout was sadly very low but we had an enjoyable afternoon spotting rare arable weeds in amongst the arable crops in the sunshine.

Finally, in September we had a slideshow and talk entitled ‘Orchids of South Midlands’, which was delivered by Friend of KCT and local orchid enthusiast Dr Colin Scrutton. The talk was extremely informative and featured Colin’s fantastic photographs and all who came thoroughly enjoyed it.

In addition to our own events, in March I also gave a talk to Beckford Gardening Club about the wildlife of South Bredon Hill, which was to a packed out village hall and resulted in a generous donation to the Trust.

Grant Applications

In April I secured £500 towards replacement woodcrete bird boxes for our bird box scheme from a donor who prefers to remain anonymous.

In May I secured £500 for a woodland wildflower project at Kemerton Wood from Friends of KCT Miles and Joan Kulakundis, after an initial grant application to a local funder failed. The project will see 500 native daffodil bulbs and 100,000 native bluebell seeds planted in Kemerton Wood. Work has already started and the project will complete in November.

In addition, we again received a generous unsolicited grant of £500 from the Miss K.M Harbinson’s Charitable Trust, which we used to purchase a replacement trail camera and some volunteer tools.

My application to The Fore for funding for a part-time fundraiser and project officer was sadly unsuccessful, as was a major application to Cotswold Conservation Board for a joint partnership project mapping invertebrates on Bredon Hill with Bredon Hill NNR. However, as both parties were keen to continue with the project idea, I have subsequently made a second application to the Niniveh Charitable Trust for a slightly re-worked 3 year partnership project and we are currently waiting to hear whether that has been successful. In addition, I have just submitted an application to Natural Networks for a major restoration project at Kemerton Lake Nature Reserve and we expect to hear back on that very soon.

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 only carried out one NBMP bat roost count at our Lesser Horseshoe Roost in June this year due to very poor weather leading to my second count being cancelled. I was unable to carry out any field surveys due to the constraints of parenthood.

I carried out a couple of small fungi surveys last autumn, as well as collecting some ad-hoc records when out and about.

All records from my bat and fungi surveys are sent to John 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 Governor Peter Doble in ensuring our H&S documentation is up to date and issued to all relevant people. Our annual review in September identified Lyme Disease as now being a potential risk to all visitors to our reserves so we have updated all relevant risk assessments to reflect that and have also issued a tick awareness poster to all our volunteer recorders etc. From now on I will also ensure it is highlighted at all relevant events and work parties to ensure our visitors and volunteers know what to look out for. This was the only change to our risk assessments (apart from updating the governor information in the header) so it was not felt necessary to reissue the assessments to our volunteers as the poster and accompanying email highlighted the additional risk adequately.

Vandalism at Kemerton Lake Nature Reserve

This year we have sadly suffered numerous vandalism incidents, ranging from littering and petty destruction to more serious incidents such as in March when 4 youths found our boats at Kemerton Lake Nature Reserve, damaged them and used them dangerously on the water before attempting to steal one of them. On that occasion photos and car registrations were obtained and the police were able to follow up and speak to those involved and warn them away from the site. However, much of the vandalism appears to be local lads arriving on foot and using the reserve as a hangout spot and issues have continued throughout the summer.

The Water's Edge Hide has sadly again proved the main target with various instances of littering, damage to items within the hide, damage to the hide itself and reports of drug using and drinking within the hide by teenagers. We have also had numerous access and safety signs removed or damaged.

I continue to keep the local Community Policing Team in the loop and we had a visit from them to look at ways to reduce the problem and we followed up on their advice to make trespassing more difficult through use of natural barriers, barbed wire on gates etc. We have also tried to monitor problem areas using our trail cameras but sadly we have not managed to identify the culprits yet.

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

Conclusion

That concludes my roundup for the year – I would just like to thank Adrian, Matt, John, Pam and John for all their support this year. I would also like to thank my husband David, who has continued to assist me with organising many of the events, has helped with maintenance of the website and, through his unstinting support, enabled me to juggle my volunteering role with the demands of parenthood.