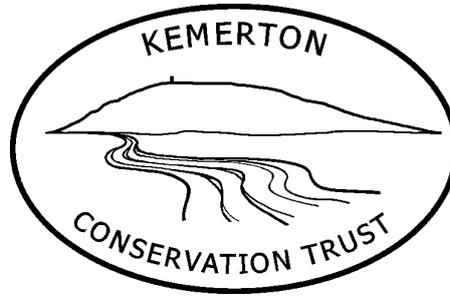


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Kemerton Conservation Trust

Report to the Governors from John Clarke

October 2012 to October 2013

Summary

Changes have taken place during the year which have affected KCT. I have reduced my hours to the minimum number agreed and Pamela is working with me more now. John Threadingham has been appointed as Part-time Warden and is directly overseen by the Estate Office, in liaison with me.

Our longest-standing voluntary supporter, John Meiklejohn, has retired from most of his wildlife recording work. He has been surveying sites at Kemerton for thirty years and also identifying species found here by others (see later).

Out in the field, a long, cold Winter and late Spring affected overwintering birds and delayed the Spring migration and growth of cover. Species such as Robin and Blackbird began egg laying in early March and then stopped for more than a week before resuming, thus reducing their productivity for this year. However, many birds took advantage of the warm weather from late Spring to early Autumn. For example, on 8 July a Dunnock nest was found with 6 eggs just hatching and nearby a Blackbird was nest building. Many species of butterfly, burnet moth and bumblebee enjoyed a bumper year. This year there were 8 separate sightings of Clouded Yellow across the estate – the first for many years.

Health & Safety

The Warden continues to make regular Health & Safety checks around Kemerton Lake Nature Reserve (KLNLR).

I continue to keep records of visiting groups and work parties when information is passed to me.

The problem of vandalism was back with us earlier in the year and has been costly in terms of materials and time needed to rectify damage.

Monitoring

Pamela and I, with help from Adrian, continued to monitor as many sites as possible. I am glad that Adrian has been able to spend more time in the field this year – his contribution and

expertise have been very valuable. The various wildlife surveys focussed mainly on **Skylark**, **Yellowhammer**, **Waders** and other **Farmland Birds**, plus **Plants** and **Butterflies**. Skylark numbers on Kemerton Estate (excluding Brookfield Farm) increased to 17, but numbers were down at Brookfield at 6 pairs - the late Spring and lack of cover there may have influenced numbers. Yellowhammer numbers were down slightly to 7 pairs at Kemerton but dropped to only 1 pair at Brookfield. However, we did hear that because of the late Spring a number of Yellowhammer were still present at a nearby garden feeding station at the time of the survey. Up to 4 pairs of Lapwing were present at KLNR although at the time of our survey only 2 were seen with 1 pair at Brookfield which subsequently moved. For the first time we surveyed Days Farm but found no target species.

Pamela and I focussed some of our survey work on learning more about two of the Trust Lammas Meadows – Asham and Upham. Adrian came with us on one of our visits to each. Earlier in the season I had noted displaying Curlew on Asham Meadow and Adrian had noted both Curlew and a pair of Redshank displaying. However they subsequently moved elsewhere. The meadow is traversed by a public footpath popular with dog-walkers and perhaps that, combined with lack of cover in early Spring, may have caused the birds to move. 2 pairs of Skylark continued to display. An exciting find was Redstart, probably nesting in a pollard willow. On Upham Meadow we covered only a small part of the area but found at least 1 pair of breeding Curlew and 2 of Redshank – plus Skylark.

For bird highlights at KLNR see later in this report.

Geoff Trevis completed what will probably be his final year for surveying **Bees and Wasps** at KLNR. He hopes to make comparisons with similar surveys on a Worcestershire Wildlife Trust site

George Day continued his surveys of **Butterflies and Bumblebees** on the estate.

James Smith, a local farmer, agreed to use his security cameras to help survey the Carrant Brook and Squitter Brook for **Otter**.

Elizabeth Pimley – an expert on small mammals working for Worcestershire Wildlife Consultancy - offered to carry out **Dormouse** surveys and I selected Beggarboys and Squitter Brook at Wells Farm as possible sites. On her first visit she confirmed that the sites are ideal Dormouse habitat. Later she sited 30 nest-boxes at BB and 20 along the brook to assess whether there are indeed local populations there. I think it unlikely but we will at least know for certain. She will ascertain their suitability as sites for a possible future translocation, should the need arise (much like our crayfish project).

Pamela Clarke organised a follow-up **Glow Worm** survey on Bredon Hill, above Westmancote. Numbers were well down on surveys carried out about 5 years ago.

Rob Prudden continued his long-term survey of **Birds** using KLNR. He has been collecting records since the early days of the gravel pit. When I met Rob in 1997 I asked him if KCT could have any future records and he has been supplying them ever since. He has considerable experience in the management of similar sites and I am extremely grateful for his expert contribution to our work.

Mike Averill continued to monitor **Dragonflies** and **Damselflies** at KLNR and Beggarboys. He also helps me with identification of my records.

Kate Aubury continues to monitor **Bats** and **Fungi** - her report will contain fuller details.

Orchards

Two young trees from grafts taken from a garden in Kemerton are now ready to plant out. We are hoping that the variety proves to be 'Nine Square' or 'Nine Sides' – a rare variety that I had been looking for in recent years as it was once fairly common in a local village.

I work closely with Kemerton Orchard Workers (KOW) in the management of Daffurns Orchard and am as always grateful to them for their support for KCT in doing so. Since their formation they have managed to raise sufficient funds to maintain this community orchard and purchase new trees and equipment through the sale of goods and the annual Apple Day. We have an arrangement whereby KCT cuts the grass in the orchard each year and KOW rakes and carries off the spoil. Last Winter Peter Doble cut some of the hedges and Richard Jones supplied sheep to graze the orchard in the Autumn.

Upstones Orchard requires more winter grazing to return it to its previous good state. It was not grazed last autumn/winter due to difficulties with stocking.. The considerable matting in the bottom of the sward may well be suppressing the growth of finer plants and grassland fungi – Upstones is a good site for the latter. Some fence maintenance and the cutting of rough vegetation beneath the fruit trees are required. Several branches have broken under the weight of the fruit and need cutting up and clearing. Hay cut by KCT in the orchard was spread along one of the woodland rides in an attempt to improve floristic diversity.

Kemerton Lake Nature Reserve

Some more notable highlights of bird records: Coot numbers reached 170 in September. A ring-tail Hen Harrier wintered in the area and was seen hunting at KLNR as well as over a game strip in Middle Hill (formerly Twenty Three Acres). A pair of Barn Owl was seen hunting in broad daylight over the scrapes and one bird was subsequently found dead on the bund. This species suffered badly because of the prolonged Winter with a total of 4 dead birds being found in the local area. Teal numbers peaked at 62, Wigeon at 122, Tufted at 66, Pochard at 73 and Mallard at 52. There were a few records of Shoveller and Gadwall. Up to 41 Snipe and 9 Jack Snipe were recorded in the scrapes. Birds passing through included Yellow Wagtail, Common Sandpiper, Green Sandpiper, Redshank, Common Tern, Pintail, and Whinchat.

The Cetti's Warbler which had been present for more than a year suddenly disappeared in mid-April. In early June Adrian heard one calling along Squitter Brook at Wells Farm and it is possible that the bird moved there.

Cuckoo was heard calling regularly during the breeding season. However as in previous years there were no reports of young.

At one time 2 pairs of Oystercatcher attempted to breed. A gull was watched predated the eggs of one: later a pair raised 2 young.

A pair of Mute Swan reared 5 young – a fairly rare success rate as most years some of the eggs are predated. Numbers peaked later at 19.

By the end of July up to 250 Jackdaw were feeding there or in the nearby woods.

Numbers of geese continue to be a problem on the reserve. During the breeding season excluding birds on nests, there were counts of up to 47 Greylag and 25 Canada Geese. In September numbers rose to 262 Greylag and 160 Canada - total 422. Once again, the geese caused considerable damage in the arable area as well as polluting grassland bordering the lake.

In August I watched a flock of about 100 Lapwing circling the lake and islands possibly looking for somewhere safe to roost. This flock probably represented the entire population of our area.

Rob Prudden's count of breeding warblers peaked at 12 pairs of Reed Warbler and 8 pairs of Sedge Warbler. Although no full counts were made, I estimate there were up to 10 pairs of Reed Bunting.

This year there have been 2 sightings of what are believed to be Carp in the lake.

As you are aware Kemerton Lake is an Ark Site for the endangered British Crayfish. As my report is being compiled a month earlier this year I cannot report on how the planned survey in early October of existing stock at the lake went or on whether further introductions (or translocations) were made.

Beggarboys

The capital works of recent years have proved very successful with water levels holding up well during the Summer and the control of seasonal flooding is also working well. Roach are thriving in the pool and John Threadingham reported seeing a Carp.

A survey to check for Dormouse is/has been carried out (see under Monitoring)

Hornet was discovered nesting in a bat box.

Some of the habitat management has been resumed after the wet 2012 and it is hoped that all areas will be brought back up to previous levels in the next few months.

Elsewhere

Part counts of Pyramidal Orchid on the hill found 371 in the middle section of Round Hill and 1,750 in a neighbouring field.

I mentioned in the summary this was a good year for some species of Bumblebee. For example 5 nests were found at Ivy Cottage and nests were reported from a number of people in the village. Up on Bredon Hill in some arable wildflower margins, huge numbers were found.

Green-flowered Helleborine was re-discovered in Squitter Brook field.

In Stable Yard and nearby buildings the number of Swallow pairs dropped from 4 to 3 – however they all produced 3 broods. The last brood fledged in the first week of September. On 1 September about 60 Swallow were joined on the overhead wires by 15 House Martin. During the next 10 minutes a Hobby made two spectacular attacks but was driven off by the birds.

Hornet was also recorded at Ivy Cottage, The Old Manor and at KLNLR.

RELIC

My part in the Elm project is now very small as I do not have time available except for a small amount under Outreach. Under that heading I was able to help a student at Pershore College carry out research into hardwood cuttings from elm and in compiling his dissertation.

After disruptions caused by moving the greenhouses in 2011 and a disastrous year for taking softwood cuttings in 2012, this year Pershore College has attempted to increase production. Elm cuttings are particularly difficult to strike successfully. They hope eventually to increase production to more than 250 trees annually.

John Moore Reserve

This little reserve continues to flourish. The coppiced Hazel and recently-planted shrubs are providing a dense under-storey. A ride leads to a seat in the middle of the reserve and sitting there in Spring or Summer visitors are unaware of just how small the reserve is. Its success is due in no small part to the contribution made in recent years by volunteers.

Greenhouse and Nursery Project

The new polytunnel was erected by Johnny Cutler. Quite a lot of extra, un-budgeted time was required on my part to get things up and running. Work on re-potting, weeding and staking had therefore to be delayed until this Autumn/Winter as other seasonal priorities took over. Tree and shrub species, including Hazel, Guelder Rose, Holly, Box, and Goat Willow are available for planting out in Kemerton woodlands as part of the **Woodland Shrubs and Wildflower Project**. Black Poplar has been grown for planting out in the Carrant Catchment Area. A total of 200 young trees and shrubs survived last Winter and now, despite the lack of attention, about 100 are large enough to plant out. The rest will be potted on as required and prepared for next year's planting. That will mark the end of funding for this project, but I currently have 60 hours in my annual work programme (extra to the project) allocated to the nursery.

This has been another excellent year for the arable wildflower nursery - Pamela and her volunteers, weeding, planting, harvesting and processing seed. Species grown included Rough, Long-headed and Prickly Poppy, Night-flowering Catchfly, Shepherd's Needle, Corn Buttercup and Cornflower. Via Natural England I supplied collections of arable wildflower seed to 6 farmers in the Cotswolds who were really pleased with progress although the unusually bad weather last Autumn caused some problems. I hope to have supplied some more this Autumn. We now have what would seem to be a good stock of seed and I need to discuss with Adrian where we should go from here. Meanwhile, Pamela's volunteers are on standby should they be needed for next year. Many thanks to Sue Chandler and Lis Coates for their great help. Debbie Manns also managed to help on two occasions despite her other commitments.

Nest-boxes

Some years ago I was invited to write an article about the effectiveness of mirrors to deter Great Spotted Woodpecker, thereby reducing damage to boxes and nest predation. I plan to do that this Winter. This year saw a first when a pair of Nuthatch nested in a box fitted with a mirror. Roy Cox continues to build and manage nest-boxes at Beggarboys, Aldwick Wood SSSI and The Bushes SSSI.

Recorder

Thanks to sterling work by Simon Wood of Worcestershire Biological Records Centre we were able to complete the mammoth task of updating all the site names by the end of November 2012. Simon restored the programme, which had crashed, and then worked with me to change the sites names. Pamela and I then uploaded all records for 2012. The total now stands at 58,000. Earlier this year Kate Aubury, with Simon's assistance, updated the database to the latest version of Recorder. While here Simon provided Kate and I with training on the new system. As agreed, I will no longer keep a back-up version of Recorder on my personal computer.

The Trust Computer

I confess to being remiss about backing up the computer – mostly due to lack of time. Jim Verrechia, another long-time supporter of KCT, has recently added to my personal computer an automatic back-up system on an exterior hard drive. Could the governors please consider asking Jim - or somebody else – to quote for a similar system for the Trust?

Outreach

I continue to advise Beckford community on their local lake nature reserve which is now very popular with visitors while supporting an interesting range of wildlife.

COCO (Conderton & Overbury Community Orchard) which I helped establish is proving very successful. I provided a training session for the volunteers who wished to learn about pruning and other tree maintenance. KOW kindly provides COCO with the use of their juicing equipment.

I maintain contacts with the Marcher Apple Network, the Three Counties Traditional Orchard Project, the Worcestershire Biological Records Centre's Orchard Wildlife Survey Project and Worcestershire County Council. It was a surprise this year to receive a request from a visitor from Virginia, USA to visit our orchards and to discuss his plans to plant an orchard on his land. KCT has gone international! AJM Apple Enquiries originally approached me via Worcestershire County Council. This group of volunteers takes displays of apples to a number of events and provides an identification service – mainly in Wales and neighbouring counties. The displays sometimes include about 400 varieties. This year the group returned to Kemerton to collect samples of a number of varieties, some of which they had not shown previously.

I continue to work closely with Worcestershire Wildlife Trust and their Biological Records Centre.

I continue to be involved in a very limited way with Pershore College in RELIC, the Elm project. I occasionally hear from people who either want to know how things are going or wish to purchase trees. This year I was able to help and advise one of their students in work leading to his dissertation. I have now been approached by another student for whom I have suggested a project that she will complete by May 2014.

For some years a small group of dedicated volunteers have been trying to establish a community nature reserve in Tewkesbury. I was first asked to help several years ago and have felt guilty at my subsequent inaction. This year I was able to put that right when I had several meetings with leading figures. I also arranged for them to make an official visit to a

riverside reserve in Pershore where they were shown round by the conservation manager. There are similarities between both sites but not with what we do here at KLNLR, where the focus is more on wildlife and less about public access, so it has been interesting for me to come up with ideas about how they might build a compromise. As the Environment Agency will be heavily involved at Tewkesbury in the future it is unlikely that I will be asked to do more than offer some occasional advice.

Carrant Catchment Area Project

The Environment Agency failed to complete work started and have proved so unreliable that if the project is to continue we will need to find alternative sources of funding. However, I understand that a new person is now in post and I look forward to meeting and working with them. Meanwhile, I have suggested to Peter and Adrian that we might consider some improvements along Squitter Brook and current thinking is that perhaps the farm can do something as part of the next tranche of HLS – or its successor. In January I will be having a meeting with a neighbouring farm to see if they can take forward another improvement scheme that I have suggested. Meanwhile, Jamie Smith, another local farmer, has succeeded in photographing Otter (and mink!) and finding Otter spraint along both brooks and in local pools. My occasional attempts to fish part of Squitter Brook – along the stretch improved a few years ago by the installation of fish passes – have produced important information. Some years prior to the fish pass project the EA had trapped along the brook and caught nothing. Assuming that they are far more expert than me in catching fish, my record of 6 species indicates the success of our attempts to improve water quality. Eels are migrating up the brook and Brown Trout are breeding there. Presumably, this is what attracts Otter to visit the area. I do not count the memorable hours spent fishing the brook as ‘monitoring’!!

Volunteers

This year I want to highlight the dedication of some of our longest-serving volunteers and top of the list is John Meiklejohn. John moved to this area about 50 years ago and began recording wildlife during his spare time after his teaching job. Then, about 40 years ago he ‘retired’ to focus full-time on his great love – of recording wildlife. Much of this took place on Bredon Hill. He worked closely with NCC and English Nature - the forerunners of Natural England - and his records probably contributed to the designation of much of the hill as SSSIs. Pamela and I met John when we came to Kemerton Estate in 1982 and he offered to help in what was then a ground-breaking project – integrating farming with wildlife. John spent many days with us, recording wildlife on sites that we had identified as potentially rich in wildlife. We also attended his evening classes and lectures. He taught us a great deal and what we learned as a result helped us to form the basis for the conservation management strategy evolved for several sites here at Kemerton. John has donated his extensive reference collection of insect specimens to Buglife, together with a number of identification keys and reference books. We use the term ‘Friend’ to describe people who support the work of KCT and John stands out as the biggest friend that we’ve ever had. I would like to pay tribute to his enormous contribution to our work and to wish him well in what is his second ‘retirement’!

Others who have given freely of their time and expertise for more than ten years – some for more than twenty include: Jim Verrechia, Rob Prudden, Mike Averill, Kemerton Orchard Workers, Sue Chandler, Johnny Cutler, Geoff Trevis, Roy Cox, Gill and Terry Onions, Simon Wood and Harry Green. I am always concerned that we might fail to acknowledge the enormous contribution that they have made and continue to make.

Other volunteers are acknowledged below.

Funding

I have not had time to identify any new projects and to seek funding. Given the limited time now available to KCT staff and volunteers I assume that additional projects might not be feasible.

Acknowledgements

Once again Pamela Clarke has provided vital back-up for the work of KCT, carrying out surveys with me, helping in the office, the greenhouse and particularly the nursery projects and glow worm surveys. Some of these hours have counted towards the rent of our cottage but many are voluntary.

Apart from the long-serving volunteers mentioned above, I should acknowledge the considerable contribution of Kate Aubury, David Aubury and all her volunteers. Kate is also contributing to our wildlife records by surveying for Bats and Fungi. These taxa had received little attention in recent times.

George Day continues the survey of Butterfly and Bumblebees and provides occasional other wildlife records. Roger Cox has been growing a small sample of arable wildflowers for us. Geoff Bryant along with several other birdwatchers send us their records. Jamie Smith is surveying Otter along the brooks. Lis Coates and Debbie Manns have been helping Pamela with projects. Whenever I am away John Millichap looks after the Trust greenhouse. I am afraid that I have imposed on him a lot this year and he has stepped in for about seven weeks. Elizabeth Pimley is carrying out Dormouse surveys. Clive and Mark Cleaver provide us with records of Woodcock seen during shoot days – these comprise almost all the annual records for that species. Roger Umpleby reported a number of interesting butterfly records from Bredon Hill including Dark Green Fritillary, Wall and good numbers of Small Heath. Peter Doble and his team continue to support KOW.