

**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

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## **Kemerton Conservation Trust - Report to Governors**

### **April 2022 – March 2023**

#### **Pamela Clarke - Conservation Advisor**

##### **Overview**

A busy year on all fronts with ongoing works at KLNR and fencing and tree planting projects undertaken across the estate.

##### **West Midland Ringing Group**

Fergus Henderson and his small group continue to ring at KLNR and are producing a report annually on their findings and recommendations. I glean their records from their Whatsapp group and enter later onto Recorder. Thus far they have largely worked at the lake reserve and I have expressed the wish again that they will look at farmland birds on the estate. We have a lot of information on the use of the KLNR by birds and it would good if they were able to provide information about birds such as Yellowhammer, Skylark and Corn Bunting amongst others which are indicators of the general quality of the farmed environment.

Fergus and members of the team have produced a report of their work for their first year at Kemerton which is attached.

Of special note in 2022 - a Wryneck (10<sup>th</sup> September) and 4 Lesser Redpoll (9<sup>th</sup> October) ringed at KLNR.

**Supplementary Feeding:** I spoke with Fergus and Matt about this but there is no funding provided through our existing Higher Tier Country Stewardship Scheme nor at the moment the budget, time or labour to organise this ourselves but we will look at this again.

Nick Berry (Ashton-u-Hill) a keen birder/photographer and now trainee ringer, has again made more nest-boxes including Kestrel, Tawny and Barn Owl boxes for which the Trust is very grateful. (A Barn Owl box is ready and planned for the Far Park in the autumn)

11 Marsh Tit boxes in total have now been put up – 6 in The Bushes and Aldwick Wood and the remainder in the Beech Plantation (Quarry Wood).

##### **New Volunteers**

**Neil Thompson** – I met Neil at Rosemary’s talk in March and following that he contacted Kate and then myself about volunteering. He is local (Comberton) and has been a member of Butterfly Conservation for nearly 30 years (and was a trustee of the charity for 9 years). We are delighted to have his expertise on board. It was decided that Asham Meadow would be a good site for him to survey and Adrian also suggested he look at Bredons Norton Banks above The Bushes – Overbury land but now rented by us and where our cattle herd is run. It will be interesting to see what changes will result from the cattle grazing there. Generally Neil is also keen to look particularly at species which are currently expanding their range – such as White Admiral, Silver-washed Fritillary and Brown Hairstreak.

I emailed Jake Freestone for permissions and Kate supplied Neil with H&S information. A meeting on site at Bredons Norton Banks was arranged for Adrian, Neil and myself for May 5<sup>th</sup>.

Neil will be supplying Simon Wood at Worcestershire Wildlife Trust with his records and these will be added by Simon to Recorder. Neil is also supplying us with a copy.

**Juliet Vines** (Overbury) continues with WeBS monthly counts. Her data combined with that of Rob Prudden give a good picture of wader species using the site. Of note, 22<sup>nd</sup> February 82 Common Snipe and 12 Jack Snipe.

### **Spotted Flycatcher Study**

Given the increasingly diminishing number of returning birds, I suggested that reviving John’s project would be of value and in January, we held a meeting with 18 of us who had been involved in the past in monitoring the fortunes of this bird - a similar number volunteering to be involved but unable to attend. I advised on the help coconut shells offer for nesting, management of gardens and houseworks/disturbance at key times and predator control and set up a Whatsapp group. I put up shells and advised on sitings. Matt was keen to have a site and I put up a shell in the front of Kemerton Court – adjacent to a previously favoured site. He had expressed a wish for a wire netting ‘cage’ to protect the site from squirrels/avian predators and I advised that actually we have had no such losses here in fact the ‘caged’ shell which we have had on Ivy Cottage for many years has not been used the past couple of years and an unprotected one at the front of the house has been adopted successfully (and is being used currently). Interestingly SPF numbers are up in Ireland and Scotland but down in England. A PhD student is looking at the causes of the decline here and I have supplied the group with details.

### **Glow-worms**

Not good numbers last year – 4 transect walks completed with other volunteers – best total 12 on July 16th. It was very hot but whether that affected numbers is uncertain. Walk planned for Friends of KCT in July 2023.

### **Aquatic plant survey - May and August 2022**

With the spread of Nuttall’s Waterweed *Elodea nuttallii* at the lake in mind Will Watson and Giles King-Salter undertook two surveys to look at how the numbers of plants are being affected by the encroachment of the weed – first recorded 22 years ago. The management of the weed is not straightforward and satisfactory methods of addressing this problem however are not clear so trials are needed.

## **Fishery survey April 2022**

A survey conducted by Andy Hinds (Fishtrack Ltd) was made to assess fish numbers with disappointing findings despite various predators being seen with fish throughout the year. The 3-spined Stickleback was the principal fish captured and the only other fish was the Brown Goldfish – all of which were found in the southern corner of the lake. His recommendations included placement of woody debris for fish shelter and foraging have been followed up.

## **Back from the Brink: Red hemp-nettle *Galeopsis angustifolia***

Following seed introductions in October 2020 to Oathill, Adrian and I went up in August/September but found no plants - (with the hard seed coat it can take up to 2 years to germinate). I have been in touch with Elizabeth Cooke (Plantlife) who is now running the project to confirm that we will continue to monitor and will keep her informed: meantime Plantlife is awaiting funding to collate data for the project.

## **Otter**

Again several sightings through the winter and spring through to early summer. When the lake is quiet with duck its worth looking as to why as they move off when an otter is about. Up to 3 otter seen (adult + 2 pups) on occasions. I believe at least part of the cause in the drop in the number of ducklings and goslings is down to otter predation but it is yet to be proved – one (see below) was seen taking a juvenile Oystercatcher and probably returned to take a remaining chick which subsequently disappeared.

## **Recorder**

The process of updating the Recorder database in the Trust office has been finally completed by Simon Wood (Worcestershire Wildlife Trust) and Kate has also been able to update the office database.

## **Bird Records of note – at KLNLR**

### **2022**

25<sup>th</sup> February – first Great Crested Grebe back

6<sup>th</sup> April – first Swallow and by 10<sup>th</sup> House and Sand Martin passing through.

2 pairs Great Crested Grebe through the season but no juveniles seen and by end of June no juvenile ducklings or goslings seen. (2 pairs Pochard but no young)

28<sup>th</sup> June - An otter on central island seen to dash out with nearly fully- fledged juvenile Oystercatcher – adults seen mobbing the intruder.

5<sup>th</sup> September Whitethroat and Linnet in territories in bramble scrub on marsh area and flock of 10 linnet

4<sup>th</sup> September 105 Lapwing, 46 Teal, 3 early returning Wigeon. Red Kite, Kingfisher and Little Egret all feeding and 4 Hobby hawking over the lake

Barn Owl sat at midday on edge of wader lagoon and flew off low over marsh area. A box

5<sup>th</sup> September 4 Hobby hawking over the lake – adult + 3 juvs

6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Sept 2 Marsh Harrier - 6 raptor sp. seen - Buzzard, Red Kite, Kestrel, Sparrowhawk and Hobby

Comment: Canadas were always in large numbers at the reserve at this time of year but the Greylags have become more dominant, pushing the Canadas out.

13<sup>th</sup> Sept c. 50 southbound Swallows + House and Sand Martins

7<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> October female Pintail

November around marsh area - flock of c. 50 Goldfinch, wintering female Stonechat, 10 Meadow Pipit.

End of December Common Snipe numbers increasing to 31 and 7 Jack Snipe

## **2023**

9<sup>th</sup> January - 360 Teal .. unusually large number for the site - with 2 Wigeon, 2 pairs Gadwall

22<sup>nd</sup> Feb - 82 Common Snipe (largest number for some time) and 12 Jack Snipe

24<sup>th</sup> January- Large raptor seen circling high (c.600 ft) identified as female Goshawk – it circled for 15 minutes and then drifted to west end of Bredon Hill

29<sup>th</sup> March - 1st Swallow + 15 Sand Martin